

Judges are human too

by Lavina Diamanti

We live in a world now where it seems everyone expects perfection. We expect perfection from those hosting events, perfection from anyone delivering service of any description, perfection from our consumable purchases, we even add filters to our selfies and edit photos so we look perfect. Add to that the methods of delivering criticism to those who don't meet our standards of perfection and is it any wonder that mental health is predicted to be the number one health issue in years to come?

So, do we expect perfection from our judges? After all, they are only human. If the criticism of judges on social media is anything to go by, it seems we too are expected to be perfect. An opinion of a judge's performance, however, is as subjective as the judge's decisions themselves. After all, your opinion of that judge will mostly depend on whether you won or lost. The judge who gives you Best in Show is usually, in your opinion, perfect!!

Mostly, the difference in decisions is totally relevant to the judges experience, interpretation of the breed standard and their preferences in what they will reward and what they will forgive, after all, no dog is perfect. Having said that, sometimes we do make mistakes, and sometimes when we finish an assignment and take the time to review our decisions, we do realise that we didn't always get it right. After all, judges are human too, and perfection is beyond the reach of all of us. Let's have a look at some of the things that can affect our concentration and our decisions.

- We are unwell. Even if we feel like we should still be in bed we turn up, after all, the show must go on. Colds and flu make it difficult to concentrate, and if we are in pain then it is even worse. But we do the best we can and soldier on.
- The weather. It isn't easy turning in your best decision-making performance when the wind is howling, the rain is pouring or it is so hot you feel like you are melting. And let's not forget, few dogs give their best performance in these conditions too, so we can only judge what we have in front of us.
- The ground conditions aren't ideal. Small rings, sloping rings, long grass, slippery surface, poor quality ring equipment can all affect the dog's performance and subsequently our evaluation of them.
- We have had an upsetting incident while judging. An aggressive dog or an abusive exhibitor can unsettle us and throw us from our train of thought. Sometimes it is worthwhile taking a few minutes break to allow time to settle the nerves and refocus.

- We have been concentrating so hard, we just lose focus. It happens! It's not ideal, but it does happen. Judging for a full day takes its toll on our ability to concentrate and sometimes we just lose momentum. Accept it and move on.
- We are new to judging the breed/group. No matter how much study we have done, nerves can get in the way and sometimes we overthink it. And sometimes we are judging breeds we have only judged a small number of or only previously seen from outside the ring. It takes time to really get the grasp of a new group of breeds and their standards. Treat each assignment as an opportunity to learn.
- There is a diverse range of styles in a breed. This can make it quite difficult, especially if a style is very different to what we are used to seeing in our home patch.

Regardless of any of this, the reality is that we will receive criticism from disgruntled exhibitors and we have to accept that this will happen. As they say, you can't please everyone! But, that isn't to say we shouldn't evaluate our judging after an assignment if we feel we didn't get it right. Live streaming gives us the perfect opportunity to do this — so there are some things about social media we can be thankful for.

As exhibitors, we should remember that judges are human too, and our opinions are best kept to discussions in the car on the way home or in private. While perfection is something to strive for, none of us will ever achieve it, after all, we are only human.

Happy judging. 🐾

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Important Dates

31 December 2022 Cut off for completion of mandatory training