

NZDJA

Looking through my eyes

by Lavina Diamanti

With the Tokyo Olympics in full swing as I write this, I reflect on the similarities between some of the Olympic sports and our own hobby of judging dogs.

Not all winners are decided by the first across the line or some other specific measure determining who receives the medals.

Just like dog showing, many Olympic medals are decided by judges who determine, in their opinion, who should receive the top scores and the medals. And just like dog showing, these judges' opinions are subjective, and different judges score the competitors differently.

But, unlike dog shows, the prize and accolades are significant and on a totally different level.

Nevertheless, it was interesting to listen to commentators discussing the judging process and scoring for some of the subjective sports and in particular the assessment of the artistic points.

It was also interesting that one commentator pointed out that while the judges undergo a rigorous training and selection process, variations in opinion and scoring occurred and sometimes left the viewer wondering what influenced that decision, much the same as we see in our hobby.

So why do we see things differently? Why does one judge award a dog highly and another less so? Why can you have such a variation between judges opinions? There are a number of different reasons for this, and they probably are all valid.

Firstly, there is the science behind it.

You will have seen the black and white image where some see an old woman and some see a young lady - or the image which appears to be either two faces or a vase. These images are optical illusions.

What we see depends on how our brain processes information, and when you start looking at different, more complex examples, we can begin to realise how much the brain can play tricks on us.

Optical illusions in dog judging can be created by different lighting conditions, different backgrounds and different angles as well as the colour and markings of the dog. Judging at night time under lights, as they often do in Australia, is an example.

In addition to this there is the psychological tendency to see what we want to see and not see what we don't want to see.

Psychology students no doubt study this in their training and many a court room lawyer will have seen examples of this, but rarely do we discuss it when talking about dog show judging.

However, it is real and without doubt it will, at times, be a factor in decisions made in the show ring.

What about observation ability? Some people notice every minute

detail but fail to see the outline and the 'whole' dog.

Others see outline and silhouette very easily but fail to notice the smaller, less obvious detail.

Our brains all function differently and what is obvious to one may be lost in the overall picture to another.

The most common reason for variations, however, is that each of us travel our own learning journey and no two are the same.

Consider your own experiences and your judges training.

For example, we assume that all judges know what a well laidback shoulder feels and looks like. But do we? I clearly remember my own 'lightbulb moment' many years ago regarding shoulder layback.

I still remember the dog, the handler and the location and realising that the dog I was examining had an exceptional (and correct for the breed) front assembly.

Up until that point I had simply been going through the motions, examining dogs like I had been taught but not really understanding what I was feeling and seeing.

I am sure you have had similar 'a-ha' moments... What about other areas of interpretation? One that springs to mind is colour, and not only coat colour but also eye colour.

A judge who is used to seeing a lighter colour eye in their own breed would have very different understanding of a light eye compared with a judge whose own breed typically had a very dark, almost black, eye colour.

That is just one example and I am sure there are many others you could think of.

Each judge's interpretation is related to their own experiences and learning, and because of that they won't necessarily have the same understanding as someone else. In reality, our experiences, training and brain function are ours alone.

Add to that the level of experience judging in the ring and hopefully you can understand that judges opinions are relative to them and no one else.

Quite simply because only they are looking through their eyes.

Happy judging. 🐾

National Board

Patroness:	Annette Buxton Email: annette.buxton@outlook.com
President:	Ray Greer Phone: (07) 211-6948 Email: shelton117@outlook.com
Vice President:	Pam Douglas Phone: (07) 824-1738 Email: pamdouglas@xtra.co.nz
Secretary:	Robynne Trainor Phone: 027 233 5436 Email: secretarynzdja@gmail.com
Treasurer:	Lesley Chalmers Phone: (03) 312-0413 Email: merthyr@xtra.co.nz