

Sportsmanship has been defined as: the conduct and attitude considered as befitting participants in sports, especially fair play, courtesy, striving spirit, and grace in losing. As one of the oldest sports in this country, the Sport of Dogs has a long tradition of sportsmanship, and it is, most assuredly, the responsibility of all of the participants from junior showman to dog show superintendent to uphold this tradition and pass it along unsullied to future participants.

Yet it is a rare occurrence when I can stand by the ringside during a dog show without once overhearing some heated and less than charitable remarks regarding either the judge's style or selections, or, more commonly, disparaging comments on the qualities of the dogs being exhibited, particularly if the dogs selected for the purple ribbons are not of their own breeding. Perhaps this is in line with the quintessential American disrespect for authority commonly voiced in an equally old sport with cries of "Kill the umpire!" and "Throw the bums out!" Nonetheless, there is a modicum of civility that indulged by all can make our chosen sport more enjoyable for participants and spectators alike. The following comments on Sportsmanship and Etiquette have been excerpted extensively from George Alston's book for dog exhibitors, *The Winning Edge, Show Ring Secrets*.

"Sportsmanship in the show ring involves more than the obvious. One does not position one's dog to deliberately block the dog in front of or behind you in line. One does not run up on the dog in front, nor stop short in order to throw the dog behind off balance. One does not attempt to distract other dogs with squeaky toys or obvious displays of bait being thrown around the ring. If your dog baits best on a squeaky toy, use it unless a competitor complains that it is distracting his dog. If that happens, use the toy, but do not make noises with it. Exhibitors who brag about their dog before or after it is shown are in extremely bad taste. Don't tell the world that a certain judge loves your dog and that you can't lose under her. Not only are you setting yourself up for disappointment, but your comments reflect badly on the judge.

"Do not stand at ringside running off at the mouth about the awful dogs in the ring. The person next to you probably owns one of them. Keep your comments to yourself, even if you are sure you should have won that class. Wait until you get into your car, roll up the windows and then vent your gripes.

"If your dog loses, do not take it out on the dog. It is not the dog's fault. If it does not behave in the ring, you have not trained it. If it does not show well, you have not taught it. If it is a poor specimen and deserved to lose, you should have known that and left it home. There is absolutely no excuse for ever physically or mentally abusing a dog for any reason, least of all because it did not win a ribbon.

"If you win, whether it be Puppy Class or Best of Winners accept your ribbon politely, thank the judge and leave the ring. If you lose, leave the ring without comment. If you get a fourth of four, accept the ribbon and thank the judge. Do not berate the judge, stomp on the ribbon or throw it into the garbage can. Not only are you demonstrating extremely poor sportsmanship, but you may be called up on charges and suspended by the American Kennel Club.

"If you are really interested in the opinion of the judge under whom you have lost and you would like to find out why, you may engage the judge in conversation. Wait until their assignment is completed and then approach them. Most judges will not discuss an exhibit, except in the most general terms. If you ask why the judge didn't put your dog up, the answer will most likely be, 'Because I liked the other dog better.'

"In order to understand what a judge may have liked or disliked about your dog you must be able to honestly evaluate your dog compared to others in the ring. Perhaps every dog that placed in the class was tall and rangy and your dog is short and cobby. If you were observant, you would know right away that your chances aren't good that day.



Congratulating the winner is appropriate show ring etiquette. Photo by JS Dorf, American Kennel Club.

Reference:

Alston, George G. and Vanacore, Connie, *The Winning Edge, Show Dog Secrets*, Howell Book House, New York, 1992.

CANINE TERMINOLOGY - SPORTSMANSHIP

Continued

“Many owner-handlers complain about politics in the show ring. The most often heard gripe is that the handlers always win. Well, there are politics in everything in life, and that is a fact that the owner-handler has to recognize. However, the amateur often has an advantage over the professional because a judge is going to be more forgiving if an amateur makes a mistake, sets a dog up imperfectly or gaits awkwardly. If the dog is worthy, the judge will usually give that owner-handler every opportunity.

“There is a great deal of controversy about the propriety of showing to one’s friends, or even acknowledging that one knows the judge. Suppose you are well acquainted with a judge because you have shown to this person many times before, or even because you have been at some of the same social events. For appearances’ sake, it is best to be casual and brief in your conversations with that judge if you should meet prior to going into the ring. Exhibitors who hang around the judge, either before or after the breed is completed, show extremely poor taste and put the judge in an awkward position.

“True professional handlers are generally good sports. You will always see losers congratulating winners in the Group ring. They will most often go out of their way to help their competitors outside the ring. Although their livelihood depends on winning with their dogs, human relationships are important and they will rally around if the need arises. Owner-handlers sometimes are not as charitable either as winners or as losers.

“Good sportsmanship is an important lesson to be learned in presenting a dog properly. If you are going to show dogs over a period of many years, you will find it far more enjoyable to be known as a good sport than as a sore loser. Many lasting friendships are made at dog shows. Sportsmanship and a sense of perspective about what is really important in and out of the show ring help foster those relationships.”