

JUDGES AND JUDGING

*The following are excerpts from **Charles Morgan on Retrievers**, first published 1968. Charlie won the National 3 times and was one of the foremost professional trainers of his time.*

What makes a good judge? What are the qualities that make a person a good judge? It is hard to say, but I think a good judge has a talent for judging and the only way you can find it is to try him. The proof of the pudding is in the eating. He has got to prove himself. He might seem to have all the equipment to make a fine judge and turn out to be a poor one. He might not have many of the qualities that you think are necessary to a good judge, but he might turn out to have that special talent or gift which makes a helluva good judge.

I think it's some indefinite thing in him that makes a good judge. Courage, fairness and experience are factors, but there is something beyond these qualities. I don't know what it is but few have it. I asked a friend of mine to name the good judges he could think of. He thought and thought then came up with one name.... the judge he had won under the previous weekend.

I don't think a man's ability to judge always depends on how much experience he has had in training and handling dogs even though it's a good start. Nor do I think it's a question of honesty, because they are all honest. I don't think you can pick a judge by how many times he has judged. Maybe he has judged a lot because, like Barkus, he was "willing". In my 30 years of handling dogs I have never refused to run under any judge, but I do feel more at ease under certain judges. There have been times when I felt I was walking into the execution chamber.

I think when you run under a good judge you handle your dog's better. You have a feeling of ease and a feeling of confidence and these feelings are necessary for to do a good job. A good judge wants to see good dog work, he wants to see your dog do good work and that is his attitude. When he goes out there to judge, he wants to see all the great qualities a dog has, a dog's true abilities, and doesn't blow some minor fault out of all proportion.

The better judges do overlook the minor things and really look for the big things... how well a dog marks, hunts and handles. The rules and regulations stress that.

It seems to me that when a judge drops a dog for a minor fault, he doesn't have much confidence in his own ability to judge real dog work. He has to go to the minor details because to him they seem more definite.

Maybe a judge can't help being influenced by his own past experiences as a handler. He may have had a disagreeable incident where he felt his own dog was thrown out unfairly. It may be hard for him to judge that fault impartially. "When I judge, they are never are never going to get by with that". Or he may have the opposite attitude and not give a darn about it. Like one judge I saw who said "I don't care if you yell at the dog, I don't care if you shout at the dog I just don't want to see a dog break! "Well that's a generous attitude but it's contrary to the rules".

These are "I" judges, rather than book judges. I would rather run under a book judge. You know what the score is, it is in print, and it is the written word. It is far easier to judge at any game if there is a definite set of rules to follow. While we have a rule book governing the trials, many judges continue to judge in a personalized way. It's "what I like not what the book says".

What is the philosophy of dropping dogs? One judge says to another "I told you we had better drop that dog or he would come back with a good run to haunt us. Now where are we"? I know where you are, you are backed up against the wall and forced to judge by the superior qualities of the dogs. Maybe there are 15 dogs still in the trial at the finish and it looks like 6 could have won. The decision cannot be popular, but in my opinion it is a case of fine, courageous judging. Judging cannot always be popular and how popular it is doesn't reflect the wisdom of it. I hope I am a good enough sport to congratulate the winning handler and thank the judge. He accepted the responsibility that goes with judging. It is a tough disagreeable job but in accepting the job he fully understands this. He has the courage to judge.

Courageous judging is not always popular. In baseball we have a term a "homer". A homer is an umpire who favors the home team. He makes popular decisions but he is not a good umpire.

In a fight between Stribling and Siki in Georgia, the decision was given to Stribling at ringside... an immensely popular decision. It was reversed by the referee after he got a little further north, by phone ... a fair decision. This referee just was not ready to die, at least not in Georgia anyways.

We will always have trouble getting good judges and no judge can be satisfactory to all, but the poor ones should be weeded out no matter how many feathers or pins they have in their hats.

I don't think that a baseball player would be a good judge of his own team, and I can't understand how a judge who continually works out with a certain group can judge that group fairly.

It seems there are two types of judges. There is the hanging judge, like judge Parker at Fort Smith, who hung over a hundred men in one term of court. He built the scaffold before the trial. Then there are judges like Judge Bean, who had the law west of the Pecos. He judged according to his own ideas and the only law book he used was his own. He kept a saloon and the man that bought the most beer was the man that wasn't hung.

I think judge's clinics are a fine idea for both judges and handlers. It is an opportunity to get together, to express ourselves and not pull any punches. The judges who come expect to be criticised but it is an opportunity to criticise in a constructive way. As a group I am sure judges want to do better judging. They are making a terrific sacrifice of time and money and all, I am sure that anything that helps them is well received. I think that judging has improved greatly since the judging clinics started.

I would like to see an approved list of judges, passed on by both handlers and owners. A judge should have to prove himself and it shouldn't take too much to keep him off that list. Owners, handlers and dogs should not be made to run under flagrantly poor judges. There are many people who have had too many unhappy experiences with certain judges. The record might reveal things that give the complainant a real case. The mere fact that there is such a list and that they can be dropped from it, might keep judges on their toes a little more.

So back to the original question who makes a good judge. One who has open tests for open dogs and derby standard for derby dogs. A good judge is one who will judge fairly, fearlessly and impartially, not favoring name owners, name handlers or name dogs and most importantly he will try to avoid popular decisions favoring popular people.