

Report for the Good Sport Award Committee

“In the beginning.....” No, really - the beginning for all of us was being drawn to the quirky Bull Terrier, the face, the humor, the character. We were then further drawn into the “sport” of purebred dogs so that we could immerse ourselves in all things Bull Terrier, spend quality time with our dogs, and make new dog friends. We started by falling in love with our dogs (a great place to start!) then we commenced to “playing” dogs. When you play, the end result is, generally speaking, joy and delight. That original jolt of joy propelled us onward; but soon, most of us ran head-long into the “competition” aspect, where all too often an unattractive level of intensity develops. We have all witnessed individuals whose desire to win, more than play with equity and fairness, caused clashes within the community. This stole our joy, and it certainly **never** benefited the Bull Terriers that we love.

It became increasingly apparent to the BTCA BOD and several other concerned members, that it was high-time to stem this tide of disenfranchisement occurring within the Bull Terrier world; to enhance the sense of community for the betterment of dogs and members, to encourage members to reconnect with their original goals, to take back our sport, and entice others to join our fun. The subject of good sportsmanship has no longer been relegated to the back seat!

With the formation of the Good Sport Award Committee (Franne Berez -chair, Susie Harris, Christine Schuur) came a re-birth of the BTCA motto of yesteryear, “Here’s to a good bullterrier, a good bullterrier fancy, an honest realization of sportsmanship, not my bullterrier, or your bullterrier, but **THE** bullterrier”. (Mrs. Drury-Sheraton, 1934) It is the committee’s aspiration to recognize and encourage behaviors, both individually and corporately, that foster this type of good will and generosity of spirit, to advance **our** Bull Terriers, as far as possible, in the best and most sportsmanlike way possible.

In a nutshell -Wikipedia defines **sportsmanship** as an aspiration that a sport will be enjoyed for its own sake, with proper consideration for fairness, ethics, respect and a sense of fellowship with one’s competitors.

The committee wishes to express our appreciation to the membership for the spectacular response to our request for nominations for this new award. What a delight to recognize so many “good sports” among us. The nominees for 2015 were: Candy Aron, Marcy Bankus, Diane Davis, Lisa Greaney, Skip Greaney, Gail Harlamoff, Sharon Whalen-Keillor, Edgar Llanas, Krista Prater-Piles, Mary Remer, Brent Ruppel, Marcia Speers, Lori Stafford, Ty Whitehair, Linda Woodruff, and Glenna Wright.

So what do you think? Has our sport lost some luster? Do you feel included, a significant part of the community? Perhaps it’s time to reassess our “tudes” and to spit and polish a bit. We hope that you will take the time to read the following article, and ruminate a little or a lot, as we celebrate our inaugural recipients of the BTCA Good Sport Award – **Mary Remer and Krista Prater-Piles.**

This subject matter is apt, it affects every member of our community, and thus our dogs. Let us never forget, as Mary says, “The dogs are our heart!” How fitting that our dogs, our heart, be responsible for again reweaving us into the tapestry of the Bull Terrier community.

Sportsmanship and the American Myth by Lesley Brabyn

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What has happened to good sportsmanship in the world of dogs? Has it, too, succumbed to the American myth that winning is everything at whatever the cost? Are we really so short-sighted as to concur with the statement made by the famous football coach, Vince Lombardi, that, “winning- isn’t it the only thing?”

These questions were brought home to me one Saturday afternoon last fall as I was watching a Stanford football game with my husband from the alumni section of the bleachers. It was the first time he had been to an American football game and I thought it was a good time to broaden his horizons.

Suddenly, a member of the opposing team brilliantly intercepted a pass and made a skillful 40 yard return for a first down. The alumni section was completely silent, save for my dear traitorous husband who was enthusiastically cheering away for the opposing team. With apologetic and embarrassed glances at my fellow alumni, I shrank into a heap on the bleachers until the noise had abated and the next play had begun.

Later, in response to my accusations of disloyalty to the red and white, of secretly being a UCLA spy, and charitably suggesting that perhaps his color blindness caused him to mistake the color of the interceptor's jersey, he was quite surprised. "In my country," he patiently explained, "we always applaud a maneuver well done, regardless of which team does it." A well-deserved lecture on sportsmanship followed, interspersed with a few derogatory remarks on how we Americans seem to be missing the point of the game and how our preoccupation with winning has blinded us to the subtleties of the game itself. This was my first inclination that perhaps this thing called sportsmanship was a cultural one and that our culture had quite a bit to learn about it.

In the US, we have structured a competitive society that rewards winners and rejects losers. The indoctrination starts early as children are taught to strive for high grades, not to love learning. Not even their games are free from this message for they are encouraged and sometimes demanded to WIN, not necessarily to love sports for its own sake. We are a culture "obsessed with victory" in the words of psychologist Eliot Aronson.

However, the rewards are few, even for the winners. No matter how great their achievements, they are transitory and more and even greater victories are required of the victors to maintain their winning status. Another familiar American theme comes into play: MORE wins, BIGGER in importance and FASTER in coming. Our obsession with winning creates a monster with an insatiable appetite for victories, making a frustrating, anxious and pressured existence for those unable to keep up with its demands.

What effect does all of this have on the players in the game? If winning actually lead to a happier, more fulfilling existence, perhaps the price could be justified. However, this does not appear to be the case. Competitive situations tend to foster suspicion and lack of trust since others are not expected to act in our best interest. Even if one succeeds, life at the top can be exceedingly lonely and interpersonal alienation is more the rule than the exception, as commonly complained by many top US athletes.

The negative potential of the competitive situation was demonstrated in an interesting study by Rausch (1965). He found that the friendly behaviors of well-adjusted children greatly decreased when the children were placed in competitive situations with their peers. A further study using a similar paradigm found that well-adjusted children reacted most like their mentally disturbed counterparts (who rarely respond positively to or initiate friendly overtures) when competing. The well-adjusted children began exhibiting openly hostile and negative behavior in response to the friendly advances of their fellow competitors. Thus, if you've darkly suspected that the competitive atmosphere of dog shows can produce a touch of insanity in even the most reasonable of people, you are absolutely right.

So if winning isn't the be-all, end-all it is made out to be and the extreme competitive nature of the game can be deleterious to our mental health and social relationships, what do we hope to accomplish? Perhaps a lesson can be learned from the sporting philosophy of the mainland Chinese, which is "Friendship first, competition second." Perhaps if we took a more long range perspective on our activities in the dog world, we would have more fun at it while getting more in return. The idea that friendships, and even acquaintanceships, surpass the temporary states of winning and losing is one that we should take heed of.

Our own states of happiness and feelings of well-being are so closely linked to what others do or do not do that we cannot be only concerned with ourselves and our petty victories. By shifting our orientation to a more cooperative form of competition where the outcome is never more important than the players, we will feel better about ourselves and about each other. When was the last time you congratulated a fellow competitor on winning whose dog you particularly didn't like? Your congratulations need neither condone nor condemn the judge's choice, but it will certainly make that person feel good and isn't that even more important than who won on a given day? Rare is he or she who remembers who won what two weeks or two months ago anyway, but people do remember who was kind and who wasn't. Idle conversation at ringside with breeders or exhibitors of a line you especially don't like does not give your stamp of approval to their dogs, but goes such a long way to foster good feelings. If it makes it simpler, don't talk dogs; you won't change their minds about their line or about yours, so why not enjoy them as people on a non-dog level. You might have a lot in common once you get past your disparate type preferences.

A dangerous by-product of the American win ethic is the dehumanization of the opposition. It happens on the football field, manifested in physical aggression and it happens in dog show circles where the aggression is psychological. Malicious gossip, unkind remarks and outright lies are all too common. See this for what it is: the dehumanizing of others and stop it wherever you can. Exercise a little compassion, a little empathy. Nothing can be so important that it requires one to malign another human being for this makes losers of us all. Make an effort to get to know your fellow competitors as people, maybe even as friends. It is much harder to be cruel if you can see that they are people just like yourself, complete with feelings, failings and hopes.

Another accompaniment of the intense desire to win is the inability to handle defeat. Excuses are made: it was a setup, the judge only liked whites, or handlers, or was political, the dog was having an off day, it was too hot, too cold or the ring was lumpy. This denial of losing reflects a society in which there is little sympathy for the loser. When we lose, let's be good sports about it and not belittle the winner's accomplishment by mutterings of foul play or other under our breath. A simple congratulations would be in order whether or not one agrees with the outcome. Even on the slim chance that one of the above rationalizations happens to be true, at worst, you can avoid that judge in the future or correct the circumstances you feel led to your unfair defeat. However, don't be too hasty in jumping to conclusions. More often than not, the judge simply preferred the other dog that day and whether his reasons were fathomable is beside the point.

Many of the alleged "set-ups" are merely cases in which the judge is known to prefer dogs of a particular type. If Breeder X produces dogs that conform to this type idea, then it should not be surprising that he or she will win under that judge, no politics involved. It is far better to congratulate the winners with a smile rather than to detract from their happiness with your sour grapes attitude. If you truly do have a good dog, there are enough good and honest judges out there that it will be recognized sooner or later. There is also the possibility, as surprising as it may seem to some, that the other dog actually was better than yours – at least on that day.

By the same token, to be a good sport, not only must one learn to lose gracefully, but to win with grace. To be in the Number One spot is just for the moment for tomorrow may be different. Keep it all in perspective and free yourself from the American myth that winning is all. The people you meet, the dogs that you share your life with and the relationships you have with both species are all more important than the transitory spoils of the game.

To de-emphasize the importance of winning is not to stop trying. It is to merely put it into perspective. It is possible to do something well without beating or losing to someone else. Take pride in a good performance, a beautifully trained and conditioned dog, a friend that you have helped who is now doing well, a prospect realizing his potential, whether the dog belongs to you or someone else. All these can be independent of winning and the rewards from which are certainly more long lasting.