**IMPROVING THE JUDGING STANDARD**

AIM

The purpose of this paper is to start a discussion about how we can improve the standard of judging, how we can support current judges to improve and maintain their level of knowledge and skills to the required standard for judging, how we can achieve a consistent approach to judging across the country.

INTRODUCTION

I have had judging appointments in most Australian States and have observed a wide variety in the way that the rules are interpreted. It varies from state to state and from judge to judge. Our sport and its participants deserve a consistent and standard approach to judging, that supports clubs and competitors. How can we… deliver a consistent approach to our judging and ensure that what we are doing is indeed implemented across all states; in our approach to run setting as a judge and most importantly how we then interpolate what just occurred when a competitor steps up with their dog to run under you.

RUN SETTING

When setting runs, what is the criterion that you use? Where does this information come from? Your own training? Did you have training? Did you learn how to set runs from someone else? Your own personal experience of training a dog and running in Australian trials? Have you actually taken part in a real live duck hunt on native game or are you from an obedience background that has also participated in dog sports previously? Do you engage with the trial manager weeks before, discuss the ground, weather, general conditions of the land and availability of water?

INTERPRETING THE SCORESHEET

The rules include a “Performa scoresheet” indicating how points should be allocated. What about the things that are on the scoresheet that isn’t in the Rules? What about things in the Rules but are not included in the scoresheet?

* Lines, we talk often about the line out and in, what is our interpretation of that, in different States do we appear to have different penalties and different interpretation for this?
* Blinds, is not only a test of control but must be scored as such. So therefore, if the competitor has indeed attempted to keep the dog honest and on line he/she will not be penalised as much as someone who has avoided the direct line to the blind, there still will of course be a penalty for using extra commands but certainly not as much as someone would receive as a competitor who avoided the direct line to play safe?

Why do some judges score this different and you are awarded a higher score if you have avoided the direct line, you have false lined your dog to keep them out of trouble, used less commands, successfully collected that retrieve to someone who took the judges test on and had a lot more commands than you. Have you not failed the Judges test?

* Marks, as a judge, I set my run and decide what potential ground could I use for a suitable marking test, how do I interpretate what just occurred especially if I insist a particular pick up order to the competitor? If this is a marking test or is it now a big memory selection test?

For example if I set a triple mark, and show the first bird at max distance, slightly to the left middle of the FP, then place another short bird out slightly to the right at 60 meters of the first but keeping it legal then the 3rd and final bird is dropped in between the 1st bird and 2nd seen marks splitting the two at around 135 meters. Then say to the competitor I want the birds collected in the order shot! With an oblique wind blowing from the right to the left across the dogs face, knowing dogs can smell birds from up to 30 meters away, is this then a marking test? Or is it now a test of control and obedience, have I just taken away any sagacity that a dog could present to me by setting the dog up to fail and ignore its nose?

By saying to the competitor “please pick up the birds in any order”, I as a judge would still get the same result from watching the handler do selection, memory and the pick up order the dog was sent for. I can then judge a dog that really does understand selection, recognise depth and make a better assessment on the marking test itself, I have taken away any disposition on selection and if the competitor does want to collect the short bird on the right first, then the middle bird with the long mark on the left collected last, I have still retained a true marking test.

* Rules say that the Performa Scoresheet should be used for each “Retrieve” however; retrieve is not a defined term. Retrieving is, as is a single mark retrieve, and a double mark retrieve etc. There is a list of deductions with maximum points. Since retrieve isn’t defined, should these deductions be applied for each run or each leg of the run?
* Does a dog that has two half breaks and a full break on a triple retrieve get penalised 10 points or 20 points? What is your interpretation?
* Why do judges have different types of scoresheets?

TRAINING OF JUDGES

I have watched several articles and suggestions over the last few years on how we can or how we could improve our judging. As a competitor I want to feel really comfortable that whatever state I travel too and run in, that the judge has been trained to the same standard as I have and their interpolation of the score sheet when judging negatively is reflective, which I am indeed going to be scored within one or two points the same by any other trained judge holding a licence.

My suggestions are:

* Each State has a “training of judges” representation on RAFT and is included in the Annual National RAFT meetings to discuss improvements with any inconsistencies in judging.
* Judges to attend a day’s formal presented training once a year. Mandatory if you no longer run a dog at the level you intend to judge.
* That each trialling/dog club holds a minimum of one judges training day per year. This way if each club holds a judges training day we will ensure that all Judges have received refresher training, gained current compencies.
* That we do formalise our training at the national level not just the state level.
* Once judging is formalised and we have received our retraining or maintained our currency over the next four years that it is included as part of the next rule change paving the way for a standard calendar event held annually by clubs where you can train further competitors as judges.
* The use of IT or programs like Zoom to share and chair an annual judges conference BPT to discuss scoring, “the why” along with run setting and our aim. Share our experiences and the “what happened on the day” that is not listed, how you dealt with it, most judges have experienced that at some point!
* That all judges are periodically signed off by a Championship judge that their competent for another two years with run setting and the interpretation of the rules when judging.

I firmly believe if we did offer a similar training package to all members of the trialling fraternity across all states that we would be able to recruit “competing handler volunteers” into the judges training scheme, knowing that they will receive the correct training and the correct compencies prior to judging in a trial without that adequate training and expected to survive. When you want to do the right thing but don’t know how. Lets be honest, you would not go to a unqualified dentist to have your teeth extracted, so why should we put ourselves in that position if we do not receive adequate training with guidance from a national level.

NB: *Competitors/Volunteers for judging need to know that the correct support and training will be given.*

SUMMARY

Just like dog training, we never stop learning; we always want to improve our dogs’ weaknesses. In judging we should try where possible to look at setting runs that reflect an achievable product that a correctly trained dog at that level can complete. We must look at ways of encouraging dogs to finish rather than being bombastic in our thought process particularly at the lower levels because without encouraging more competitors in the sport at that lower level it will not continue. We are all ambassadors for the sport lets not only give back but ensure that we are not discouraging competitors to run under you by your own personal preferences when judging. Competitors need to feel comfortable where ever and who ever they run under.

Some people have the confidence to share and discuss, some people lack the confidence to share and discuss, some people don’t care enough to share and discuss but some people are just too arrogant to share and discuss, What category are you in?

Yours in trialling,

Karl Britton