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The Lost Art of Good Sportsmanship

Hugging and the shaking of hands in the winner's circle gives a look of great sportsmanship. It's part of the "show"—but not all those greetings are heartfelt.

Has winning become so important that we have lost sight of why we are in the show ring in the first place? Do you remember when you first started showing dogs all those years ago, and how you loved the camaraderie garnered at the show site? Gone are those old days when everyone sat ringside watching the groups waiting for Best in Show, where the oldtimers shared their jewels of wisdom with the "newbies."

I remember being in awe of those who had top dogs and being able to sit within hearing distance of those who knew a good dog and bred the best, while trying to catch a word or two of those gems they threw out there. It was a treasure chest of tried and true information.

Ah, the good old days, before the Internet and Facebook. Those were the days when you knew what you were hearing was fact, and when just being able to listen to the "chatting" of those excellent breeders, of all breeds, was the best learning experience one could receive.

Progress is progress, and there is always the good and bad to come. Information is at our fingertips. Internet bragging is at an all-time high, and everyone is an expert. Unfortunately more and more dog lovers are entering the show ring with a lot of misinformation. Previously, it took years to learn pertinent information from the bottom up. Today, however, we hear the lingo on Facebook one day, and become experts the next. And then when the dog we spent a fortune to purchase and had such high hopes for doesn't win first time out, we blame the judge, the handler, or a million other reasons for the loss. It can't be our handling skills or the fact that our little "darling" isn't up to standard.

Negative ringside comments have become the norm, and what is said behind closed doors has become vicious, while rumors begin and reputations are on the line.

Welcome to the new dog show world, where sportsmanship is losing to "win at all costs." Newbies get discouraged and leave the sport before they even get started. Showing dogs may look easy, but it takes years of study, work, and sheer determination. Those who stick with it really do find wonderful friendships among their peers, and people will come out of the woodwork for a dog in distress and drive hours to help a stranger's dog. So there is still the love of the dog that keeps us together.

Let's stop blaming and start doing. Let's get back to mentoring those new to the breed, to being happy for our fellow exhibitors who produce a great dog and beat us in the show ring. Let's see the judges pick the best of the best, and not someone they owe a favor for fear of not getting the next assignment. Let's get back to when dog shows were about the dogs and not about the wins. Let's become good sports again!

—Virginia (Jenny) Hauber, 2016