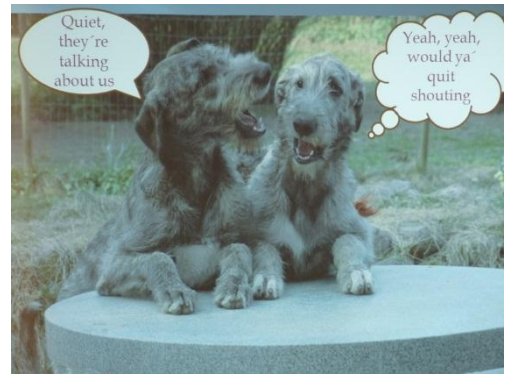


Judging the immature Irish wolfhound addresses some of the challenges and psychological mechanisms, which go into the dynamics of judging dogs in general, as well as the more specific question of judging immature individuals. The puppies and young dogs are supposed to be judged by the breed standard on equal terms with mature individuals. Taking into account, how drastically growing youngsters of large breeds change, during the first 2-3 years of their lives, this task is difficult for all, but especially challenging for the non-breed-specialist.



The science, art and subjectivity of judging

The understanding of conformation and bio-mechanics are often treated as an exact science by breeders, judges and the literature on the subject - all alike.

However, judging is also an art, something which is not emphasized in the judges' education, which I have undergone. I believe that this is because, the artistic aspect of judging, is a much more intangible entity. An area which is difficult to teach, – because it is *not exact*, simply because it does not involve weighing or measuring.

Although a detailed knowledge of anatomy is fundamental, there is something which we all know as "*an eye for a dog*". This can't be taught. It involves an innate sense of balance, aesthetics in conjunction with understanding biomechanics. It also means being able to see the whole dog, and not get caught up in minor flaws or faults – which may cause the less experienced judge to throw a baby out with the bathwater – just so he/she can prove to the exhibitors and the spectators, that no detail is overlooked.

The task of judging immature dogs within the framework of the breed standard – ***on the day*** – within the ***window of just a few minutes***, is not only difficult, but requires added knowledge of how these animals grow. Judging an immature wolfhound is an extremely difficult task – especially for the non-breed specialist, who doesn't have the privilege of experiencing these hounds growing and maturing on a day to day basis. Even experienced breeders have discovered, how different bloodlines exhibit a variety, in the way the dogs mature, which is an added element of confusion for the non-breed-specialist judge.

When judging the dog on the day, an in-depth understanding of the canine anatomy and bio-mechanics, has a built-in responsibility, which reaches beyond the moment of assessing the dog. In the show ring we see some very seductive animals, exhibiting over exaggerated characteristics. These individuals will win more often than not. It is of paramount importance to keep in mind that *the extreme conformation expressions* may not always be bio-mechanically advantageous for the ageing hound.

As judges and as breeders we have to ensure, that these animals have more than a brief career in the show ring. Yes, we have to judge the animals on the day, but judges are allowed to apply common sense which is rewarding a sound individual which presents a physique, which will serve him well into an old age.

Pernille Monberg