

## **ARE OUR LIVESTOCK JUDGES ALWAYS RIGHT?**

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Howdy. Well we made it through the NC State Fair 2004. I enjoyed my first experience and look forward to many more. I hope everyone had a good time for the most part and made it home safely. I realize there are some things that need some work, but you will never find it to be perfect. Speaking of perfection, I think there are some people who expect our judges to be perfect. Therefore, I ask the question "Are our livestock judges always right?"

Most people reading this article have shown animals themselves or had a family member or friend that has shown livestock. Has everyone always been at the front of the line when the judge completes the class? NO. Why is that? It must have been the judge's inability to evaluate livestock properly, right? Fortunately, most people do not agree with that statement. However, unfortunately, some people actually believe that statement and end up making life miserable for other exhibitors because we have to listen to the complaints. I must say that regardless of whether people like the results of a judge's decision, he/she (the judge) is RIGHT. Not only are they right, but they are right every time they are asked to make the OFFICIAL decision. Some one or some group has hired the judge to evaluate your animals based on other people's suggestions or some type of reference. You may be asking yourself, "Has Brian lost his mind, what is his point?" My point is that we have a duty as parents and leaders to teach our kids that while we may not always agree with decisions made in the show ring, we must help them realize that we must respect someone else's opinion. Many of you know this already and certainly do not need me to tell you. Nonetheless, some of my past experiences growing up and some very recent incidents have convinced me to voice my opinion on the issue.

Folks, I realize that we all want to win, but we all know that it is not possible. I want our 4-H Livestock program to be known for the high quality KIDS we produce, not the animals. Certainly I want our kids to exhibit the best animals possible, but not at the expense of learning bad lessons. We must teach them selection, feeding, and showmanship principles that will empower them to feed and care for a high quality livestock project. The next thing they have to learn is how to be a gracious winner and loser...SPORTSMANSHIP. Parents, grandparents, volunteers, and extension personnel play a critical role in this lesson. My parents taught me that success was the result of combining a great deal of hard work with a little bit of luck (sometimes more luck helps). When your kids are successful, congratulate them and pat them on the back for working hard. However, also make sure they understand that those kids placing behind them worked hard as well and deserve the winner's respect because next time the roles may be reversed. As a judge, there is nothing more pleasing to me than to see kids congratulating each other by shaking hands and hugging one another's neck at the end of a class. Sometimes you even catch these kids, with a smile on their face, threatening to beat the winner NEXT TIME. Friendly competition is what 4-H is all about. Most of my closest friends today are those that I was in heavy competition with as kids, and most of the time I found myself placing below them. However, to this day we laugh and carry on about

the times we were in “fierce” competition and how it was so much fun. Help me teach our kids this principle. Most of you in the livestock barn today know each other from competing against one another growing up. However, some of you can’t laugh about your experiences because you or your PARENTS/GRANDPARENTS/VOLUNTEER LEADER/ AND YES EVEN EXTENSION LEADERS made such a big deal about how the judge was wrong. Did you notice, how we managed to lose focus on the judge’s opinion up until this point? Does this tell you something?

Every judge cannot be expected to rank animals the same. I have been walking in my father’s footsteps since I was 6 years old, and we have evaluated more animals together than I can count. However, we still do not rank animals exactly alike. Now, we usually have similar groups of animals on the top and bottom, but we line them up differently. If my father and I cannot rank animals exactly alike; then how can folks expect judges from different backgrounds and parts of the country to place animals the same. Yes, consistency is important but we must always respect the judge. If you find yourself in the winner’s circle, enjoy it and be proud of the accomplishment while realizing it may not happen next time. If you find yourself outside of the winner’s circle, congratulate the winner and ask yourself these questions. What type of animal was the judge looking for? Did I do the best possible job showing that animal? Was my animal truly ready to show? Once you have honestly answered these questions you will usually find the answer to why you placed where you did. Next time, you will know what type of animal to show to that particular judge, how to show them, and have them ready to show. All I ever ask of a judge is that they work well with the kids and that they be consistent. Everyone must realize that in small shows consistency sometimes goes out the window because variation in quality usually increases. In this case, know the judge is doing his best to find the animal that combines the qualities he is looking for to the highest degree. Also, from show to show the same animals may be present or different animals may show up. Thus, placings are going to differ not to mention the fact that the animals are changing from week to week.

The moral of the story is...go to a livestock show with an open mind and ready to have fun. If you cannot bring yourself to be a good sportsman during the show, STAY HOME. Adults, it is our responsibility to provide an example for our kids. Let your kids have fun and do not put so much pressure on them to succeed that they cannot enjoy themselves and learn. Kids and parents, if you win...you must have had the right animal for the right judge and that little bit of luck. However, if you did not win, do not blame it on the judge or anyone else. Instead, congratulate the winners and keep working hard because your time will come. I am sure you all have seen this, but it is a good thing to remember: Rule 1, the judge is ALWAYS right...Rule 2, if the judge is wrong, refer to Rule 1. Look for us in January, as we will be attending the National 4-H Livestock Judging and Skillathon Contests held in Louisville during the time this article was written. I wish everyone a HAPPY HOLIDAY SEASON. Drive safe and watch out for the other guy. Believe me...I know.