

The Irish Wolfhound Association of the Garden State

October 25 & 26, 2020

Conformation Judge Critique, Michael Canalizo

HATS OFF (gloves and warm coats on) to the membership of IWAGS to “firmly establish the requisite courage to put on their yearly activity”! This event might have been one of the first dog shows held since the Covid – 19 crises hit our world. Clearly everyone stood tall and did what they needed to give the breeders and exhibitors not just a chance to show their dogs...but to see one another in/at a time when most of us were starting to suffer greatly for any number of reasons. While I could only watch from afar...I could sense the “love” between everyone when they were able to meet and greet while at the wonderful host hotel.

Understandably being house bound for 7 plus months not only took a toll on the humans, many of the younger stock were venturing out for the first time. I was asked, and gladly agreed to give a little wiggle room for some that might be “a wee bit out of control”. Of course the one that was obviously the one with only “Fleeting Moments of Greatness”, was my Best Puppy from the 6-9 month class of 8. I am not sure who worked harder...the lady with a small frame trying to maneuver this wild child or me holding back my frustration on attempts to get this lady to exercise some control of her charge...and charge she did...but I finally could rationalize she did have enough moments coupled with some room for forgiveness to give her the Best Puppy win.

The 5-point entry of male class dogs provided me with hard choices with only small details separating many of the placements. When the Winners Class came into the ring I was honored to have 8 worthy Wolfhounds to select from. The lineup all had the size and the shape expected of the breed. Across the board I was so impressed with so many tidy, small and well carried ears....I know it's a small detail but I was seeing far too many large hanging ears around the country and was starting to be concerned. I can say the same about nice long tails, carried well.

My Winners Dog was the Open Dog: A dark coated dog that combined excellent type with firmness of muscle while retaining smoothness under a proper hard coat. If I would change anything it would be to see a bit darker eye that might blend better with his dark coat color and add a skotch more length in overall body. Most know that movement defines so much about a correct Sighthound for/to me and this entry had exacting footfall from every direction. Reserve was another hard/close decision between the BBE and Am. Bred...The Am. Bred got the nod.

The next day dawned cooler with some moisture for the bitches to deal with. The huge ring had lots of room to examine under the tent and the ground drained well so using the great expanse of grass was accepting. Another full complement of worthy contenders in the bitch classes. Another lineup for winners with everything important in the Standard looking back at me. None of the girls let me down...each filled my eye in such a good way. Winners to the Open Bitch and Reserve to the BBE.

IWAGS is special for always having a beautiful entry of Veterans and even during this very unsettled time for us, the “Old Guard” made their presence known. The Veteran Bitch earning an Award of Merit.

The Specials lineup, coupled with the Veterans and Class winners filled the ring well. I went about my process, which to many is widely know to be a bit “different” but nary a one failed to ace the maneuvers

and the free stack....and to those who think free stacking and Irish Wolfhound are at odds with another....You couldn't be more wrong...the sight of those noble hounds standing on their own was beautiful...it's not an "end all" or even a deciding factor to me...but there is something so pleasing to see a dog stop naturally and show set under legs, arched necks, firm hocks and graceful curves project a proper balanced IW. I was so proud of the breed on this day.

After a steady comparison I found my Winners Bitch to be the one on the day that met the Standards intentions to the fullest. She was my Best of Breed. My Winners Dog would be awarded Best of Opposite Sex. I would come to find out that Winner Bitch and Reserve were littermates to my Winner Dog. I enjoyed sorting out the Special Attraction Classes...Your breed sure has some unique classes and I rather liked that I could reward a dog for one very specific quality/feature when singled out.

As a judge we work hard to be cognizant of a breed's nuances, the current status of the breed, watching for "fads or fashion" and rewarding entries that have something useful to/for the breed. I am a breeder...those breeder instincts are always part of the process. When one is honored to judge a Specialty of a breed all those triggers override all else. It's a good day when one has to work hard to place first to fourth....I want to thank the IWAGS members for affording me one of those "Great Days".