

AOS Judging is a Team Sport

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Last summer's Olympic games showed the vital importance of teams in sports. However, teams are also a necessary part of our avocations (such as AOS judging) as well as vocations and not just necessary every season or every four years. The following letter from an anonymous bricklayer illustrates my point.

*“Dear Sir:*

*I am writing in response to your request for additional information. In block #3 of the Accident Reporting form I put, “Trying to do the job alone,” as the cause of my accident. You said in your letter that I should explain more fully and I trust the following details will be sufficient.*

*I am a bricklayer by trade and usually work in a team of two. However, on the day of the accident I was working alone on the roof of a new six-story building. As I completed my work, I discovered that I had about 500 pounds of brick left. Rather than carry the bricks down by hand, I decided to lower them in a barrel by using a pulley that was attached to the side of the building at the sixth floor.*

*Securing the rope at ground level, I went up to the roof, swung the barrel out, and loaded the bricks into it. Then I went back to the ground level and untied the rope, holding it tightly to ensure a slow descent of the 500 pounds of brick. You will note in block #11 of the Accident Reporting Form that I weight 163 pounds.*

*Due to my surprise at being jerked off the ground so suddenly, I lost my composure and forgot to let go of the rope. Needless to say, I proceeded at a rather rapid rate up the side of the building. In the vicinity of the third floor I met the barrel coming down. This explains the fractured skull and broken collarbone.*

*Slowed only slightly, I continued my rapid ascent, not stopping until the fingers of right hand were two knuckles deep into the pulley.*

*Thankfully, however, I had regained my presence of mind and was able to hold on tightly to the rope in spite of my pain.*

*At approximately the same time, however, the barrel of bricks hit the ground and the bottom fell out of the barrel. Devoid of the weight of the bricks, the barrel now weighed approximately 50 pounds. I refer you again to my weight in block #11. As you might imagine, I began a rapid descent down the side of the building. Near the third floor, I met the barrel coming up. This accounts for the two fractured ankles and the lacerations of my legs and lower body.*

*The encounter with the barrel slowed me down enough to lessen my injuries when I fell onto the pile of bricks and, fortunately, only three vertebrae were cracked.*

*I am sorry to report, however, that as I lay there on the bricks — in pain, unable to stand and watching the empty barrel six stories above — I again momentarily lost my concentration and let go of the rope.”*

*Author unknown*

Although we may feel as if a ton of bricks landed on us after spending hours on the judging floor, the team should have shared in this load. According to *Webster’s Ninth Collegiate Dictionary*, a team can be several things. First, it can be two or more draft animals harnessed to the same vehicle or implement. (We have probably all judged with people that fit this definition.) Second, it can be a group of animals, as a brood of young pigs or ducks. (Would the Dallas Cowboys still be America’s team if they were the Dallas Ducks?) Third, it can be a group of people on the same side (which does not even fit the Texas Rangers!) More fitting for the purposes of this discussion, however, is that it can be a group of people organized for a particular purpose. According to the guidelines from the AOS’ *Tenth Edition of the Handbook on Judging and Exhibition* page 33, a team is minimally described as “...at least three certified judges, no more than one-third of whom shall be probationary judges.” Now that we have determined just what a team is when discussing AOS judging, we should consider the advantages of having a team.

The bricklayer obviously understands the value of the team approach now, but do orchid judges? One of the benefits of the team is to normalize an individual’s prejudices or predispositions and make the final score of the game more consistent. The American Orchid Society obviously believes this to be true and would not recognize an award given by any group other than the one described in their handbook. However, there are still other values in having a team.

There is increased knowledge and expertise available when a team is involved — another case where the sum of the whole is greater than its parts. Of course, a team has more observers so that more can be observed and a better outcome can be produced.

Education is another payoff of the team effort because we learn from working with others, absorbing their knowledge and experience. This may be particularly true in judging orchids because many of the plants presented for judging are not commonly grown or seen in some areas of the country.

Finally, teams encourage participation and interaction and enhance our efforts. Quarterbacks may get much press coverage and glory but goals are scored by the entire eleven-man team on the field with each making a contribution. There may be some disadvantages to the team approach, however, so in interest of fairness, we should look at these also.

One comment often heard is that teams slow down the judging process. Some people walk, talk and think faster than others. I, for one, will put my money on the turtle rather than the hare since we are not talking about a 100-meter race here. Speed is not always advantageous and can cause mistakes. Moreover, I find that steady, persistent and patient work and research will normally beat hasty decisions.

Another disadvantage often cited is that a team can promote a “hidden agenda” of an individual while obscuring the person involved. All of us are rational, well-educated and well-trained judges who would not be led astray by such a circumstance so I doubt the significance of this criticism.

Now that we have looked at the advantages and disadvantages of the team effort, what is an individual’s obligation to the team — every team — including AOS judging teams? To obtain the best result, every member of the team must keep abreast of hybridization trends, prior awards, flower parentage and provide their undivided attention. It also helps if everyone always remains cool, calm and collected because pounding a shoe on the table does not solve anything — not even for the Russians. A judge on the team must participate yet keep an open and impartial mind and not “tout” the virtues of a flower. Of course, this should not exclude unbiased discussion that contributes to the synergism of the team.

Common sense and good manners also are part of an AOS judging team. For instance, judges should remain outside the show arena until judging begins unless they are involved in an exhibit or working at the show. Judges should always refrain from making personal, derogatory comments about a flower. Have you ever heard “blooming for the last time” on the judging floor? All of us know, and follow, the rule of withdrawing from the team if there is any conflict of interest or even the appearance of impropriety. The motto “When in doubt, opt out” should be one of our mantras during judging.

The final result is what counts in all sports, including orchid judging. It also goes without saying that all members of the team should cooperate with the chair of judges and the team captains. It takes many support functions to keep a team on the winning track and all are important.

Even though judges score a flower individually, the score is a team average. It may be necessary to compromise and alter a score on occasion so put all egos aside and remain a team player. A team member must be willing to explain and, if necessary, to defend the team’s actions to any interested parties.

To paraphrase Yogi Berra, “It ain’t over til the paperwork is done.” It may not be the best part of judging, but it is a necessary part. As well as the score being an average, the description should be written, reviewed, edited and approved by the entire team. Each team member should feel that the results are fair and proper, that the job was well done and that they had fun doing it.

How does the above discussion pertain to our future team members? When entering the judging program, a potential candidate should realize, appreciate, and support the commitment to the team idea. We should solicit students who are team players. Let the Magics and the Michaels star on the court or on the track, but let our AOS teams be the star wherever orchid judging is performed. This attitude should be something else to consider when elevating individuals in the judging program beyond their knowledge and participation. If they are not team players, do you want to judge with them for the next ten or twenty years?