

Team Captain Responsibilities

By Jerry Stephens and Clair Ossian

Published in Awards Quarterly, Vol. 32, No. 3, 2001, page 194-195

The general responsibilities of a team captain are well known to all of us, but that does not mean we always remember or apply that knowledge. This summary attempt to codify what most of us know, but may forget from time to time.

There is very little written on this important subject, and *the Handbook on Judging and Exhibition* (10th Edition) simply states that the team captain should “average the scores.” This hardly adequately describes the duties of a team captain.

There are five aspects of team captaincy to be remembered:

- Leadership
- Preparedness for the role
- Conduct at any judging center
- Conduct at shows
- Conduct during the actual judging of the plant

LEADERSHIP Team captains should lead in every sense of the word. That is not to say that he or she should attempt to impose his or her will on the team. Rather it is to assure that the team gives the plant all due consideration, and focuses on judging rather than extraneous matters.

The captain should let the team know up front what is to be done, i.e., does the team screen together, by class, individually? Arrangements should be made for meeting at a specific time or place if screening is not done together. Also, explain when and how the team will be dismissed; remember to thank your team and clerks, and when done, dismiss them formally, don't just disappear.

Guide discussions toward fruitful comments by asking questions and soliciting opinions (especially from reticent team members; don't embarrass them – simply try to draw them out).

Be observant of the team, especially noting if anyone is feeling left out, or seems withdrawn for some reason.

Remember – you are the team captain, no matter how little you think you know.

PREPAREDNESS You seldom know in advance when you will be a team captain. Therefore, always be prepared by bringing your handbook, a ruler, a calculator (if you are not good at math in your head), and a magnifier. Check to see what references are available (especially at shows).

You alone are responsible for quality control of score and award sheets. You should directly supervise measurements and award descriptions.

Be aware of variation in speed among team members – suppress any discussion of the plant or scores until all score sheets are in. Personally tally the scores and do the math. It is probably a good idea to have someone else check your results. Read and edit the draft write-up before transferring it to the award sheet. See that the description fairly characterizes the plant and flower award, and that the description is appropriate. Indicate to the photographer which flower is to be photographed. (Notes for photographers: Quality awards [HCC, AM, FCC] – close-up of flower; CCM – plant character and habit; JC, AD, etc. – show commended feature; AQ – show group of plants clearly.

CONDUCT AT LOCAL JUDGING CENTER At the start of judging, gather your team as expeditiously as possible, have someone get a plant, and assign research. Assignments should be evenly distributed among students. Remember the newest member may not know exactly what you want. There may be a team member with special knowledge of the plant in question – use that person as a resource. If a member of another team is an expert in the plant you are evaluating, he or she would be glad to offer guidance if asked.

There will be judges who cannot stay focused. Keep a tight rein on all team members in order to judge the plant fairly.

Try to enlist full participation from all of your team. It may be necessary to draw out opinions from some, while stopping the overly aggressive team member. This can be a balancing act, but is very important. Getting the less-forthcoming members to participate can be difficult, but is critical in developing the future confidence of the person in question. If there are guests other than the plant owner, you may want to involve them.

If there are local experts in a particular class, ask for their opinion. Remember that the team is the final arbiter of ribbons and trophies.

If scores are out of range, you must offer the team the opportunity to rescore.

CONDUCT AT SHOWS: RIBBON JUDGING Locate your team and clerks as quickly as possible, and be sure everyone knows each other. Get the show venue layout in mind and assign duties to your clerks – which one will carry folders and who will do ribbons. It is a good idea to write down the names of anyone you do not know.

Check for variations in the usual schedule. Learn the exceptions and special cases, such as the policy concerning reclassification of mis-entered plants, whether classes may be subdivided, trophies withheld, or extra or special ribbons given.

Remind your team members of their responsibility to move out of the way when they are done viewing the plants(s) in an exhibit. They should remain until satisfied, then step away from the exhibit. If you are sharing a class and must coordinate on a particular plant (i.e., best flower or best grown), locate the judges of the other team as soon as possible. When taking a break (restroom or otherwise), advise the judging chair.

One way of keeping track of flowers in a class during ribbon judging is to consider the first flowers seen as “best.” The second flower examined will then be best or second best, and so on. During the remainder of the class, add or delete better and poorer flowers from your short list.

Watch for candidates for the best-grown plant. This is often overlooked until the end of your assignment, making it more difficult. The best-flower selection is easier, as the blue ribbons will allow you to compare only a few plants.

AOS show-trophy voting should also be borne in mind as you judge.

CONDUCT AT SHOWS: AOS JUDGING The general conduct of AOS judging at shows is essentially the same as at centers, with some important differences. Keeping your team together may be a greater challenge than at your center. Since research materials may be less complete than at your center, locate and examine these materials. Bring your handbook for information on awards other than those most commonly given.

You still must have help in bringing in plants to examine, and for doing research. See to it that these duties are shared.

REGIONAL OR NATIONAL SHOWS There are additional items to consider in this instance. You are often at a disadvantage, since schedules may be quite different from the ones you are familiar with, so ask questions. Identify the local judges and use them as a resource.

Local opinions and procedures may vary from yours – respect them. Be careful of making careless judgments, since feelings may be hurt. Watch your team for loose tongues, and remember that you are a guest – keep your good manners.

Clerks expect more from out-of-town judges – rightly or wrongly. Don’t let them use you as a bad example. The team captain (especially) should emulate Caesar’s wife – who cautioned that the appearance of evil is as important as evil itself. Give no one the opportunity to criticize your ethics, your statements or your deportment.

We all know that there are judges who are less than professional. We cannot change that, but we do not have to contribute to the problem.

JUDGING PRACTICE We are all used to how things are done at our own center. At other centers and at shows outside our region, things may be quite different. Being a team captain, however, requires the same behavior everywhere.

Lead the discussion, ask questions of everyone, and do not allow the more aggressive individuals to take over. Draw out your clerks, students, and probationaries. Everyone should be enjoying him- or herself.

Generally refrain from leading the team to your conclusion. Avoid voting (especially on large teams) unless there is a tie, so you can function as a group leader or moderator and retain your neutrality. The team captain has great influence, especially on newer members of the judging community. Although it is regrettable, they will often seek to do what they believe you want, rather than what they really think. The object, of course, is to help teach our newer members, and a show is an excellent place to accomplish this with the abundance of material available. Look for noteworthy breeding lines, parents, and ways to explain how certain characteristics are developed.

Finally, always strive to do your best, and offer the exhibitor the best that you can and your team can give.