

AOS Judging – A Crystal Ball

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The seventh edition of the *Handbook on Judging and Exhibition* has recently been released and should now be in the hands of all judges and affiliated societies which plant to stage orchid shows. This edition, on which work continued for three years, prescribes many changes in rules adopted by the Committees on Awards and Affiliated Societies over that period but not heretofore announced. Obviously it will require careful study.

Regional judging committees are not autonomous organizations but, in fact, are subcommittees of the AOS Committee on Awards. Adherence to rules prescribed in the *Handbook* is not optional; it is required. Regional committees will need to review their practices and perhaps modify some of them. Since the chairman of each regional committee is *ex officio* a member of the Committee on Awards, and has a vote in its decisions, this is not a one-way street.

But not all of the changes which are taking place in the judging system are specifically recorded in printing the new *Handbook*. Committee discussions which brought it into being reveal attitudes which foreshadow changes we may reasonably expect to see in the next few years. Making predictions is a hazardous business, and, more than most, particularly predictions which involve timing. Nevertheless a consensus, vaguely formed as it may be, seems to be developing in many areas and suggests what we may expect in the evolution of our judging system.

First there will be greater emphasis on uniformity in the quality of judging throughout the country. It need not be stated that this has always been our major objective, but, with eighteen regional and supplemental judging centers in operation with important differences in plant material depending upon geographical location, this is not an easy goal to reach. In a sense, all our predictions of change will help to fulfill this ambition.

We may anticipate a gradual increase in the number of judging centers throughout the country to serve areas for which judging service is not currently accessible. This of course cannot happen until there are sufficient numbers of resident judges to operate such centers effectively. To reach this level, potential judges in such areas will have to make unusual sacrifices of time and money to qualify for service. This has always been the case, and, in spite of the daunting obligations which some candidates for judge still face in reaching this status, judging centers are much more accessible to them than in earlier years.

The establishment of new supplemental judging centers seems not to be in the cards. Indeed the elevation of some such centers to full regional status is more probable. Criteria for establishment of a supplemental center are not less stringent than for establishment of an independent judging center, and the local administrative problems are more onerous. Therefore there is no advantage to a local group, seeking a new and more convenient

judging center, to set its sights on a supplemental center which is increasingly seen as an outmoded organization.

We may anticipate a gradual raising of standards to be expected of candidates for student judges and of judges themselves. The *Handbook* no longer uses the words “student judge training.” Training and retraining has become the obligation of all judges, the need for which becomes obvious when we consider the growing appearance of unusual species and exotic hybrids on our judging tables. The time has passed when a judge, knowledgeable as he may be in evaluating the traditional forms of cattleyas, phalaenopsis and cymbidiums, can on that basis alone be considered a competent judge. Hybridizers are not slackening their pace in searching for valuable combinations, particularly in the field of intergeneric hybrids; neither can the judge limit his search for new knowledge and experience.

Coincidentally the tools which a judge may employ can be expected to improve. Faster publications of awards made in other regions will help. Increased availability of reference books and slides will be important. Especially significant increased emphasis on the thorough and precise description of flowers which will permit the judge to make a valid comparison between the qualities of the flower he is looking at and similar flowers which have previously been awarded. Too often the comparison is reduced to the evaluation of the size of the flowers, since this is the one tangible feature which can always be relied upon in previous descriptions. The fact that too much emphasis is being placed on flower size becomes obvious from a study of the point scales. Few judges can contend convincingly that they do not base more than 10% of their decision on this factor. This signals not the inadequacy of the judge but the inadequacy of the descriptive material at his command.

Elimination of the requirement that judges be physically resident in the United States has opened the door to new representatives of thriving orchid communities in neighboring countries, particularly Canada. New sources of plant material and new perspectives will become increasingly valuable because of representation from these areas. No concessions are offered such candidates – they must meet the same requirements imposed on any resident United States judge. Similarly, greater flexibility is offered judges and candidates for judge within the United States by the new rule which permits a person to serve outside his region of physical residence with the concurrence of the chairmen of the two regions involved. While state lines will doubtless remain the basis for defining the boundaries of regions, their impact can now be softened for the individual for whom arbitrary boundaries are a handicap.

Judges will increasingly be expected to maintain an active interest in the orchid community beyond mere appearance at a minimum number of judging sessions. Active membership in local societies, growing and exhibition of plants, development of personal resources such as libraries, and participation in judging activities outside his region make the difference between a judge who is growing in competence and one who is stagnating. No program aimed at the improvement of the quality of judging can be effective with judges who isolate themselves from their own orchid communities. Closer monitoring of

activities of individual judges with respect to attendance at judging functions, business meetings and training activities has already been mandated, and we may expect this to be followed by evaluations of the quality of the judge's participation in the work of his orchid community.

Judges are appointed for indefinite periods, not for life, and the process of continued evaluation can be expected to result in the termination of services of judges who are deemed by regional committees to be inadequate. A new and more precise procedure for terminating the services of such judges has now been adopted which clearly describes the responsibilities of regional committees in bringing charges of inadequacy against a judge and provides for his rights in defending against such charges. The termination procedure will not affect many judges, but its existence is a reminder that accreditation is not a conferred honor, but an initiation into a dynamic program in which he will be expected to assume and maintain substantial responsibilities.

The American Orchid Society is a rapidly growing organization, with great changes in store in the forthcoming move from Cambridge, Massachusetts to West Palm Beach, Florida. Orchid judging will remain a most significant part of its total program. The growing popularity of the *Awards Quarterly* among the general membership attests loudly to that fact – less than 10% of its subscribers are judges. Our judging system is highly regarded and widely imitated in other countries throughout the world. Nevertheless the increased interest and needs of our membership will continue to challenge its integrity and demand higher standards of performance.