

Plan For Picking a BIS By Randy Weaver

“If you don't know where you are going, you will probably end up somewhere else. “ ~Lawrence J. Peter

So you think you would like to have a Best in Show winning Great Dane, or perhaps just a Champion? OH, DO YOU REALLY? You have no chance in achieving your goals unless you formulate a plan on how to achieve those goals, NO CHANCE. Or as that old proverb says. “He who fails to plan, plans to fail”

Defining your goal is the first step in reaching the goal. Be realistic in what you want and what you can achieve. Obviously family and personal life comes before dogs, no matter what your goals are. Every one would like to have a top BIS winner. Unfortunately not many have the means to achieve that goal. It is a \$100,000 to \$250,000 realistic bottom line to expect to become the #1 dog and BIS Great Dane in this country. And that is if you do the handling your self. Twice that if you do not. Most people are not in that income bracket, but other goals are achievable and definable.

More realistic goals are TOP 20 or BISS winner, or group winner, or Champion.

Champions are accomplished everyday by novice owners and novice handlers and are the most modest and most rewarding of goal for most people. And a great goal to start with. Unfortunately or fortunately for some, those goals are quickly expanded once we get a taste of winning.

The secret to getting an owner-handled champion is 3 keys Breeder, Breeder, Breeder. Your best source of success is from someone who has been there. Successful breeding is part luck and part spend able income but over a number of years the Elite breeders come to the top just like cream. It is not luck. You can learn from them and use their experience to your advantage. They represent very inexpensive lessons that can be used to your benefit.

Before you even buy a dog and certainly before you continue on another daylonger start formulating a plan. The first advise to the beginner is to educate yourself. The Internet has a wealth of knowledge but can be confusing when trying to determine which direction you want to go. Before you start, if possible, take at least a year to attend shows, talk to owners, handlers, and breeders to get many opinions as to the person or breeding program you think will help you reach your goals. Start making contacts making it known that you are looking for a “SHOW POTENTIAL “ puppy. Be prepared to wait and that is fine as long as you get what you want. But do not settle for a bargain or anything other than the best quality from the breeder or breeding program you want to get a puppy from.

Often times breeders will offer or even insist on co-ownerships to get someone new into showing without putting a top quality puppy out with a novice first time owner. This is a personal situation and one that should be considered carefully. Most will advise NOT to go into co-ownerships with a stranger as these agreements can be at first very

appealing but will often develop into a situation that is not ideal for all concerned. Remember all co-ownerships should be to the benefit of both parties. Be careful.

Bottom line when selecting a puppy it should be a requirement that both parents must have health screenings. The Great Dane Club of America along with OFA has set up a list of health checks that they think are minimum for the Great Dane Breed they are referred to as CHIC testing. These are the standard health tests that should be performed so as to get you started on the right footing so as to be able to achieve success in the big picture of the dog world. Certainly breeders over the years have achieved success without doing all health tests, but they will be in the vast minority as the year's progress. Always look at your dog show experience as a BIG PICTURE and stand back and think what you want to do or accomplish 10 or 20 years from now. You can't go wrong from that point of view.

While the competition and expense is much greater now than in the good old days, you now have many tools that were not available just a few short years ago. When I started back in the 70's there were no dog shows on TV or videos to watch of the National specialties to even get an idea what the rest of the country was doing. The Internet was not even heard of and the breed magazines were the only tools available to know what other breeders in the country were looking to improve. The national was held on the East coast so we hardly ever saw west coast breeder's dogs at all, except for an occasional. Example by an adventurous breeder.

Now we can see videos of dogs from around the country and around the world and pictures of these dogs and their offspring are only a click of a mouse away. Making evaluating dog and breeders much easier than from just an occasional picture in a magazine.

The start of the use of frozen semen has brought in a revolution to breeders around the world. Now, can we not only breed to the best pedigree and dogs almost anywhere in the world occasionally we can take the good parts of outstanding breeding programs from years ago and add to existing programs redefining the good parts that we want to keep adding to.

The ability to ship puppies from anywhere in the world with comparatively ease, and only slightly more additional cost in the United States make getting something good even easier. Today newbies desire to MAKE IT in the world certainly have been given some outstanding tools.

With all these new tools come the consequences of greed and deception, not far behind. It hasn't taken the Back Yard Breeders in the US and the World long to figure out what the Newbie is looking for and the key words that excite them. Recent winners and success, real and exaggerated and the most promoted being the best deceptions. A very exciting website is no substitute for years of experience and consistent quality. Most of today breeder's long time and new success stories are now on the web to a different extent. It is up to the Newbie to swift through the glitz and photo shopped pictures to find what they are looking for.

First select a breeder that has the style of dog that you like that has been winning, the longer a history of winning the better chance you will be another winner from their hard work and years of experience. They will be there to guide you. Even with those credential you should contact others who have dogs from their breeding program to confirm that they are in deed helpful and that other puppy buyers are happy with the help.

Selecting a puppy can be a difficult process, again trust your breeder. The cute shy puppy in the back of the box might be the most loving dog in the world and in most need of the attention you may be able to provide, but there are other people in the world looking for exactly that kind of dog. If you have the goal of a successful show dog, this one is probably not for you. Reading books, and asking others for advice cannot compare to the amount of time a breeder has had in raising these puppies from birth not even taking into account that they were probably involved in raising at least one of the puppy's parent or grandparents. Again take their advise over your own 30 minute evaluation if you have taken the time to be sure this is the breeder you want a puppy from listen to them.

After selecting a breeder and a puppy. Listen to what you are told. All too often novice owners contact their breeders asking for their advice only to do what they wanted to do in the first place, the breeder is the best person, and one of the only people that has a real interest in your success. You make them look good; they will make you look good.

Breeders can advise you on handler selection if necessary and judges selection for sure. They can give you a quick opinion of what you have because you are a reflection of what they are doing as breeders.

Remember handlers are paid to show your dogs, not win with your dogs, Some handlers will give you an honest opinion on the quality of the dog you have but don't count on it. Others will treat you just like a plumber or other person you hire to do a job and not want to upset you with negative comments about your dog. Other owners are not necessarily an unbiased, qualified opinion no matter how close of friend they are. Breeding and owning a champion or 2 does not make you an expert, or even a qualified evaluator of quality. Experienced breeders have learnt from their mistakes and success's over a number of years, and will know how to get you to your goals, and if those goals are achievable and realistic. Taking into consideration all you can contribute to the goals if you define your ability to reach those goals. Meaning; if your goal is BIS but you do not have the finances and time to achieve that goal, lower your sights. You never know, what can happen you may be the right dog at the right time under the right judge but don't count on it and don't make it a goal.

Besides the obvious dollar expense of showing a dog on any level. There are other expenses that may go unnoticed at first. There is the expense of time, and hardship on your family to do without you and the dollars that are designated for the dogs. The emotional expense of not meeting our goals can only be compared to the income you spent upon reaching your goals. Be realistic and prepared to change your plan if your life situation changes.

Probably the most difficult evaluation for all buyers is to determine weather a breeder is a good one because they have lots of expendable money to spend on dogs, and have been successful because they are in an upper income bracket and are prepared to spend it on dogs.

Have they achieved success as breeders with highly campaigned dogs with big time handlers as well as helped guide novice owners with little expendable income. Both scenarios are important. Small time, lower income bracketed breeders can compete on a smaller level with good dogs and hard work. That has always been my fondest moments

beating the big money machines with my limited incomes for just one day. Not more often than not but those moments are sweetest.

You are not going to discover the next super breeder and no matter what they tell you and no matter how lucky you think you are. If they had a better mousetrap (breeding program) the experienced breeder would be flocking to them. Over the years different experienced breeders have ventured outside the USA to bring in a hopeful addition to the gene pool that will make a difference, at best it has brought in a slightly different quality of some traits but most often these hoped for trials have had less than the desired results. Take it into consideration when looking outside of the USA, for your new puppy, why lots more Great Danes are being shipped out of the country than being shipped into the country.

Now that you have your “SHOW POTENTIAL” puppy it is up to you. Many a champion has been lost due not to bad breeding but bad care, no matter how unintentional or not. It starts with day 1 when the puppy arrives.

Remember it is a dog not a person or a member of the family. It has dog needs, not the same as a baby by any means. It does not need to be constantly cuddled no matter what you think, probably just the opposite. It is now your responsibility to socialize the dog, keep him healthy, tape ears diligently if necessary and make no excuses as to why you cannot get these things done. Excuses are just that. An extra 15 minutes taping ears, leash training, stacking a young puppy will save you hours of work and lots of \$\$\$ later on. And will aid in the success of the big picture plan you have hopefully defined.

Taking puppies to organize classes are great tool in its development, whether they are just puppy kindergarten or conformation classes. Some breeders/handlers will tell you not to do Obedience and that in my opinion is just wrong. Besides teaching a dog better manners it also does teach it to sit when told, but it also teaches it to stand when told. If a Great Dane cannot tell the difference between the command to sit and stand you have bigger problems than the dog sitting in the ring.

A puppy should be exposed/trained to allow you to trim/grind nails, tape ears and trim whiskers at an early age. Again 15 minutes now will reduce hours of headaches come show time. You cannot over train a puppy. Standing still is not easily learned and can be expensive if you try to teach them in the conformation ring at shows. Expenses in wasted dollars spent on entries and gasoline to get there but also expensive as to the mental expense of loosing because your puppy could not be properly evaluated because it would not stand for examination or move on a lead correctly. I have always felt dogs show success could be broken down to

10% Conformation

45% Preparation

45% Perspiration

100% CHAMPIONSHIP

Meaning that there is a small difference in conformation that can be over come or added to by hard work.

It is my opinion to do early preliminary health checks with certifiable checks done at 2 years. Early health checks can be an expense that is worth paying if you get negative results that would put a limit to your Big Picture Plan. A possible negative test result may allow you a refund or return of your “Show Potential “ puppy to your breeder for placement, the tough decision will now be to return the puppy you have fallen in love

with for a new one that may or not be coming in the near future. Make sure you know what your contract with your breeder says and make the tough decisions to accomplish your goals.

Now one of the toughest decisions that you will be required to make. Are you prepared to return the puppy that you have worked so hard with that is a part of your extended family? If your goals would be set back because of another Great Dane mouth to feed and take care of you must make the hard decision to return or even place the lovely puppy that has not met the require results to allow you to reach your goals. Everyone, including the puppy will be better off in a wonderful home with someone who doesn't really care if he will ever be bred or shown or not. And that is not a bad thing.

Let's assume that you are now an owner-handler or are hiring a reputable handler to start heading down the path to your Big Picture Goal. Hiring a handler can be a tricky job. Here again your breeder can advise you. There are many pluses and minus for hiring any handler. Cost, location, distance they travel, can they carry your dog if necessary, do they do a great job, do they have the extras that many handlers are paid for (Influence) do they do a good job, do they also handle their own dogs, how many dogs are they currently showing, how does their seniority system work, do they carry insurance for care and custody, in case the unimaginable happens, do you and your dogs like them. All of these questions are worth asking but none a deal breaker. Many combinations of handlers and owner handling can be incorporated into a good Big Picture Plan.

Perhaps starting your puppy yourself is the best decision for you and maybe even earning a few minor points only to turn the dog over to an experienced handler when those all so difficult majors are needed. Here again your breeder can advise, listen to them. Never under estimate the right time to become an owner handler, and when it is time to not be an owner handler and turn it over to the professionals. Perhaps your young prospect would be better off with an experienced hand from the beginning.

Here again is time to formulate a plan. A 20-show plan is a good picture to the quality of the dog and or handler. Give the team this opportunity to be evaluated under different judges on different weekend. This is assuming that the dog was ready to be in the ring and you have done all that is required to accomplish your Plan. If not it will take more shows and more money.

At some point in time weather it be 20 shows or God forbid 40 shows you must be making progress. Let say in 30 shows you have spent \$20 per show for puppy entries that would be \$600 take into consideration the cost of getting there and hotels and perhaps even a handler you have now probably spent more on the cost of 30 shows than you did on your puppy. You must have made some progress. That being actually winning points, not reserves, sweeps wins or class wins, if not you must reevaluate your prospect and again make the tough decisions. Was he really ready or did you just hope he was ready. What does your handler say, what does that important breeders say, listen to them. As a professional handler I used to tell the owners of not ready for prime time dogs to wait 6 months and try again. Most owners do not want to hear that they have at best a marginal dog, so telling them the truth will only send them to a handler that will tell them how beautiful the dog is and how he doesn't understand why it has not won before, BEWARE.

Again you must soon make the tough decision to move on and cut your losses if you are truly trying to reach a Big Picture Plan. Placing a marginal dog is not cruel and heartless, if done properly it is done the best for everyone. I am sure he would prefer to be in a home as an only dog with non-show people rather than be ignored while you continue on your Plan. These are tough decisions, but often for the best for everyone.

Let's assume that you have now finished your first champion no matter how you did it, 20 shows with a professional or 60 shows with you on the lead. You are now entering another room, Best of Breed competition, is not for the faint of heart. The demands financially, time wise, actually attending the shows as well as time away from the family and economically are much greater and the rewards harder to achieve but oh so sweet. The feelings of the highs of winning are in direct relationship to the lows of loosing. Make sure you enjoy winning, not just glad that you didn't loose as so many old timers experience. When it stops being fun, GET OUT.

If achieving a championship was your goal, now everything else is just icing on the cake. If you have higher goals you must again define them and come up with another plan. So many first time Champion owners just continue showing and hoping that a higher goal is achieved and don't even really want to admit that they want to be a BISS Winner or Group winner or even a TOP 20 participant. I personally think a TOP 20 participant is one of the highest attainable goal for the average dog owner can achieve and tip my hat to all those that achieve it every year. Sure sacrifices have to be made and the credit card may take a hit for a while, but dogs that have the quality to attain winning under a number of judges against significant dogs during a full year is a quality animal. I have heard all the negatives about mediocre dogs being shown extensively just to make TOP 20 and anyone could do it. That may seem so until you try it. There are many hurdles to get over, Dollars are always a big one, but time on the dog show schedule and time away from your family is always a bigger factor than what you think when you start.

It is a good thing if all members of the family can participate and attend the show schedule, again a little more work and planning but worth it. The emotional and mental toll is often too much for the faint of heart after a short time into the plan. We once started a young dog on the path to the Top 20 only to win 1 show in his first 20. Very discouraged we were about ready to make the change in our plan to avoid most of the top winning dogs and head to different shows if possible, when things turned around and things feel into place and we started winning our share against all types of competition. Be ready to make a plan and ready to change a plan if it is not working and you think you have a good dog and a desire to reach your goal.

Realistic the Top 20 is a Jan 1 to Dec 31 competition, so you must be ready to start on Jan 1. I suggest a series of 1 or 2 double page ads prior to Jan 1 in a popular all breed magazine. The ads should be high quality and flattering to your dog and handler. Pricey yes, but perhaps money well spent. The Florida circuit and the other groups of shows the first part of the year are very important and you must commit what ever resources necessary to attend as many shows as early in the year as possible. Everyone, including exhibitors and judges alike are more attentive to who is winning and to what extent early into the year. Don't get left out or get too far behind early into the year. What you don't want to happen is to fall into 21 place at the end of the year, so an early winning position makes the year less stressful and more enjoyable for all.

Normally you will need to win 40 Best of Breeds or 400 Breed points to qualify for the Top 20, sometimes more sometimes less, but figure 40 wins beating an average of 10 dogs per show, there will be times when you are ahead of that schedule hopefully but be prepared for the long year plan and make your plan to do that, making it 10 wins during the first 4 months and continuing on that pace though out the year, hopefully you will win more than that and the pressure will not be there as you head down the stretch the last quarter of the year. If not you must be prepared to travel further and go to more shows that are favorable to your dog in order not to fall short of your goal. It will be all worth it when you attend the Top 20 as a participant for the first time. I was at the First TOP 20 and knew right then that I needed a plan to get me there.

Normally a plan to get into the TOP 20 must include an advertising budget. Whatever funds you feel that you are able to spend will not be enough but everyone has their limitations. I suggest to heavily weight your yearlong budget in the first quarter and/or the end of the year prior to your start. Use as many early wins as possible as long as the pictures are great, if not go and take non-show picture to best advertise your dog. NEVER use a bad picture for any reason, as everyone remembers bad pictures and few remember good ones. Advertising is part of the BIG PICTURE of your plan and must be planned for like any other part of the plan. Not only for this dog but also for all the others that follow. The selection of breed magazines and web sites must be mixed with the same in all breed magazines. Set out a plan to accomplish both.

Obvious the most popular breed magazine are looked at the most by breeder judges, as this is where they began and have most interest. All-Breed judges who do not have a personal interest in Great Danes receive many magazines every month and will usually not spend a great deal of time, looking at individual breed magazine and are more likely to read the best all-Breed magazine to see what is happening in the bigger dog world outside the breed ring.

If you have a male dog and are considering offering him at public stud certainly you can never start too soon to start his stud career. And obviously, advertising works. Aiming for a breeder's magazine, web site is a definite must. Advertising in all breed magazines for a stud dog is wasted dollars. But it is very necessary if you goal is also to become a TOP 20 qualifier.

Higher goals #1 ranking or Best in Show are another completely different Plan and will be discussed at a later date.

And so it goes,

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