

Coaching to Succeed: Teaching and Preparing Students for Questions in Meat Evaluation

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Abstract

It has been said that there is no substitute for hard work. The ability to think critically and discern differences in meat judging gives the student a definite edge when the decision-making processes occur in real-world situations. Many hours should be spent recruiting and informing the administration of the benefits of an activity such as meat judging. Yet, after this feat has been accomplished, we can get into the nuts and bolts of teaching and preparing students to perform at a high level of answering questions. The key factors that must be completed with this high level of precision are understanding proper terminology, understanding the concepts of quality and cutability, possess a competitive nature, be willing to give the proper time on task, concentration (focus). Many coaches recruit good students and teach the fundamentals, yet students fail to fully concentrate 100 %, and follow a methodical procedure. Furthermore, the successful coach needs to understand that students have various learning styles. Let us note at the onset that note-taking for questions is different than that for reasons in most cases. Reasons are comparative with each of the three pairs and are descriptive for the last carcass or cut, whereas, questions are more holistic in that they are descriptive for the entire class. Notes for questions are to observe and identify the major points for placing the entire class according to quality and cutability as well as understand the reasoning for placing the class. Second, organize the notes in a manner in which the student can read the notes and make a mental picture of the class. In preparing for questions, remember take notes on the big differences first and work your way down. We should aim for one hundred percent, but at least 75-80 % of the questions will pertain to the distinguishable differences that were used to place the class. As in both reasons and questions the student's notes should "paint the picture of the class." This is a critical part of answering questions. Finally, it is imperative that team members are involved each week throughout the year in prepar-

ing for questions. Repetition and concentration are the vital determinants for success and consistency in questions.

Introduction

It has been said that there is no substitute for hard work, yet it doesn't hurt to have intelligent young people either. Along with the time on task, both are irreplaceable commodities. Not only has time on task proven to be a valuable lesson in meat judging but has shown to be an excellent lesson for the preparation of a career. Along with this hard work, the ability to think critically and discern differences in meat judging gives the student a definite edge when the decision-making processes occur in real-world situations.

Methodology

Introduction

The first step to training students to be successful in meat judging is not necessarily having a good understanding of terminology, possess a good memory, and have proper note taking, but to have administrative support and be involved in the personal recruitment of top quality, ambitious young people. Many hours should be spent recruiting students and informing the administration of the benefits of an activity such as meat judging. Yet, after administrative support has been attained, we can get into the nuts and bolts of teaching and preparing students to perform at the highest level of answering questions.

Learn the basics

The first step to train students to answer questions for meat judging is to have an understanding of the terminology, have proper note taking skills, etc. The key factors that must be completed with this high level of precision are understanding proper terminology, understanding the concepts of quality and cutability (combination of trimness and muscling), possess a competitive nature, be willing to give the proper time on task, knowing the observations to look for that play a major role in the placing of the class, concentration (focus), and concentration. No, that wasn't a typographical error. Many coaches recruit good students and teach the fundamentals properly, yet stu-

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dents fail to fully concentrate and follow a methodical procedure.

Terminology and Observations to Note

The first step mentioned is for students to understand the proper terminology associated with each carcass and cut that will potentially be in a contest. These should be understood in relation to the trimness, muscling, and quality for each respective class. In fact, the initial factors that we have our student observe for questions are the big three for each major observation for quality and cutability. In other words, the student should take notes and concentrate on which carcasses or cut was the trimmest and fattest (i.e. Beef Carcasses; at the eye, round, KHP, loin edge, cod/udder, etc.), heaviest muscled and lightest muscled (eye, round, and chuck), highest and lowest quality (marbling, color, and firmness as well as texture when there are major differences). In addition, observations should be noted for distinguishable differences in close pairs. Occasionally, there will be some exceptions to the class. A good example of this is when the last place beef carcass is also the highest in cutability. Another example is when the fattest, lowest cutability carcass may not be the fattest at the brisket or inside round areas. Yet, questions that have no bearing on the placing of the class should be eliminated or very limited.

Note-taking skills

After terminology, and knowing which observations to look for most often, proper note taking is essential. We believe that a student can both take too many notes as well as not enough notes. At first, the student will have a tendency to do the latter, but after about eight to ten practices, the competitive students will tend to practice with an overkill of notes. Five to ten notes for the entire class is too few while 25 to 30 notes would be considered excessive. As the coach prepares the team, 12-15 questions should be asked regarding each class. Yet, this should take place after the first four or five practices. Another suggestion is that you should never ask more than twenty questions for one class in practice (this is the borderline). In fact, when starting a team, only five to eight questions should be asked on each class during the first practice or two. This will emphasize and accomplish learning the fundamental differences of the class for the student. As with most learning methodologies, it is a building process and is usually progressive. Therefore, it is imperative that students be shown the proper amount and type of observations to note both at the beginning and after students have completed a few practices. Successful coaches will continually monitor the note taking throughout the judging career of each student. One problem that you might encounter is that students do not progress at the same rate. This can be very frustrating, but the coach should yield to being patient if they want to be successful.

Note-taking styles

Another aspect of note taking is that there are various styles of note taking. Let us note at the onset that note-taking for questions is different than that for reasons. Reasons are comparative, with each of the three pairs, while the last carcass or cut is descriptive. On the other hand, questions are more holistic in that they are descriptive for the entire class. Occasionally, a comparison is made for a pair within the class, but it is usually not the rule. When developing questions, either as a coach or an official, you should not have more than two to three comparison (between #1 and # 4) questions per set. Depending on the individuals of the team, there may be several styles of note taking for the team members. Some coaches have their students use the same format of note taking. However, we have always allowed students to experiment early during their judging career and choose which method works best for them. Sometimes, this may not be accomplished until eight or ten practices have passed. Never allow a student to change immediately prior to a contest. However, there are some simple principles to remember. First, observe and identify the major points for placing the class according to quality and cutability as well as understand the reasoning for placing the class. Second, organize the notes in a manner in which the student can read the notes and make a mental picture of the class. This is a critical part of answering questions. We recommend that the students write a few sentences (two or three) noting how they placed the class and why, including the major points again. Third, they should analyze any close pairs for observable advantages and/or grants between the two carcasses/cuts. Fourth, observations should be noted for exceptions that are easily distinguishable within the class. This may be an exception for the normal thought of placing the class, sex of the carcasses, or any other observation that assists the student in remembering the class.

Various styles or formats of note taking are as follows:

- 1) Subdivide the card into 5 sections (horizontally) where notes are recorded on all four carcasses or cuts individually. This should be according to their differences for quality and cutability within the class. The fifth section is for recording anything that makes it easier to remember the class at a later time.
- 2) Subdivide the card into four squares where notes are recorded for each carcass/cut for quality and cutability. This style is much like the first style mentioned above, yet in a different format. Each student may make a mental picture of his or her note-card differently. Some can remember squares or quadrants while others may remember in line-by-line format. Others will remember the class and not try to remember their card.
- 3) Subdivide the card into pairs much like reasons note taking, yet we caution that too many notes on pairs and not the entire class can confuse the student during the period of time for answering questions. It is imperative that a paragraph describing the placing and reasoning of the entire class be more extensive in this method.

- 4) A fourth method is to simply have the student act as though they are the official and write about 15 questions that they feel are the most obvious that discern the class. Again, an extensive paragraph describing the placing and reasoning for the class is essential with this method.

Learning Styles

Furthermore, the successful coach needs to understand that students have different learning styles. One may or may not be familiar with the three basic learning styles. Some students learn more from a visual field while others learn and retain more in an auditory manner and others through hands-on or kinesthetic means. The visual students retain more by making a mental picture of the class through good notes while the auditory learner will have to make more extensive notes and repeat the observation over and over in their mind while studying prior to answering the questions. The kinesthetic learner is the most difficult to work with for answering questions because they are much more regarded as visual.

Helpful Hints

Other considerations are appropriate for assisting the student to enhance their skills in preparing for and answering questions. Another helpful hint in note taking is the use of abbreviations. This is encouraged to speed up the note taking process. A further thought is to have the students underline key points in their notes with a red pen while studying. Also, we strongly encourage saving previous contest questions to have students study questions for both familiarity and for applicable content.

Now that we come to an end, we want to emphasize again the importance of time on task and repetition. It is imperative that team members are involved each week throughout the year in preparing for questions. Even though many teams can't make it to the cooler each week, a review of previous contest questions, studying all possible questions, the use of videos, and the Internet, slides, etc. can be implemented to aid in the "encouragement of thought" each week regarding questions. In this regard, questions may be paralleled to studying for pop quizzes. Only a few notes are used, yet key concepts and a mental picture of the class is utilized. However, I don't expect to ask more than eight to ten questions per class when reviewing videos. Videos are used to build the basic concepts and review major terminology as well as remember the priorities for placing the class and for answering questions.

Summary

In conclusion, we want to emphasize the importance of:

- Groom the administration
- Actively recruit good students
- Have a regular regime of practice
- Foster a good working and cooperative attitude among the students
- Each student may need to take notes differently
- Continually assist the student to build on proper note-taking
- Pay attention to the various learning styles of students
- Repetition and concentration are the vital determinants for success and consistency in questions
- Remember, "Poor Preparation Yields Poor Performance".

Note: Refer to the Meat Evaluation Handbook for the guidelines for writing questions as well as examples of questions for classes.