

Readers' Letters

Why not gold medal classes?

Present methods of awarding points and trophies at the National and other shows are currently causing some concern, as this letter demonstrates:

We the undersigned are all members of the National Guild of Judges but it is as individual members of the National Association of Amateur Winemakers that we offer the following suggestions for consideration by the Executive Committee as a means of improving the situation both for competitors and judges at future National Shows.

We consider it most unfair to a competitor entering a bottle in an extremely large class to have, say, only a 1 in 200 or so chance of getting a first prize (as happened in several classes for table wines at Eastbourne) when another competitor entering a very small class could have as good as a 1 in 20 chance of getting an award of the same importance of value as regards scoring.

To overcome this we suggest that large classes should be split into workable sections (say a maximum of 50) with a separate judge for each section. Awards should be 1st, 2nd, 3rd, etc., in each section carrying the number of points at present allowed for these awards. Each sectional first prize in the complete class should then be brought forward for assessment by another judge to determine the overall first, and this entry should receive a gold medal award with a premium of points—say 2 or 3, making a total of 11 or 12.

We feel this arrangement would not in any way upset the present system of calculating trophy awards but would help a competitor to feel that he had at least a sporting chance with a good wine, which we also feel would enhance the image of the Association.

Our second concern is the excessively large number of bottles entered at the National and, as National Judges, we are bound to say that a proportion of the entries are of very poor quality indeed. Whilst various suggestions have been made regarding systems of qualification for entry we understand that these may not be practical to carry out, or even desirable. However, we feel that the following addition to the rules of entry might have the effect of discouraging a percentage of poor winemakers without any effort on the part of the administrators:

“Competitors must have previously won at least one prize at a major Wine Show. Contravention of this rule may result in disqualification”.

Mr. R. N. Brooksbank, 17 Dovecote Lane, Beeston, Nottingham.

Mr. A. E. Dransfield, 157 Polwell Lane, Barton Seagrave, Kettering.

Mr. F. Green, 14 Manor Close, Irchester, Northants.

Mr. J. Greenfield, 64 Rufford Road, Ruddington, Notts.

Dr. M. Leadley, Blue Hill, Cropwell Bishop, Notts.

Mrs. P. Leadley, Blue Hill, Cropwell Bishop, Notts.

Mr. C. V. Tubb, 33 Grove Road, Bingham, Notts.

Mrs. N. Tubb, 33 Grove Road, Bingham, Notts.

Master winemaker

—but no firsts?

. . . and Mr. C. R. Wyness, of Chingford, London, E.4., comments:

I understand that the designation ‘Master Winemaker of the Show’ in annual competitions arranged by some Federations is awarded to the person gaining most points in the Show.

On this basis it would be possible for an entrant making good quality wines with an entry in every class to be elected Master Winemaker without achieving a single first. The outcome of this could be an interview by the local paper in the following manner:

Reporter: “I think it is a great honour, Mr. Ferment, to be recognised as the Master Winemaker of this area. You must have won many cups in the competition you were telling me about, and we would like to photograph the cups to accompany the article I am writing for the paper.”

Mr. Ferment: “Oh!—well, I’m afraid none of my wines were good enough to win the top award for each of the classes I entered in . . .”

Here is a matter for discussion. Would it not be more fitting if the award were based on something like the following: The competitor would need to have an entry in, say, at least six of the classes. Of these, four must secure top points. Large numbers of entries (with the recognised one bottle per class) to secure an agreed percentage of “firsts”.

Large numbers of people consistently make excellent quality wines at home nowadays, but the recognised “Master Winemaker” has got to be even better than these.

Qualification

Dr. R. A. Webb, of Long Ashton, Bristol, has these observations to make concerning judging qualifications:

May I comment on a few points in Mr. Tubb's letter (August 1972, p. 543).

Surely it will not make for good public relations to report the view of the Committee of the A.W.N.G.J. that there is room only for their organisation? In a free association, as the winemaking movement is, this is not a matter for the A.W.N.G.J. to decide.

In paragraph 4, the Committee recognises "the need for lesser qualified judges, at least until such times as the number of National Judges is increased". Should the reader assume from this that National Judges are better qualified than others? Very little thought is required to realise that there are more good judges of wine outside the A.W.N.G.J., than in it, and that not all A.W.N.G.J. judges are equally good.

As Mr Tubb points out, in every field there are grades of qualification, e.g. University degrees, diplomas, certificates of education of all kinds. Is the A.W.N.G.J. Certificate to be compared with a degree or with a Certificate of Education? If to a degree, then which University? The value attached to a qualification is assessed by others, not by the awarding body, and is acquired over a period of comparative experience of similar qualifications. Mr. Tubb will be aware that although a University may confer degrees, it draws its examiners from other Universities when deciding on whom to confer a degree.

If special merit is being claimed for the A.W.N.G.J. qualification, Mr.

Tubb should be prepared to give supporting details. How is the examination conducted, what qualifications do the examiners have, what methods are used in evaluating the performance of candidates, what is the pass mark, how uniform is the examination for different candidates, and how are the marking standards of individual examiners equalised? Perhaps more important still, has there ever been an *independent* assessment of the *quality of the examination*. Quite a lot of research work has been done on wine-quality evaluation and the performance of judges, which can form a background for the evaluation of an examination. Until it is clear that the quality of the examination is high enough it seems unwise to imply superior competence of one group of judges over any others. A name on a list of A.W.N.G.J. judges means that somebody somewhere thinks that person can judge wines, but it might mean little more. It seems unwise at the present juncture to talk about "lesser qualified judges".

It might be useful at this time to compare the form and marking standards of the examinations conducted by the various bodies of judges, if the appropriate officers are willing to publish them. It might be of great value to candidates.

Grateful to former chairman

The secretary of the Surbiton Amateur Winemakers, Mrs. Theo Percy, sends this letter:

As an individual member and on behalf of my circle, which is a circle member of the National Association of Amateur Winemakers, I thank you for your comments headed "Chairman's Departure", in the August issue of the *Amateur Winemaker*. These comments put, very aptly, our own views on the matter. I am enclosing an extract of our Circle's minutes dealing with the point before your comments were read. Perhaps you would be kind enough to convey to Dr. Webb our thanks for all he has done for us right to the very end and should he consider being re-elected at a future date he would have our whole-hearted support.

Our minute reads:

"The matter concerning the resignation of the Chairman of the National Association was discussed. It was decided that, as only the chairman had seen fit to give his views, only his view could be considered and on this basis the committee felt that he had taken the only action available to him in the circumstances and their sympathy was entirely with him. The secretary was instructed to write to the Editor of the *Amateur Winemaker* accordingly."