

# 10 THINGS TO KNOW BEFORE JUDGING *the Dogo Argentino*

BY MASSIMO INZOLI

**1. The standard.** The first thing you need to know as you contemplate the Dogo Argentino is that the history of this breed is different from any other.

Most other recognized breeds are created through a selection process with different criteria, depending on the function the dog will perform and the

geographic area in which he finds himself. After the breed has been established, those physical traits that are essential to type are officially determined, through study and the drafting of a standard.

But in the Dogo Argentino, that process was reversed.



The Dogo Argentino is a rectangular breed, which enables it to sustain a free trot with good reach.

At the beginning of the last century, Dr. Nores Martines of Argentina imagined a breed suited to the work of helping in the hunt of big game. He developed a standard, and only later began to really work to create the Dogo Argentino. In the end, Dr. Martines crossed nine breeds to obtain a final product that came as close as possible to his dream dog, idealized so many years before.

As a result, the description in the standard written by the breed's founder should be appreciated with a particular eye and attention, compared to other standards. The Dogo must be exactly as his creator imagined him decades ago, and any attempt to change him should be seen as a serious attack on the original spirit of the breed.

Years after the original Dogo standard was written, the Fédération Cynologique

Internationale (FCI) decided to reformat the standards of different countries to make them more uniform, more modern and easier to read, and to leave less room for personal interpretation.

To accomplish this FCI goal of unifying the standards, the Federación Cinológica Argentina (FCA) was formally asked to provide a version of the Dogo Argentino standard following the new format. In February 1997, after fierce battles between the Argentine kennel club and the breed's parent club, the new Dogo standard was sent to FCI. But this proposed standard was not yet definitive, as FCI sent it back to the kennel club for revisions, and it was not until January 1999 that the new Dogo Argentino standard was definitively approved and put into force.

Because of its new format and various questionable details,



Correct Dogo expression – one of hardness – is created in large part by a properly shaped and placed triangular eye.



this new standard has modified the original spirit of the Dogo Argentino standard. So, with respect to the current and official document that all we judges must refer to when we judge, anyone who seriously wants to deepen his or her understanding of the breed must carefully read and study the original standard. That is the only document that contains what were and should be the true principles for understanding and judging the Dogo correctly.

**2. Substance.** The Dogo Argentino is a lighter and more muscular Molosser. He must not tend toward a heavier, brachymorphic type, nor should he be of a racier, Sighthoundy form, with light bone and long legs. Instead, he falls in the center, without tipping to one side or the other of these two different extremes of body type.

The first impression a Dogo should give is one of "substance." As a result, he must have good bone paired with an explosive, defined musculature, and as little body fat as possible. A Dogo without this substance will never have the basic characteristics of type to be considered a good representative of the breed.

The Dogo Argentino is a rustic dog, but he maintains a general impression of pride and nobility.

**3. Proportions.** Correct proportions are another characteristic of type. The muzzle of the Dogo is almost as long as the skull; one can accept only a slight shortening.

The thorax must descend almost to the elbow, although a dog with a deep chest that finishes slightly below the elbow is preferred. A deep chest is indicative of great

lung capacity. The length of body should be slightly longer than the height at the withers, a rectangular outline.

**4. Head.** The head should be formed by the union of a skull designed for holding and a muzzle built for scenting. The skull should have strong temporal and masseter (jaw) muscles, since they are the main muscles for a solid, well-developed bite. The muzzle should be as parallel as possible in its lateral, or side, planes, with a good width, never pointed.

The lips are moderately thick, short and tight. We do not want abundant or pendulous lips that obstruct the air flow to the mouth: The Dogo is a holding dog who in doing his job needs to breathe as much as possible, aided by air flow from his nostrils. The lip, therefore, must be short to allow the dog to breathe through his mouth while holding his prey. In the original standard, a pendulous lip was a disqualification.

The upper profile of the head should be "sinuous" – that is, a slight lateral convexity of the skull (think slightly domed) should switch to a slightly concave upper profile of the muzzle (think slightly upturned).

**5. Expression.** An expression of marked hardness is essential. The upper eyelid is very thick, and because it is slightly heavy it tends to form an angle with the



The Dogo's white coat is an important facet of type. But so is correct structure and substance, without which the Dogo would not survive long in the field.

upper eye rim. The lower eye rim should be as tight as possible. As a result, the eye shape is triangular, leaving the eye well protected and the white not visible. It is preferred that the eye rims be black, because without it comes eventual depigmentation, which should be strongly penalized. The eye is positioned semi-laterally, and the orbital bone beneath appears heavy, because the muzzle joins well below the eyes.

Eye color is as dark as possible, and a blue eye is not allowed, although this color may appear in puppies.

**6. Muzzle.** An exaggerated foreshortening of the muzzle must absolutely be avoided. The muzzle of the Dogo must have well-developed lower and upper jaws. A dramatically short muzzle shrinks the upper jaw

and limits the Dogo's scenting capacity. As a result, a good depth of muzzle is also essential. Muzzle depth should not come from a pendulous lip, but rather from well-developed and strong jaws.

**7. Bite.** A perfect intersection of the canines is more important than the overall bite itself, which can be scissors or level. (In exceptional cases we can also accept a reverse scissors bite, if the following requirements are met). The lower canines must be positioned perfectly inside the space between the two upper canines, and be flanked by the first incisor. A holding dog must have canines that intersect perfectly. The teeth must be large and healthy, all the better if all the premolars are present.

**8. Coat.** The Dogo is born white, and he dies black. But it is not

essential to search for perfect pigment in a dog that is still young. Over the years, the Dogo's skin becomes an evolving map – it transforms itself little by little.

When I bought my first bitch 20 years ago, the first thing that I counted were the eight little black flecks in her undercoat. I remember that I did not sleep for a week. Today, it is one of the last things I look at.

The whiter the Dogo's coat, the happier we are. But for a dog that owes its survival to other functional qualities, the pure aesthetics of the coat are a secondary concern.

Pure white is a color that has spread to many dog breeds. It is the color of domestication. In the most cultures, white signals animals of worth, and they are

frequently assigned a symbolic value. Often white represented the purity of a purebred animal, as opposed to the ordinariness of mixed breeds.

Coat color in dogs is determined by different pigments. Other animals, including birds and insects, can produce many different pigments. But dogs, like all mammals, can produce a limited number, the melanins, of which there are two types: eumelanin (responsible for black pigment) and feumelanin (responsible for brown pigment).

Selecting for white is not simple, because this color is not regulated by just one gene. In the Dogo Argentino, several different loci (S, C and T) influence the coat. The gene that interests us most is in the S allele series, which completely inhibits melanins and



**Depth of thorax – and by extension, good breathing capacity – is vital in a Dogo. At minimum, the chest should reach the elbow and, ideally a little lower.**

produces a pure white. In fact, in the S locus one finds the alleles that determine the presence of any pigment in the coat. The first allele of this locus, S, determines the complete pigmentation of the body surface. Other alleles regulate the depigmentation of other parts of the coat. The final allele in the series, sw, determines the appearance of a completely white coat.

Thanks to the sw allele, the dark color disappears almost completely, or, as often happens in the absence of very specific selection, appears only in small, asymmetrical areas that exist only around the eyes, on the ears or at the base of the tail.

Because the sw allele is recessive, it is natural to wonder how it is possible that two white dogs can produce offspring with black markings on the eye, tail or ears.

A peculiarity of the S allele series is the presence of minor genes called modifiers whose actions are independent of those of the primary genes. Some gene modifiers increase the extent

of the pigmented areas and are referred to as “plus”; others that reduce the pigment area are “minus.”

It is the presence of gene modifiers that creates the appearance of spots around the eye of the Dogo. The marking around the eye cannot be more than 10 percent of the surface of the head. Clearly, this is an approximate measure, because it is impossible to measure while a judge is assessing other traits of type and conformation. The dark marking (better if it is black) should not be too extensive; in this way it is aesthetically pleasing and not distracting.

Other genes that affect coat color in the Dogo Argentino are found in the T series. The allele in the T series is responsible for flecking in the white areas; it also produces mottling on the pure white carried by the sw gene.

In winter, the Dogo coat develops an undercoat that at times might carry gray hairs. It is better if the white of the coat stays pure throughout all the seasons, and



**The lips of the Dogo should never be too pendulous, as that would inhibit his breathing – and survival – while holding game.**

also if the undercoat is a pure white.

The white of the Dogo Argentino should not be confused with albinism, which is regulated by a gene in the C series. Fortunately, albino dogs are very rare; albinism causes the inhibition or total lack of any pigment in the coat, skin or mucous membranes.

To sum up, the white of the Dogo is a white from the sw allele. It is affected only by the genes of the T series, which create the mottling of the coat, which is not desirable. But the coat is never the result of albinism from the presence of the C series genes.

The coat is short, but not smooth, and has a glossy texture. It should never appear soft or fluffy.

In certain dogs I have seen a pigmentation of the nose, along with the mucous membranes, that is brown. This is a very serious fault because it indicates the presence of recessives that are not desirable. A Dogo with such brown pigment of the nose or mucosa should not be bred and should be disqualified from competition.

**9. Temperament.** A Dogo should

never be aggressive toward humans. A Dogo who growls at the judge or the handler should be removed from the ring.

Pay attention to aggression toward animals of the same sex! In a dog that has never been used in the field, same-sex dog aggression can be normal and tolerable enough, but, again, human aggression is never to be permitted.

**10. Gait.** The relationship between the height at the withers and the length of body identifies the Dogo as a breed that is rectangular and not square. As a result, his tendency is to trot rather than gallop.

Of course, any given Dogo can certainly gallop well, but the breed's proportions, along with its angulation, predispose it to be a good trotter with good reach. The agile and loose trot demonstrates that the Dogo is a mesomorph, not a brachymorph with a heavy gait.

The gait of the Dogo is almost feline. His movement is agile and quick, and he is always aware of what is going on around him.

When the Dogo's interest is aroused, his reactions become very rapid, and his attitude

change is very obvious.

In this case, he is able to break into a rapid and strong gallop, to bring him quickly to his prey.

In the first phase of the hunt, the dog uses the trot or pace to carefully follow the tracks of his prey. When the distance between him and the game begins to close,

his interest is abruptly awakened, and the Dogo's attitude begins to change, and with it his gait. The final gait that the Dogo uses to close in on the game is the gallop.

The final hundreds of meters that separate the Dogo from his prey are the ones in which he expresses his maximum strength: He launches himself at the game to hold it.

It is important to remember that on a hunt, before reaching



The Dogo Argentino should strike a balance between substance and agility. He must have good bone but never at the cost of his athleticism.

the prey, one must cover many kilometers on foot, with dogs following the boar tracks. If the Dogo did not have endurance, with a good foundation, he would arrive at a fight for his life, lacking for oxygen and strength.

To recap, the essential characteristics that a Dogo must have are: rusticity, substance, hard expression, a muzzle that can scent but that is strong, a deep thorax, broad chest, and an alert and combative character.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Massimo Inzoli of Caltanissetta, Sicily, has bred the Dogo Argentino since 1992 under the kennel name "de Angel o Demonio." In 2007, a dog of his breeding, multi-Ch. Indio de Angel o Demonio, won the official FCA ranking of most prized Dogo Argentino of the year in the breed's native land.*

*Founder of the Dogo Argentino Club Italia (DACI), and its past vice president, Inzoli has judged Dogo Argentino club shows in Austria, Bulgaria, Hungary, Italy, Slovakia, Serbia, Spain and Switzerland, and has judged the breed at the prestigious Cierre de Ranking in 2008 in Buenos Aires, Argentina.*

*Inzoli organized and spoke at the first judges' refresher course on the Dogo Argentino organized by the Italian kennel club in 2005, and is its trainer for new judges of the Dogo Argentino.*