

BRACING MARKET GOATS

Should market goats be braced in the ring? I recently received an email from a parent asking this question.

Her seven year old daughter was showing her project goat before a judge that did not allow bracing. The goat started acting up so the youngster held the goat's head against her side to control it. She got knocked out of first place for "bracing" her goat.

Prompted by that email I requested input from three respected market goat judges.

The results were quite surprising... each had a different viewpoint.

Marvin Shurley, President, American Meat Goat Association

The A.M.G.A. as an organization opposes bracing of goats period and recommends against it.

Bracing gives the bigger (larger or older) exhibitors a chance to make their animals feel firmer as well as showing more muscle in the hind legs since they are tensed up but... Some of the more heavily campaigned animals have broken down rear pasterns and you can see where structural damage is being done. I understand that goats stand on their hind legs to browse but this is when they are older and ligaments and tendons are stronger.

Reggie Phillips, certified judge

Most market goat judges started their careers as lamb judges so they are used to seeing an animal braced.

Market goats are not lambs. It is very hard for a judge to evaluate goats that are braced in an un-natural position. I fought bracing as a parent for several years but our daughter wanted to win so we allowed her to brace her animals.

As a Judge I do not allow a kid to pick the animal's front feet off the ground. I do give the child one warning and after that I will not use the goat.

I wish the people putting on the shows would require that meat goats be shown like breeding goats - on a tight chain only. Without rule changes from the people putting on the shows we all are facing a up hill battle.

Daniel Thompson, certified judge and livestock auctioneer

To brace or not to brace has been a BIG question here in Oklahoma. At one time there was no bracing allowed in the Oklahoma shows. A whole new set of problems evolved from that ruling.

1. All other major livestock shows in the United States are leaving it up to the judge. Most judges allow it. Therefore anytime our kids go to

- a major out of state they get beat and look like they have no idea how to show.
2. This may be the biggest question... What is bracing?
Too many helping with our shows have no idea. It has gotten so bad here that, as the judge looked at goats at our Tulsa show, the show chairman was in the ring grabbing kids when they tried to control their goats. Many times the judge himself has no understanding as to what bracing a goat looks like.

I myself thought it was a good idea not to brace but after seeing all the problems I think it is time to leave it up to the judge of the day. So if the judge will not allow it, stand there. Be ready for either and go get'em.

As a club lamb and a club goat producer and a former college livestock judging coach it is not about if goats should be braced or not. The reason is education. Starting in the early 60's sheep were not braced either but as the sheep changed so did the showing. The club goat industry is at the same point that sheep were 20 to 30 years ago. The fact is that as the goats change so will the showing. You need to decide if you are in the purebred or club goat business. If it is club goats then go with the flow and allow change to happen. We are looking for a meat animal and if bracing shows the animal to its best then let them be braced.

So, where does this leave the exhibitor?

They should train their goats to present themselves to their best either braced or not. Find out ahead of time what the judge prefers and be ready for it.

Similar judge-related situations exist in showing breeding goats...

- Some judges like goats with more finish (thicker fat layer), some want almost no fat.
- Certain judges want more air under the goats (longer legged).
- Really good judges can see the good points in a goat even though it's "acting up" in the ring.

Don't expect a long legged goat with a thick finish to place well before a judge that doesn't appreciate those qualities.

Judges need to learn the difference between bracing and simply controlling the goat.

Don't expect a braced goat to fare well with a judge that doesn't like that.

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