

Cheryl May's Book Reviews

"Fear No More: Competing with Confidence"

by **Barbara Cecil** and **Gerianne Darnell**.

In a compact, easily-read book of some 200 plus pages, Barbara Cecil and Gerianne Darnell have packed an array of information on virtually every aspect of the mental aspects of dog sports.

The authors compete in obedience, agility, conformation, tracking and herding and have amassed an impressive number of titles on their individual dogs.

They make it clear that many of their titles and achievements were accomplished while the authors dealt with fear, show nerves, and all the negative emotions all of us who compete must confront. The authors say they worked through the show nerves problems, and share with their readers the techniques they found successful.

Recognizing that no one solution will work for everyone, Gerianne and Barbara provide readers of their new book with multiple solutions to conquering fears and learning to be mentally tough.

The authors recognize that more actual dog training information is available today than ever before - on the Internet, through books, videos, and seminars.

They say, "It's the game that is played in your mind, the one that requires an understanding and application of sports psychology, that is going to make the difference."

In the early 1990s, Jane Savoie's book on mental training for horse people with its distinctive yellow cover could often be seen outside obedience rings. Of course we had to substitute "dog" for "horse" and try to make it work for us. Or some of us went directly to the source, Maxwell Maltz. Unfortunately, many of us found Maltz rather difficult to read. Cecil and Darnell have translated Maltz and expanded on Savoie for dog people.

They ask, "How did we become so fearful and negative about a sport that we have freely chosen to play?"

Their answer is that we don't need to be anxious, fearful or negative and we'll have a better chance of success if we can get over these negative feelings.

The advertisement for their book says, "Fear No More covers every stress-buster and tension-reliever from Affirmations to Zen, including what you should eat, drink, smell and hear, potions and pills, relaxation exercises, proper breathing, a reintroduction to psycho-cybernetics, goal setting, 20 pages of "Quick Fixes" and much, much more!"

Truth is, there's a lot more to it, because they have evaluated all of the potential anti-stress techniques from a dog trainer's point of view. This is the first book I've seen whose authors have "been there, done that" in both obedience and agility.

They don't pull any punches, though. They freely admit that a mental skills training program takes work. Just reading their book or any other won't solve a lifetime build-up of stress-related anxiety in the ring. They say, "These are skills that take time and practice to attain; they are skills that you continue to develop and refine all your competitive life."

The advice they provide is concrete and real, with specifics. On goal-setting, they advise that daily and weekly goals be time-limited. "Specify when you will complete them. If you do not, you run the risk of procrastination and of making your goals an ethereal 'Someday ...' like a wish."

Another good tip involves self-talk. They suggest readers spend a dog-show day taking inventory of self-talk. Write it down as it occurs and at the end of the day tally the positive and negative things you have said to yourself. They note that we may discover that we are doing a lot of negative self-talk. We have the ability to change this and improve our attitudes and our performances.

One of the most helpful chapters is one on proper breathing. The authors say that 98 percent of the population doesn't know how to breathe properly. They provide the tools to get their readers into the tiny group of people who DO know how to breathe - and therefore perform at their best.

The authors' suggestions take effort to put into practice -- just as good dog training takes effort. But the payoff for those who take advantage of this information is a calmer handler, and therefore a calmer dog. Probably the end result will be improved performances. At least we will enjoy the experience more fully.

Besides the great information, each page ends with a quote - either inspirational or humorous - from famous people ranging from Eleanor Roosevelt to Abraham Lincoln.

This is a fun book with an incredible amount of helpful information packed into its pages.