

THE DOGO

Love at first sight.

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By Massimo Inzoli

At the beginning of the 20th Century, Cordoba in Argentina was a city with two faces: On one side lived the fervency of what defined the Belle Epoque, a society that was obsessed with spirituality, that made itself feel better by crossing to the other side of the street from the city's poverty-stricken youth, and that fell asleep to the song of the waltz and mazurka. In short, Cordoba had the appearance of a capital that wanted to show itself to be important in the eyes of the country.

On the other side, not far from the first, was a cruder and crueler aspect that had arrived in this land with the active practice of bullfighting, and passed on the predilection for cock-fighting. Later, it pushed to create and prefer another type of fighting, more brutal and emotional: dog fighting.

These two opposite lives co-mingled, and not in different social strata as one might be led to believe, but also in more evolved and unsuspected social circles. In order to accomplish their barbaric purpose, they used mastiff-type dogs in repeated crosses until they developed a type suitable for fighting. This dog came to be considered indigenous and was called *viejo perro de pelea Cordobes*

(the Old Fighting Dog of Cordoba), precisely because it was already identified with that area.

These dogs were of a good size, and almost completely white; at times with beige or black spots. Courageous, bold, almost to the point of ferocity, they were untiring and resistant to pain. Wounds did not seem to bother them, allowing them to be victorious in any type of fight.

Antonio Nores Martinez, in a brilliant inspiration along with his brother Agustin, conceived of transforming that old fighting dog into one that was more noble and useful - namely, a *caza mayor*, or catch hound, capable of hunting boar, puma, jaguar, fox and other scourges that invaded the Argentine fields, resulting in huge losses to farmers of the period.

To advance their design, they crossed this *perro de pelea* with breeds that were already fixed in type and were internationally recognized in the dog world, such as the Boxer, Pointer, Pyrenean Mountain Dog, Dogue de Bordeaux, Bulldog, Bull Terrier, Irish Wolfhound and Great Dane, all to try

to give agility, strength, size, a good nose, resiliency and intelligence to a unique canine race. It was truly a dense and difficult cocktail, when one stops to think of the fact they were bringing together Molosser-type dogs with other morphological types. However, one should not forget that even if these were established breeds, they were less evolved and extreme than our modern dogs, in the sense that the breeds were distinct but not as typey as the dogs of today.

I think it is very important to understand the fundamental characteristics of this new breed referred to in Nores Martines' famous speech presenting the *dogo* he held to the Buenos Aires hunting club in 1947.

The first quality the dog had to have was silence on the hunt, so as to not be heard by its prey.

Second, the dog had to be a good scenter who could follow the trail of the prey without putting his nose to the ground, but capable of air-scenting in the manner of a Pointer.

The third quality was agility, resulting in a dog who was very explosive and agile in his

movement, without becoming too heavy a molossoïd type.

The fourth quality had to be medium size, in the sense of not being a giant, nor a dog that was too small or too light.

Finally, the dog had to be a good guardian – one who defends the things and people he loves.

These few concepts expressed by the creator of the breed set forth its basic characteristics.

Clearly, this type of brutal hunting is not practiced today in many countries because of cultural differences with the breed's motherland. Fortunately we live in a society where the dog is no longer seen as a means to an end who can be sacrificed, but rather an end himself. This type of hunting is very risky for our friend the Dogo, and is not to be practiced or encouraged with him. But that does not take away from the fact that to understand the essence of the breed, one must understand and know the reason for the Dogo's existence in the worldwide panorama of dogs.

We have seen its original purpose and the characteristics desired by the father of the Dogo Argentino, but what makes it in fact a *Dogo*?

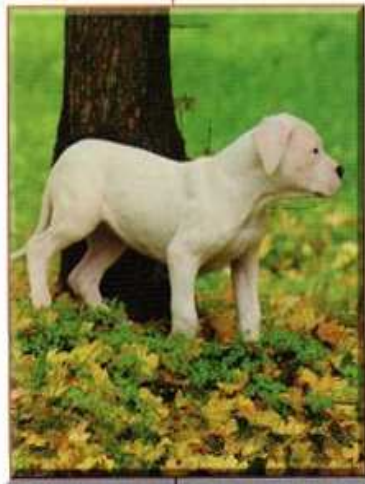
This is a molossoïd dog of a lighter type, made of a rectangular shape, with length of body longer than the height at the withers. The head is of a lighter brachiocephalic type, having a cephalic index greater than 50. The upper profiles of the head have a sinuous appearance in the sense that a slight concavity of the foreface corresponds to a slight convexity of the skull. The muzzle is lighter, shorter than the skull and must be strong and well developed, with lateral planes as parallel as possible, but a lip that is not so heavy or abundant as to impede the dog from breathing with ease.

The cranio-facial axes are almost parallel in the sense that there is a slight tendency for a mild convergence created from the upper margin of the nose pointing slightly higher than the upper line of the muzzle. The expression must be of distinct hardness,

but lively and intelligent. The eye shape tends toward the triangular, and must be in a semilateral position, of a good dark color with lids that cover them well, to protect the eyeball.

The stop is average, marked at the point where the slight concavity of the muzzle switches to the convexity of the skull.

Good muscle fills the temporal and jaw muscles, which must be well developed. These features make the head typical and very functional.



Another key feature of type besides a good head and expression is proportion and substance. The dog must be rectangular but not too long, with good transverse diameters and *not* with a front that is straight and deficient. The chest is well descended, arriving

at least to the level of the elbow, which gives correct lung room to allow good breathing capacity and endurance.

For a dog of good substance, we must have a correct, well-proportioned skeleton with well-developed muscles and no fat. A Dogo that lacks substance will never have perfect type.

Regarding movement, the Dogo is predisposed to an extended trot, with long stretches of powerful galloping. He has an almost feline gait, in the sense of walking in a light way, silent and almost sullen. But when his interest is awakened, there is a sudden change of attitude and he becomes agile and explosive, capable of sudden changes of direction.

One issue that is much discussed is that of the coat, which was intended by the creator of the breed to be a snowy white that made it visible and discernible in the Argentinian mountains. The pigmentation is black, and a well-pigmented front of the muzzle as well as well-pigmented black eye rims is very much sought after.

The mark around the eye cannot be more than 10 percent of the head. Clearly, this is a subjective measure, because it is not possible for anyone to measure the surface of the head to make this calculation. Let's say instead

that it should not be too broad in size so as to be aesthetically displeasing or disfiguring. It must be of a dark color, preferably black.

During winter, the Dogo develops an undercoat that can at times have some gray hairs. It would be better if the white stayed clear in all the seasons, and also if the undercoat was white.

One thing of great importance is not to confuse the white of the Dogo with albinism, which fortunately is very rare in dogs. Created by a mutation in the part of the genome called the C locus, it causes the inhibition or total cessation of pigment in the skin, coat and mucous membranes.

One subject of discussion among Dogo fanciers and experts in recent years is size. The problem stems from the fact that the first standard approved by the FCI gave a height minimum of 60 centimeters (23.5 inches) and a maximum of 65 centimeters (25.5 inches) without taking into account the differences between the sexes. In reality these heights were substantially exceeded by males who were winning in half the world's rings coming to 70 centimeters (27.5 inches) at the withers creating much confusion in those who followed the breed.

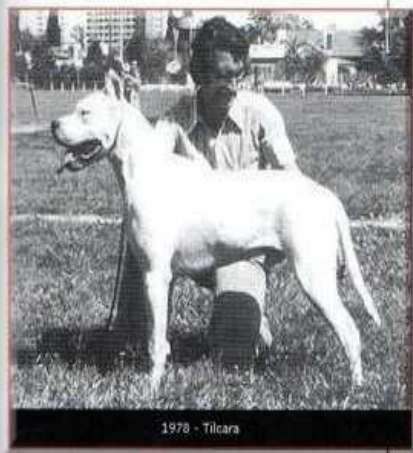
Let's take a look backward: In 1946, the founder of the breed, Dr. Antonio Nores Martines, published a definitive standard of his new creature in the May issue of *Diana* magazine. It did not make any mention of the size of the Dogo. It is possible to verify this specific detail in the book by the recently deceased Ruben Passet, which includes a photographically reproduced copy, certified by an Argentine notary, of this first standard. The only reference Dr. Antonio made regarding size is found in his comments preceding this standard, in which the cynologist says: "I tried to have the Dogo Argentino be a mesomorph, or normal type, and a macrotalico, preferring those of greater size – that is, a dog weighing between those."

Later, because of a kidnapping ending in tragedy, Dr. Antonio died. We know that the reins of the breed were taken by his brother Agustin, to whom we owe the Dogo Argentino as we now know it.

Agustin Nores Martines took charge of drafting the final standard, which is what has been in force until a few years ago. This standard includes for the first time the reference to height at the withers: 60 to 65 centimeters.

In the book by the same Agustin Nores Martines, "Historia del Dogo Argentino," published after the approval of the FCI standard, the author regretfully and almost apologetically states: "This height of 60 to 65 centimeters was simply a guideline, but I never thought it would be interpreted as a gag or cliché by judges. I never thought it would have been interpreted so rigidly to the point that I have seen beautiful specimens disqualified for exceeding 65 by a few centimeters because of that statement and guide for the judge that I put in the standard approved by the FCA [Federacion Cinologica Argentina]."

"For this reason it is a matter of urgency that those institutions that really care about the Dogo Argentino, for the purposes that we with my brother Antonio proposed more than 50 years ago, modify the standard, raising the height at the withers to at least 70 centimeters. As an indication that it can establish itself as a good criterion, all I need is to point to Tilcara, a World Champion who is around 68 [26 ¾ inches] and his son Blanco Alumina, awarded many times in recent times and who was Best in Show at the WDS '78 in Canada, who exceeded 68 centimeters."



The only certain indicator in Antonio's first standard on the subject of size was the word "macrotalico," which clearly means of great size. In the same work, Antonio defines it as "those who have a large size."

Without citing the comparative tables of reference heights of other dog breeds considered to be large, which Don Passet has done exhaustively in his "Nuestro Perro Dogo Argentino," it is clear and obvious that a male Dogo Argentino who is correctly "macrotalico" should be taller than the height of 60 to 65 centimeters at the withers covered by the old standard.

A short albeit precise series of measurements of Argentine examples of the breed can be found in the book "Todo Acerca del Dogo Argentino" by V. Valino, and even here we find heights well above those of the old standard.

Regarding Dr. Valino, for the sake of completeness of information it must be said that he, too, in the same work mentioned above, gave clear indications of reference for the height of the Dogo, namely: 60 to 63 centimeters for females and 63 to 70 centimeters for males.

In 1993, a first draft of the Dogo Argentino standard prepared by Dr. Moreno gave 60 to 65 centimeters for females and 63 to 67 centimeters for males.

But even these claims soon became a dead issue when, after fierce battles between the Dogo Argentino club of Buenos Aires and the FCA, at last on February 19, 1997, a second draft of the Dogo Argentino standard was presented to the FCI. This new wording on height gave the following measures: 60 to 65 centimeters and 63 to 67.5 centimeters for females and males, respectively.

From the above, we can draw some interesting conclusions:

- 1) All the authors cited were in agreement in placing a minimum limit of not less than 60 cm for females and 63 cm for males.
- 2) All the authors indicated the need to differentiate on size based on sexual dimorphism.
- 3) All the authors emphasize the need to raise the upper limit of the size of males from a minimum of two to a maximum of five centimeters compared to the old standard.

The new standard has definitely made a point by stating that the height at the withers for females should be between 60 and 65 centimeters, while for males it is between 62 and 68 centimeters. These statements are very clear, and room for different interpretations is very limited. We repeat, however, that it is more important that the dog maintains the right balance, proportion and substance that are the primary and essential conditions of type, rather than fixating on greater or fewer centimeters.

Sexual dimorphism in the Dogo is naturally not expressed solely in a difference between height at the withers between males and

females. In males then you will have a larger frame, more substance, a slightly larger head, thicker skin and a prevalence of the forehead over the rear.

On the other hand, in a correct female Dogo we have lighter bone, softer coat, a smaller head, smaller size, and prevalence of the rearquarters over the frontquarters. The pelvis will therefore be slightly wider in proportion to the front.



The standard does not discuss weight. The correct weight of a dog of average height and condition would be 750 grams per centimeter of height measured at the withers for males (about 4.2 pounds per inch), and 660 grams per centimeter for females (about 3.4 pounds per inch).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A breeder of the Dogo Argentino since 1993, Massimo Inzoli of Caltanissetta in Sicily, Italy, is an FCI judge who judges all the breeds of FCI Group 4 and most breeds in Group 2. He is the "trainee expert judge" for new Dogo Argentino judges in Italy.