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.

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.
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 breath 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.

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 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
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 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.