What Does it Mean to Have an Official NAEBA Score or Weight?

By Travis Lowe, NAEBA Executive Director

A question is often asked, what does it mean to have an official NAEBA score? What makes a NAEBA score different than any score from another organization? The North American Elk Breeders Association is pleased to explain the credibility the membership gains by receiving official scores at the International Antler Competition.

NAEBA holds an annual International Antler Competition for its members to bring hard antler and velvet antler sets and receive official scores or weights. Antler entries will be divided between over two dozen entries based on age, antler style and type. On the final day of the antler competition, the scores are compiled and ranked by value. Though the art of competition is exciting for participants and members, the official scores received mean more to the membership because of what it represents.

NAEBA’s antler scoring system is built from the Safari Club International (SCI) system with a few exceptions. Many different associations and organizations have scoring systems that can be used for elk antler. The NAEBA hard antler score and velvet weight system is unique because it provides levels of assurance that no other organization can offer. NAEBA members, regardless of whether or not they attend the competition, are able to see official scores with credibility to the scores and weights without fear of bias or mishandling.

First, all bulls entered in the competition must be NAEBA Gold or Silver level registered. Therefore, the bulls must be proven to be pure elk. NAEBA is the only breed registry organization for elk and no other scoring system can verify purity. Second, each entry must have DNA results on file with NAEBA in order to link any sire or dam to the participating bull. This ensures no scores or weights for a bull are published and linked to a sire or dam without DNA proof prior to the competition.

The entry sets are checked in and the judges never see the owners of the participating bulls. NAEBA has a team of judges therefore it eliminates, or greatly reduces, the chance a judge will recognize any particular set they are scoring. NAEBA does not offer a situation where friends are knowingly scoring antler of other friends or colleagues.

In order to participate, a picture of the bull must accompany the entry form. This picture must show that particular set of antler on the head of the bull with a visible ear tag. If there is no picture, there is no entry. No exceptions.

The rules and regulations for the International Antler Competition must be adhered to in order to participate. The rules are printed on NAEBA’s website in multiple places and are available by calling the office.
To the members reading NAEBA’s competition results or membership advertising published in journals and newsletters, any official score noted automatically comes with the assurance and credibility mandated in the NAEBA competition rules. Members will know those scores were measured by an unbiased third party and a picture verified the match of the antler with the bull. No sire or dam will be promoted by the bull unless it is proven with DNA. This is important. Full time elk ranchers will be the first to admit they mistakenly assume a calf is out of a specific sire or dam. After DNA testing, they learn the cow may have switched calves or some other error took place. This is even more difficult for part-time ranchers. Mistakenly listing or assuming inaccurate sires or dams for participating bulls can unfortunately sway the overall picture on the alleged sire’s reputation to pass on strong sons. Moreover, it fails to give credit to the rightful sire. DNA is the key and a staple of the NAEBA system. NAEBA is the only elk organization on the continent to have a full breed DNA registry.

Any score or weight listed for a bull that did not compete at the NAEBA competition is labeled as “unofficial.” This label is not stating that the outside system or organization does not know how to score bulls or the owner of the bull is untruthful. It simply means it does not have the level of assurance that the scores and weights do when the bull is entered in the NAEBA competition. NAEBA cannot be accountable to dozens of different associations’ scoring systems, whether it be an active association or SCI score. These other systems have no DNA registry to prove pedigree and they may not have a third party judge or a picture to verify the antler set truly belongs to the bull.

There is value in having this credible score when advertising. Elk markets are growing strong and proven breeding stock will become more valuable in comparison to animals with no or unverified data. In addition to citing scores for breeding bulls, the scores help prove the cows in your herd. Dams that are DNA matched to bulls can have an official score attached to them to prove their capabilities. Undoubtedly, there are cows that can produce 500” sons and cows that cannot produce a bull larger than 330”. Official scores and documentation will increase the value on breeding stock.

There is value in achieving official scores and weights whether members want to compete in the antler competition or not. Obtaining an official score and weight is important for the bull and its owner beyond where he places in the antler competition. Most breeders select breeding sires based on their score by a certain age rather than their ranking at the competition. Official scores help prove the bull’s worth.

Just like the NAEBA elk registration system, official scores are available for members that choose to take advantage of it. Antlers can be entered for an official score for just $25USD.