

## The Name Game

**From the sentimental to the just plain wacky, the reasons people pick dog names are as diverse as the names themselves.**

*Jeff Pearlman*

When Brian Johnson was playing catcher for the San Francisco Giants back in the 1990s, he assumed the hardest thing in life was calling pitches from behind the plate. Should his pitcher throw a curveball? A slider? A changeup?

Then he and his wife purchased three Bernese Mountain Dogs, each weighing between 105 and 110 pounds. Not only were they faced with the challenge of raising such large dogs, but also the task of naming them.

“They’re brothers and they’re pretty excitable, so we wanted to give them names that related to their personalities,” says Johnson, who now runs a business in Michigan. “So we thought and thought and thought about it, until we came up with what we thought were perfect names.”

The oldest, Johnson and his wife named Ruckus. “The second we call Ado,” he says. “Like, ‘Much Ado About Nothing.’ And the third is Ballou — for Hulla-Ballou.”

Although most Americans may not go to such creative extremes, naming a dog affords a unique opportunity to do, well, anything. Leah Guggenheimer of New York named her Dachshund Marlo after her favorite entertainer, Marlo Thomas.

“I hope Marlo Thomas doesn’t poop all over the house as much as my Marlo does,” Guggenheimer says.

John Stahl of Georgia named his Poodle Aguirre after the Werner Herzog film. And Jennifer Smith of Texas has two dogs — No Name and Dog.

That’s right — a dog named Dog.

Cindy Wolff, pets editor of the Memphis Commercial Appeal, annointed her American Pit Bull Terrier Brad Pitt and her Collie mix Tipper Gore. “I wanted her to have a strong woman’s name,” Wolff says, “and Hillary sounded so stuffy.”

According to Melanie Miller, owner of Agile Minds Training School, a great name might not result in a great dog, but it does impact psyche. “In agility, especially with Border Collies, you want a name that evokes speed and a lack of control,” Miller says. “Something like Pyro or Blast shows people that this dog is a serious competitor.”

Miller pauses, “Even if it is sort of silly.”

Jeff Pearlman is a former Sports Illustrated senior writer and a contributing columnist to ESPN.com. He is the author of two books, including the recently released, “Love Me, Hate Me: Barry Bonds and the Making of an Antihero.”