

## Pierre Wahlström: I Love to Win and Hate to Lose

Pierre Wahlström was born in 1970 and lives together with his wife Maria and three kids in Sweden near Malmö. He met his wife at a seminar, she had show GSD and had lot of succes with them – the best result was V6 in working dog class male at the BSZS. Pierre has been working in the Swedish Armed Forces since 1991. He has captain rank and since 1993 he has been working with service dogs as a military handler and a dog trainer. Nowadays he is a chief for the mental evaluation and testing dogs for service work. He has tested around 6,000 dogs, mostly GSDs, Malinois, Labradors and Spaniels. He also was one of the authors helping with the IPO rules for 2012 and he has judged seven World Championships and plenty of Nationals around the world.



(<http://www.profidog.cz/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/champions-nr-5-and-nr-1.jpg>)

**Pierre, I would like to introduce you to the dog sport fans who do not know you yet or do not know much about you. How long have you been involved in dog sport and in what areas particularly? Can you mention some dogs that you have worked with?**

I started to train IPO in a small club in Southern Sweden in 1994. When I was learning for IPO, I took help mainly from Denmark, Germany and Belgium. I got the basics of IPO training from a very good and nice person Ole Moselund from Denmark. I got the "Touch and Fitness" basics from Belgium thanks to the famous Roger Snollaerts. Connection of those different training methods together with my knowledge from the service dog training is the way I am working with dogs today. I am still an active helper and I am also active in our team "Knickarp K9ers" where we work with four different breeds: GSD, Malinois, Giant Schnauzer and Dobermann. We have two handlers who were the World Champions (it is me with GSD & Rottweiler with Fredrik Bjurklint), and four other handlers who placed in top 10 in the FCI WCH. The dogs I have worked with were: Pablo (Swedish program), Dino (military service dog), Imze (four times in WCH, placed the 18<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>), Rosso (three times in WCH, placed the 16<sup>th</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup>), Figo (IPO3 qualification for the FCI WCH), Qie (IPO3 qualification for the FCI and part WCH), and then I trained around 30 dogs for title and

ground training...

**What were your beginnings with dogs like? At what age do you recommend to start training with dogs? Have you always had German Shepherds?**

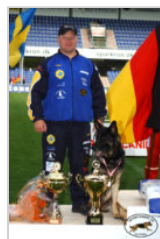
I got my first dog, an Australian Silky Terrier when I was 11 years old. Since then I have worked with almost twenty different breeds, both in IPO and other local programs and service... I tell people to start stimulation as early as possible. I start the real training when the dogs are around 12-18 months depending on the dog's maturity and character... No, I also have owned Malinois, Dobermann, Rottweiler and Border Collie. I'm not so focused on the breed. If I work with a good dog, it doesn't matter if it's a Malli, GSD or some different breed. It is true that people mostly connect me with GSD because I am a breeder of that breed and work with them on higher levels of trials...

**If you remember that, could you tell us how did you use to train dogs when you started? What methods and systems did you use then and how different are training techniques to the present ones? Particularly, when you are working with a young animal? I am asking you deliberately, because I think that dog training and attitude towards training dogs changed a lot in the Czech Republic. How was it in Sweden?**

We don't have that big changes that I believe the Eastern Europe had. Sweden and Nordic countries are in my opinion pretty fair towards animals in general. Of course, there were some strange ideas from some people. When we started to train IPO in Sweden during the end of the 80's, we went from the Nordic program. We had a time in Sweden at the beginning when some "stars" 😊 tried to educate Sweden regarding the electric models in training, but that method has never succeeded here much. The problems in Sweden actually started recently, about 5 years ago. Don't forget that Sweden was the World Champion in Teams already in 2000 in Wavre (WUSV), and we were the 2<sup>nd</sup> in Ravenna. That means that Sweden had a very nice training culture not only in individuals but in general from south to north. THESE DAYS, Sweden has turned to be a poor country with really "low" results. What is the reason for this? My opinion is that judges are too "positive" and don't give the handlers the optimal feedback they should have, the judges are awarding high points... For what reason? I think that many people know why!!! The other reason is that the training groups around Sweden are changing their styles and methods now so much that it creates almost a "circus" in the head of both dogs and handlers...



(<https://www.profidog.cz/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Pierre1.jpg>)



(<https://www.profidog.cz/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Pierre2-1140x1738.jpg>)



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**I dare to say that Nordic countries excel in obedience, which is then of course reflected into the other phases. Why is it that you Northern folks have such a nice obedience?**

The main reason is how we "look" at a dog. How the dogs live and how we treat them... I mean it was not so long ago when the "anhänger" was introduced to Sweden. You could never see a dog in an "anhänger" before that. All dogs used to travel inside the car. I can also see a difference that many dogs sleep over night in those anhängers and not together with the handler in a hotel room. This is for me a typical good way to see what relationship do the handlers have with their dogs. I think the Northern countries have in general better relationship with dogs and are treating them in a better way. About the specific obedience, the Nordic countries have a nice tradition of teaching and being patient during the training. And I actually never saw a punishment based training before the IPO or SchH rules were introduced to my country, but which could be seen in the beginning...

**Pierre, I am asking you a bit complicated questions, let's get back to questions about you :-). How was your journey through dog sport? How long did it take before the first trial, competition, invitation to do helper work and invitation to judge came?**

I'm crazy about competitions, I really love to win and hate to lose. Sometimes I am actually too competitive! But it is getting better now. 😊 I have done my IPO1 soon, maybe it was too fast. And with other dogs too. I mean, my Imze was only 2 years old when we finished the second in the Nordic Championship in Denmark. And my helper career? It started almost immediately, I was a helper already in 1995 and three years later I became a judge.

**Which part of the dog sport do you like most? What do you actually find charming about the individual parts of dog sport? Do you enjoy work as a judge? What do you enjoy on dog training and how are you coping with competitions?**

I really like tracking. It is the optimum way of balancing between the drive, analysis and knowledge for me. It's also a phase which the handler can destroy the fastest and then to have problems to solve. I mean most of the handlers can train a dog some obedience, bite on a sleeve and attack! But not so many of the handlers can teach or have dogs who are able to track in 40 degrees temperature, on a hard ground when the wind is stormy... The charm of the IPO is that you need a complete dog and a clever trainer/handler to get high results. You need a calm dog in A phase and a fast dog in B phase. And at the end you need both in phase C... That is what brings the breeding to the top. Unfortunately, many breeders aim their breeding only at speed and power of the dog. 😊 Regarding judging, I actually don't like to judge very much, but I feel that I should do it. This is because I have heard many opinions about the judge's critiques many times and therefore it is very important for me to judge. Then people can criticise me if they want to... I definitely would prefer having fun with my friends, drink beer and have a party to waking up early in the morning and then standing on the field and judging till 8 in the evening... then have dinner and go to bed. What I think is really important is that active handlers that are at the same time also the judges, will judge and give critiques with feedback to the handlers. Nowadays, the training is more stimulating for me than the trials. I prefer training and coaching others to my own success. One reason is that I don't have the time to be the "extreme number one" right now, second one is that I am waiting for my motivation to work with a new dog and it is coming closer and closer...

(<http://www.profidog.cz/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Rosso-VM-jan-reder-086.jpg>)

**What dogs do you currently have in training and do you have any competitive ambitions with them?**

Right now I have a young male for myself. It's a dog I am training for fun and for keeping my feeling and attitude. Is he a dog to get on the podium? Yes, he is and we will see if we do it. 😊

**How did it happen, that you started competing? Did you have those ambitions from the beginning of your work with dogs or was that something that came naturally later?**

The main reason I started with IPO was that I trained dogs at work but it was classic practical work in which we competed as military dog handlers in trials in Sweden. IPO rules were different and I also could compete out of Sweden. Not to mention that there was the World Cup in my head!! This sounds bit silly now, but the first day I started with IPO training, I said to my friends: "I shall become the World Champion one day!" I did not say when, but a few years later after getting my Rosso, I wrote on my blog: "With this dog, I am gonna be the World Champion in 4 years!" And I wrote that only after one month of training him... Okey, it was a little stupid to write something like that on my blog, but at the same time that pressure helped me. I like pressure so for me it was clear... 😊



**You have achieved some great results in the field of dog sport. Which of them do you value the most and why?**

I think that the second WCH with Imze where we finished on the 5<sup>th</sup> place was a great time. When I became the World Champion, I felt like "Okey, what to do now?" 😊 But of course, I was very happy. However, it might look to somebody who doesn't know me that I have problems to celebrate my success. I think that when the work is done, it is done. It is probably not the optimum, but that is me! One more thing that may explain my behaviour is that I have not reached my goal yet. So when this happens, I am sure I will celebrate my winning more properly. I will keep my goal for myself, if you don't mind... 😊

**What is it like to become the World Champion? How do you remember today that moment when you were standing on the podium and the whole world was laying at your feet? 😊**

The world has to understand that at that moment my head was so empty that I could hardly make a move. In my opinion, I should have won in Denmark one year before that. My dog was in my opinion super good and our training was excellent. We did a nice job and were provisionally ranked on the 2<sup>nd</sup> place. What the judge did in tracking "killed" us – only 90 points?! (The second judge who was there gave us 98 points for the track!!!) After that I was so pissed off and so angry that this judge was so close to stop my career in IPO. I told my wife that this is it, that's the end for me... Maria, my wife tried to push me but I didn't touch Rosso in training for 4.5 months... He was only my pet dog and in my head I was done with him and with IPO in general. But then a day came when my worst enemy in Sweden said that my dog was a bad dog and he was finished... That was in March 2007! Maria my wife pushed me again and I said to my friends and family that I decided to go and win in Bratislava/Slovakia! And we did it with 11 points ahead to everyone! So in fact I am thankful to my "enemy" and of course to Maria who pushed me and was not always was "kind" to me when I wanted to stop 😊 (it is the first time I explain this story...)

**Are you nervous as a person and a competitor, or are you enjoying competitions and looking forward to them?**

I am of course nervous but in a positive way, I never block or get shaky... You understand I have competed since I was 6 years old! I did wrestling in 15 years and in that sport you need to take about your signals and nerves... Otherwise it can go really bad. So I transform my nerves to something nice, and I also work with other handlers to do the same thing. It's a special program not so easy to explain here but it's really effective!



(<http://www.profidog.cz/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Rosso-VM-jan-reder-062.jpg>) (<http://www.profidog.cz/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Rosso-VM-jan-reder-096.jpg>)



**Pierre, you are also a military and officer dog handler apart from being a dog sport handler. How does the work with the dog for police differ to work for sport?**

I explained that above a little... But in general the tracking is little different and the obedience is like at zero level. The protection is similar, if you work with natural instincts and drives like I do.

**Have you ever assisted in a natural disaster as a military dog handler? Did you help during floods, fire etc.?**

Yes I have, but most of our work is classified and I am not allowed to write about it. But I can give you an example of such work. We were searching for an old lady that got lost in the woods. It was cold, minus 30 degrees so we didn't have much time to find her. After six hours the pluton gave up because the chance to find her was very low in the dark, cold and wet. So we started to move back home... We were using 4x4 motorcycles and after two minutes driving one of service dogs jumped out of the quad himself and ran 50 m down to a small lake and started to bark. The missing person was really there, 85 years old lady! If we didn't find her, she could have passed away in twenty minutes...

**How many dogs do you currently have at home? 😊 You are the owner of kennel "Imzedrifts". When was this kennel founded and by whom? What are your breeding plans for the future?**

I have one dog at home now. We have recently sold our big farm and moved into my hometown Lund. But I have other dogs in my kennel in a place that is different from where we are living now. Imzedrifts is a small kennel, I have around one or two litters a year. I started with dog breeding 15 years ago and since then I have had around 11 dogs in the World Cup from four different countries. The name IMZEDRIFTS comes from my dog IMZE and then drives = drifts. 😊 My plans for the future is to continue in breeding and have one litter a year and if my females would be ready, there may be more litters.

**Are you managing to fulfill your breeding plans?**

Yes, I am so happy how the handlers work with dogs from my kennel. Right now I have really nice females who I can continue with, two of them were at the FCI and WUSV WCH this year!

**How many litters did you breed so far? Do you help around with for example whelping and with puppy care in your kennel?**

I'm not sure how many, maybe around 30 litters. We do everything ourselves, but sometimes people can help us.

**You are a judge and also a dad besides being a dog handler. How do you manage dog sport, kids etc...?** 😊

Best question so far... 😊 That is one of the reasons why I take it little easy now with my own plans. My kids are number 1 and the most important to me. I love to join them when they are doing their things. I DON'T want them to be "dog-club-kids", kids that must follow their parents all the time to different dog clubs! Sorry, but I want them to make their own choice when they are old enough...

**Could you imagine your life without dogs? What are your other passions, interests and hobbies? How do you like to relax for example?** 😊

I am never gonna stop with dogs. They are my life, my soul and what I am living for. Training dogs is also the only thing I can do, because I work with dogs since the beginning 90's. Therefore the dogs will always stay with me in my life. I am crazy about football (soccer) and it can make me relax, together with nice food and some good red wine... and with my family!

(<http://www.profidog.cz/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Pierre3.jpg>)

**Pierre, what are your future plans? I mean in dog sport:-).**

I have a plan and I will not tell you about it. When I start with this plan, people will get to know about it... 😊

**...dog sport aside now, Christmas is approaching fast. How do you celebrate Christmas in your family if I may ask?** 😊

Of course you can ask. We go abroad. The whole family leaves Sweden and we celebrate in a nice warm sunny weather. 😊

**What are your plans and wish for the future apart from dog sport?**

At this moment, I got a bad message from my doctor. I actually shall have a surgery done very soon, all is ok, nothing dangerous but it must be done... At the same time the doctors found out that my back was little "smashed", probably because of working as a helper. Maybe we need to fix that too... So I wish that I and my family and friends will stay happy and healthy!!!

**What makes you laugh and happy?**

My kids and wife are making me laugh all day long and also positive people who are self-confident and love themselves, no masks and no drama! 😊

**I wish you as much of joy and laughter in the future. Thank you for the interview.**

Thank you so much Draha! 😊

*Interview: Draha Mašková*

*Photo: Jan Redder and author's archive*



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