



Drs. Antonio (right) and Agustín Martínez hunting. (Collection of Dr. Ulises d'Andrea Nores)

COURTESY RIA HÖRTER

PART 8:

Drs. Antonio and Agustín Nores Martínez and the Dogo Argentino

Most dog breeds were developed after hundreds of years of evolution and lengthy selection by breeders. However, some breeds owe their existence to just one or two people.

“To propose an idea, you can tolerate the fact that you become wrapped up in it because passion is the motor, it is the propulsive force of ideas; ideas born without passion are born dead.”
– Dr. Antonio Nores Martínez

COUNTRY OF GAUCHOS

In 1516, Spanish influence arrived in the part of South America we know today as Argentina. Colonists founded several settlements, but were troubled by local tribes. In the 17th and 18th centuries, Spain paid little attention to Argentina – the soil was unsuitable for large-scale agriculture and the natives refused to work for the Spaniards. Development of this part of South America was slow; however, by 1714 the flame of independence was burning, and after the French Revolution (1789-99), resistance against the Spanish tyranny grew.

The 19th century was the time of the gauchos (cattle drovers) who opposed the Unionists, and a large contrast between urban and rural areas. The battle between city and country continued for decades; presidents came and went, and American influence became more and more important in Argentina.

During the First World War, Argentina was neutral, but in 1918, the country faced an economic crisis. One president followed another – most of them dictators – and army generals ruled the country. In this place and environment, the Nores Martínez brothers – Antonio and Agustín – were born, in 1907 and 1908 respectively. Their father, Antonio Nores Sr., was a physician and the family belonged to the propertied class.

Nores Sr. and his wife, Isabel Martínez Berroetaran Martinda, often discussed hunting and hunting dogs and the old fighting dog of Cordoba. They agreed that the Cordoba was not suitable



(Left) A Vieja Perro de Pelea Cordobés – old fighting dog from Cordoba – pictured in 1905. This breed was also known as the Cordoba Dog. The same photo, dated 1901, was published as an Alano. (Right) Alano or Spanish Dog, circa 1900.

for hunting big game, because they fought each other instead of the prey. Their father’s opinion influenced the future plans of Antonio Jr. and Agustín.

EL DOGO ARGENTINO

In 1925, the teenaged Antonio took the first step in developing a dog that was useful for big-game hunting but also suitable as a family dog. Family and friends supported the brothers and their father appointed a kennel boy to take care of the dogs. The brothers used their pocket money to buy food for the dogs.

Antonio made the plans and worked them out; Agustín was his loyal supporter, promoting the new breed and doing his best for national and international recognition.

In the book *The real history of El Dogo Argentino* is a letter written by Agustín, after the death of his brother Antonio: “I can still remember as if it had happened yesterday, the day when my brother Antonio told me for the first time his idea and his intention of using the dog known as *Viejo Perro de Pelea Cordobés* [old fighting dog from Cordoba] as a basis for it. This dog was a descendant of Spanish Mastiffs, brought to America by the colonists, crossbred with Bull Terriers and other fighting breeds for the sole purpose of dog fighting. The idea was to use the extraordinary courage and fighting spirit of these dogs as basis, adding other breeds that

could give them height, sense of smell, speed, hunting instinct and, above all, take away that ‘fighting eagerness against other dogs’ instinct that made them useless for pack hunting. We wanted them to be friendly and capable of living freely within families and on estates, keeping the great courage of the primitive breed, but applied to a useful cause: big-game hunting and as a means of controlling predatory species.”



The Vieja Perro de Pelea Cordobés, an ancestor of the Dogo Argentino.

MONTERIA CRIOLLA

To understand why Antonio decided to create a new breed, we have to go back to Argentina’s countryside at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries. In 1908, a local organization imported wild boars (probably black Russian/European boars) for hunting. Their number – living safely behind fences – was controlled. However, when the landowners got into financial difficulties, they neglected fence maintenance. The wild boars spread over large areas and mated with domestic boars all over the country. Boars became a plague, destroying crops and orchards. As a result, the *Monteria Criolla* – hunting according to the traditions of the country – became popular again.

Huntsman and Dogo owner Dr. Carlo Mari describes the *Monteria Criolla* as: “catching and killing big game, the enemy of agriculture and livestock in their natural

environment. Only the acuteness of the hunter, trained animals and a knife are used.”

In fact, the *Monteria Criolla* was an inheritance of the Middle Ages, when noblemen on horseback, accompanied by a pack of dogs and armed with knives and spears, hunted wild boars. The dogs attacked and the hunters killed the prey.

A TWOFOLD GOAL

Carlos Mari also wrote about the dogs used for hunting; the hunting fields in Argentina were so large and diverse that different breeds were needed for different jobs – scenting dogs, sighthounds, tracking dogs, etc. Hunters were not satisfied with the available breeds, which were too aggressive and lacked hunting passion, or were not strong enough to compete against wild animals.

From an early age, Antonio was a passionate big-game hunter and great dog fancier. As others had, he came to the conclusion

extinct Alano (a molosser type of dog, rather high on legs).

In the 19th century, immigrants had brought their Bulldogs, Bull Terriers and Boxers into Argentina, and it is assumed that intentional crossings of these breeds developed the Perro de Pelea Cordobés. The Cordobés was a typical molosser type and was regarded in Argentina as a purebred dog.

Antonio and Agustín’s mission was to keep the best part of this dog. They strove to breed a “cheerful, frank, humble and friendly dog. Not a hard barker, always conscious of its power.”

EXPERIMENTAL BREEDING PROGRAM

The brothers began their breeding program in 1926 with about 10 Cordobés bitches. They had fixed plans and knew exactly what they wanted: Antonio strove for a silent hunting dog, with a “sharp sense of smell... enduring long trips in any weather conditions and then fighting fiercely with the pursued prey.” And he



Boxers (left), Bull Terrier (centre) and Bulldogs (right) by Richard Strebel, ca. 1904

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that the country lacked a suitable dog for hunting big game such as the puma, jaguar and large wild boar.

There was, however, a second reason for creating the Dogo Argentino. Betting at dog fights had been very popular and the revenues were huge. Owners spoke with pride of their “champion fighting dogs,” and dog fighting was a form of public entertainment. The banning of dog fighting at the beginning of the 20th century meant the end of the most popular fighting dog, the Perro de Pelea Cordobés.

One of Antonio’s principles was that the old fighting dog from the Argentine city of Cordoba must not become extinct. As a young man, he had watched these dogs in the fighting pits and admired their strength. Antonio needed this breed in his plans because of its stamina and fearlessness, but he could do without its useless aggression. Antonio’s goal was to save a breed from extinction while creating a new, national working breed.

Another reason he took the Cordobés was that they were descendants of the 16th-century Fila and Presa breeds, brought to Argentina by Spanish settlers and themselves descended from the Perro de Presa Mallorquin, the Mastin Espanol and the now-

wanted it to be “a loyal and insurmountable protector of those it loves” (FCI standard). The colour of the new breed had to be white, so the hunter could distinguish the dog from the game.

It was not an easy task, particularly because the brothers began with a breed that was brave, but full of aggression.

Antonio’s first step was to improve the sense of smell and he used Pointers, imported from France. The Great Dane (harlequin) improved the height, and the Bull Terrier contributed to the white coat colour. Unfortunately, the brothers faced some setbacks; several dogs proved to be deaf, the inheritance of the Bull Terrier. (Deafness is still present in the Dogo Argentino.)

Next, they used the Dogue de Bordeaux and English Bulldog to improve the strength of the jaws. The Boxer added intelligence and a good temperament. Some authors also mention the old Spanish Mastiff, but this breed was not used in creating the Dogo Argentino. The Spanish Mastiff is one of the ancestors of de Perro de Pelea Cordobés and therefore indirectly behind the Dogo Argentino.

Last but not least, the Irish Wolfhound and Pyrenean Mountain Dog contributed a calm demeanour; strength and speed;



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(Clockwise from top left) Pointers (Richard Strebler, ca. 1904); Great Danes (Richard Strebler in *Die Deutschen Hunde und ihre Abstammung*, 1905); Pyrenean Mountain Dog (Nina Scott-Langley in *Hutchinson's Dog Encyclopedia*, 1934-5); Irish Wolfhound (Hugh Dalziel in *British Dogs*, 1889)

build; and a white coat. However, the Pyrenean Mountain Dog also brought some problems: long coats and dewclaws.

It was not necessary to buy these breeds, because several of their owners cooperated and provided dogs for the brothers' breeding program.

A SEPARATE BREED

We must bear in mind that in the 1920s, the Pointer, Great Dane, Bulldog and other breeds that were used were quite different in appearance from the ones we see today. The Boxer looked like a "bullbaiting dog" and the Great Dane – once a hunting dog on big game – was shorter in back. Both breeds are mentioned as the most influential breeds in creating the Dogo Argentino.

It may seem odd that Antonio used so many different breeds, but his plan was clever and well considered. In fact, Antonio was crossing the ancestors of the Perro de Pelea Cordobés with the modern Cordobés. Almost every breed Antonio used was a molosser or mastiff-type dog.

After more than 20 years, the Dogo was considered a separate breed, not too closely related to the aggressive Cordobés. But, to

be honest, in appearance the Dogo Argentino still resembles the old fighting dog of Cordoba.

ARAUCANA AND GUARINI

From the beginning, to avoid inbreeding or too-close line-breeding, Antonio developed two different families, the Araucana and the Guarini, named after tribes in Chile and Paraguay.

At one time the brothers owned about 30 brood bitches, but obviously couldn't keep all the puppies. Most found homes elsewhere and quite a few went to hunters, to test the dogs' hunting ability. Many puppies went to family and friends.

Only the two brothers knew the details of the pedigrees, the owners' addresses, etc. They monitored the whole breed. Apart from deafness, long coats and dewclaws, there were several other setbacks. At one time, the Dogo Argentino was known as "a body without a head."

In 1928, soon after he had started breeding, Antonio wrote the first breed standard and made drawings of his ideal Dogo. Many years later, he compared his standard and the drawings with the results. In 1947, this description of the breed was published in the

magazine *Diana*; Agustín later extended the breed standard.

Also in 1947, the breed was officially presented in an unusual way. In the province of San Luis, Antonio organized a fight of his dog with a wild boar and a puma. The dog was the only survivor and a proud Antonio was photographed with the prey.

POLITICAL PRISONER

Antonio was a well-known and respected doctor, a peace-loving person. For many years he was a professor at Cordoba University. Unfortunately, he didn't see the realization of his dream – a nationally recognized breed. On December 2, 1956, Antonio was murdered while bird hunting. He was accompanied by a friend who was also killed, but had not taken his Dogo with him. The reasons behind this crime are still unknown, but it is assumed that a robbery got out of hand.

Meanwhile, the situation in Argentina was turbulent; Juan Perón had been in power, but after his exile in 1955, the situation did not improve. Agustín went to jail as a political prisoner and was not allowed to attend his brother's funeral, let alone take over the kennel and care for the dogs. Dogo Argentino owners disposed of their dogs so they wouldn't be associated with a political prisoner.

After his release from prison, Agustín had to start all over again. This is the period when many Dogos were bred under the affix del Chubut. We do not know exactly how Agustín managed to make a restart with the breed. However, we know that he did not repeat what Antonio did, and it's almost certain that he traced as many purebred Dogos as possible to start breeding again.

HERMANO DEL CREADOR

Agustín moved the kennel from Cordoba, in the centre of Argentina, to Esquel, a small city in Patagonia. After his career as a lawyer, he became ambassador to Canada. This position gave him the opportunity to travel around the world. He promoted the breed and donated dogs to fanciers. Huntsmen from all corners

of the earth were invited to hunt big game in Argentina, accompanied by Dogos. Agustín was also engaged in gaining national and international recognition for the breed.

The Dutch prince consort Bernhard, the husband of Queen Juliana, was one of the first in Europe to receive, as a gift, some Dogos. They did not arrive in the Netherlands, however, as they were transported to Africa, where the prince could use them for hunting big game.

In 1964, the breed was nationally recognized by the Argentine Kennel Club (Federación Cinológica Argentina) and by the Sociedad Rural Argentina, the organization that opened the stud book. The Dogo was recognized by the FCI in 1973 as "a smart, silent, courageous and brave hunter."

Agustín wrote several books about the breed and proudly called himself "*Hermano del Creador de la Raza*," the brother of the creator of the breed, deservedly crediting Antonio.

"I have personally witnessed the sacrifices of my brother, Antonio, to form a new breed, his anxieties, his sorrows, his debilitation, and his hopes until the culmination of his work. Thinking of him and seeing the fruit of his efforts, I have not wanted his dream made real, to disappear. Therefore, since his death twelve years ago, I have continued his work of selection. Upon his death the breed was perfectly defined, but obtaining official recognition, keeping a genealogical register, and trying to maintain the standards as they were fixed many years ago, has been my work of continuity."

Dr. Agustín Nores Martínez died in 1978. According to specialists in the breed, about 1,100 Dogos had been entered in the Argentine stud book by then.

ANTONIO'S LEGACY

Antonio's eldest children – Rodolfo, Abel, Marta and Beatriz – inherited a number of his dogs and took them to the estate La Cocha, south of the city of Cordoba. They started breeding, using dogs from the del Chubut and Totoral lines. At the same time,



Primeros dogos – the first Dogos in Antonio and Agustín's kennel. (Collection of Dr. Ulises d'Andrea Nores)

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they laid the foundation for several other kennels. In the 1980s and '90s, Antonio's children got help from other well-known breeders to refresh their bloodlines.

Today, Beatriz's daughter, Dr. Ulises d'Andrea Nores, is very much involved in the breed created by her grandfather. The kennel where we can admire the descendants of Antonio's dogs is called *El criadero de dogo argentino de la familia del Doctor Antonio Nores Martínez* – this family keeps the flag flying.

Anyone looking for a Dogo Argentino as a show dog will be disappointed; working the breed is a condition when acquiring a puppy. Two web sites that are worth visiting for further information are: www.dogoargentinonores.com and www.noresdogoargentino.com.ar.

Courage, bravery and nobility – *coraje, valentia y nobleza* – are the breed's hallmarks, and the aim of the breeders at La Cocha is “to breed a gladiator with zero percent aggression.” That completes the circle.

In November 2007, Antonio's 100th birthday was celebrated in Justo Daract, not far from San Luis. His descendants organized an international championship *Monteria Criolla* with Dogos Argentino. Sixteen thousand acres were available for the hunters and their dogs. It was a huge celebration!

A breeder/exhibitor/judge and retired bookseller and publisher, Ria Hörter is a contributing editor of De Hondenwereld, the national dog magazine of Holland.