

PHOTO

Miska with a puppy from one of his Deadliest Catch's litter



Miska Alexander Argillander

His Sighthound Journey

When I first wrote to Miska asking how his passion for sighthounds began, and what role they have played in his life and work, he admitted it was a loaded question that carried him back many years. The dream of a dog had been with him since childhood, though in his rural family home there were only cats. It was not until adulthood - after several years living abroad in Ireland and New Zealand - that he returned to Finland, almost twenty years ago, determined at last to bring that wish to life.

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The breed that had long captured his imagination was the Irish wolfhound, admired for its majesty and presence. His first dog, Brayden, was just such a hound. Together they tried their hand at lure coursing and track racing, though competition was never to be Brayden's path. Instead, he became Miska's trusted partner in elderly care, social services, and child protection - work that revealed his remarkable sensitivity and loyalty. “I could not have asked for a better colleague,” he reflected.

Through training sessions at his local club, Miska encountered other sighthound breeds whose speed and style fascinated him just as much as the wolfhound had. He had planned to bring home a Hungarian greyhound from Austria, but when that litter failed, fate intervened, and a greyhound soon joined the household. From then on, greyhounds became a constant presence in his life, and for more than fifteen years he has never been without one.

In time, the pack grew. A whippet arrived, drawing him into breeding under the prefix Deadliest Catch's. Alongside them came another Irish wolfhound, a saluki, and even a Czechoslovakian wolfdog - though the latter proved not to be the right match. Today, his home hums with the energy and grace of four greyhounds and five whippets. Breeding has still been small-scale, with only four litters, as Miska always keeps at least one puppy from each - a natural limit, but one that keeps the work deeply personal. One favourite image captures this intimacy: Miska cradling a tiny whippet puppy in his hands, the expression on his face reflecting the same care and pride that runs through his entire journey with sighthounds.

Sighthounds, he explained, have shaped his life in ways beyond measure. They are family members, companions, and, in Brayden's case, even colleagues. While daily life follows the ordinary rhythms of long walks, free runs, meals, and quiet evenings at home, it is also brightened by the excitement of training and competition, and by the friendships and journeys they have brought him.

“My dogs have given me far more than a pastime,” he wrote. “They have given me friendship, perspective, and a way of living. Through them I have learned to be present in the moment, gained lifelong friends across borders, travelled to unfamiliar places, and discovered not just a passion, but a whole way of life.”

That sense of connection was clear at the 2025 FCI World Lure Coursing Championship in Czechia, where Miska stood proudly with his team representing Finland: Valo, his brindle whippet; Merlyn, the fawn greyhound and former WCC winner from Sweden; Harald, the striking black greyhound; and Kino, the elegant white greyhound. Together, they embodied not only athletic excellence but also the friendships and shared spirit that coursing fosters across nations.

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From Owner to Judge

Reading Miska’s words, it was clear his bond with sighthounds had deepened far beyond simple ownership. Yet, as he explained, living alongside these dogs was only the beginning. In time, another calling appeared - one that would take him from the field as an owner to the field as a judge.

He recalled those early days with humility. “When I first started lure coursing, with Brayden and later with the other hounds, the judges seemed almost untouchable to me. They were distant, admired figures, and if one of them greeted me I would freeze on the spot, hardly able to believe they were speaking to me.”

But with each season, his experience deepened. He volunteered in various roles at competitions and found himself drawn ever closer to the judging table. “Over the years,” he wrote, “a flame grew stronger inside me. I knew I wanted to judge.”

PHOTO

Miska pictured with some of his pack





In Finland, the path to becoming a judge is demanding. Before even applying, candidates must complete several courses and gain practical experience as trial directors and officials. Their own club must then put them forward as a candidate, after which they undergo extensive training and pass assessments in everything from track design to officially starting the dogs in competitions. For Miska, this journey began in 2019. The pandemic delayed his progress, but he persevered, working with eighteen different judges, shadowing hundreds of starts, and studying every aspect of the role.

By the beginning of the 2023 season, he qualified as an international lure coursing judge. Since then his judging career has taken him across Europe, with the UK becoming the eighth country where he has had the honour to stand in the field.

“To me, it was a dream come true,” he wrote. “There is no sight more beautiful than a hound running with joy. From the very first training, I knew that my place was in the field, watching those performances.”

The Art of Judging

In his responses, Miska explained that achieving his dream of judging revealed the role to be far more than simply recording numbers on a sheet. For him, it is both an art and a responsibility: to see, to understand, and to balance every element of a run.

The FCI system, he wrote, emphasises speed, enthusiasm, agility, endurance, and follow - qualities that must each be assessed and measured fairly. “The course itself should give each of these traits a chance to shine.” A well-designed course balances straights and curves, sets turns that challenge yet remain safe, and makes full use of the terrain without endangering the hounds.

He described the thought that goes into designing such a course. Sharp turns immediately after long straights are unsafe for hounds and best avoided, while zigzags that allow no time to adjust should be used sparingly. Instead, the course should guide the dogs naturally through the lay of the ground and changes in direction, with speed moderated safely by bends or gentle inclines. Hazards or dangerous terrain have no place on a lure coursing field. “You must see it from the dog’s eye level,” Miska explained. “Every breed is different, and every run deserves fairness.”

Yet even with a well-set course, he noted, performances can look quite different depending on where you stand. A dog that seems to run side by side with its rival on the flat may in fact be metres apart. For this reason, judges may sometimes see things differently, and the strength of the system lies in taking multiple perspectives into account.

“To judge honestly, you must understand the breed fully - not just its appearance, but its history, instincts, and original purpose. Every sighthound embodies centuries of function in its form, and it is the judge’s task to recognise when that heritage reveals itself in performance on the field. Remaining open to learning and willing to reflect on one’s own decisions is what ensures fairness - and fuels growth.”



TOP

Autumn coursing, Hailuoto, Finland — October 2023.

MIDDLE

Judging at the International Coursing in Estonia, July 2023, with Geir Hammar.

BOTTOM

Judging at the International Snow Coursing in Galtür, Austria — January 2024.



LEFT

Miskas first Best in Field title – Greyhound female Whiskers Muad'Dip. Judges Liene Avotina, Heiry Rüütel & Dzintra Staprēna. Estonia, July 2025

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Form and Function

This reflection on heritage led us to the heart of UKSS values: the belief that dogs must demonstrate they are genuinely fit for function - able to perform well, with both breeding and training enabling them to do so. A hound proves this in several ways. Most visibly, it is shown through performance in the field; running a course with the speed, agility, endurance, enthusiasm, and follow that define the breed. It also comes through in the expression of instinct, when a dog shows that inherited prey drive and focus are still alive in its makeup. Just as important is functional structure and health, the physical form that allows the hound to move efficiently and safely. And finally, there is the role of preparation and conditioning, the owner's part in ensuring the dog is ready to realise its potential.

Together, these qualities form the truest measure of a sighthound's essence, proving that form and function remain united. For Miska, this is not a phrase for effect but the very soul of the sport.

“Sighthounds are, first and foremost, hunting dogs,” he wrote. “Coursing was organised to assess how well they could perform the tasks for which they were originally bred.”

He offered the greyhound as an example. Once a practical hunter, its structure was refined by centuries of purpose. But as appearance began to dominate breeding, exaggerations crept in - over-emphasis on certain lines for show, or on sheer speed for racing. Both, he argued, risked moving away from the balanced, functional hound.

“Lure coursing allows us to assess whether those original instincts and abilities remain. It is not perfect, but it is one of the few ways we can preserve the true spirit of the sighthound.”

Challenges and Rewards

In his writing, Miska explained that speaking about form and function naturally leads to the question of judging itself - what makes it rewarding, and what makes it demanding. For him, the answer began and ended with the dogs.

“The greatest reward is to witness those performances - seeing a dog give everything in that moment is breathtaking. I always try to position myself where I can see their eyes as they chase the lure - because the eyes tell you everything. In that look you see focus, instinct, and pure joy.”

But judging is not without its challenges. It is a role that requires sharp concentration and stamina. In Finland, where judging is often conducted by panels of three to six, the starts are divided to ensure no judge is overwhelmed. “When you judge thirty whippets in a row, you need a break,” he wrote with humour. In Switzerland, he recalled, the use of an air lure meant starts came so quickly that the pace itself became a test of the judges’ focus. “Challenging, yes - but also educational.”

And then there are the human challenges. Very occasionally, owners may disagree strongly with a judge’s assessment, or tensions can spill over into poor behaviour. These moments are rare, Miska explained, but they remind him of the importance of composure and fairness. “A dog’s performance can almost always be judged,” he wrote. “It is how we manage the people around it that sometimes requires the greater patience.”

First Impressions of the UK

From the joys and trials of judging, his writing turned to the community he is about to join. Though this will be his first time judging at a UKSS event, Miska’s connection with the British coursing scene already runs deep.

He recalled his time at the Kalajoki World Championships, where he served in multiple official roles. “I remember guiding teams to the veterinary check, and there was one car decorated with the English flag that stood out at once. Later, I saw Mrs Jones on the podium in the whippet group - while my own dog won gold. That image has always stayed with me.”

A year later in Sweden, he found himself speaking more with members of the British team. “Those conversations continued afterwards through messages and social media,” he explained, “and slowly I began to build a picture of the community.”

The impression he has gathered is of an organised, enthusiastic, and innovative scene - one that fosters encouragement and camaraderie. “That,” he added, “is something I am very much looking forward to experiencing in person.”

PHOTO

Jackie Jones
pictured with Team
UK in Kalajoki,
2022



Advice for Newcomers

No judge's spotlight would be complete without a few words for those stepping onto the field for the first time. Miska's advice was simple, but heartfelt.

"Chasing a lure is demanding, so make sure your hound is fit for the task. Your dog will always give you their best on that day - under those skies, in that field. That is all we can ask of them."

He also reminded newcomers to enjoy the experience. "This is a hobby. The judges are people too. Do not be afraid to ask if something worries you and never forget to have fun with your dog."

Looking Ahead to the National Championship

When I asked what he was most looking forward to at the UKSS National Championship, his answer was immediate.

"For me, it is the greatest honour to be invited to judge here. This is, after all, a return to the very roots of formal, regulated coursing - the country where formal coursing was first codified centuries ago. I look forward to the performances, the atmosphere, the people, and the exchange of ideas with fellow enthusiasts." Then, with a smile, he added: "And of course, I am very much looking forward to a proper English breakfast."

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Closing Reflection

As I finished reading Miska's reflections, I felt that his journey with sighthounds mirrors much of what UKSS itself stands for - heritage, performance, and above all, joy in the hound. His words remind us why we gather on the field; not only to compete, but to celebrate the instinct, elegance, and endurance that make these dogs extraordinary. With Miska at the heart of our National Championship, we can look forward to a weekend that honours both tradition and the living spirit of the sport.

Stacey Haynes