

A Little Dirt Never Hurt

2012 JNHE Senior Champion Showman Amanda Ash has found success by getting her hands dirty.

by *Christy Couch Lee*

Sure, it takes talent. And a little luck doesn't hurt, either. But for Amanda Ash, Newton, Wis., her ticket to the 2012 Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE) Senior Champion Showmanship title was found through a simple combination so often overlooked — hard work and dedication.

For Amanda rising before sunrise and working past sunset are just part of the routine. And, as she'll tell you, that routine has led to an accomplishment beyond her wildest dreams.

Twenty-one-year-old Amanda has shown cattle since she was 9. Beginning her show career in the Simmental breed, she made the switch to Herefords last year.

"My dad was raised in the Simmental breed, and I was, too," she says. "But in 2005, we bought our first Hereford, because we liked where the breed was going and the amount of progress it was making. Last year, I bought my first Hereford heifer, and now I have two."

Hard work

Since last year, Amanda has been working full time in addition to pursuing her junior show career. Graduating from Lakeshore College in July 2011, she has since worked as an accountant with a firm in Chilton, Wis.

"I work 45 hours a week during the 'slow' times, and 60 hours a week from January to April," Amanda says. "My dad and I run the cattle

operation on the side. And my parents certainly come in handy during the busy times."

This schedule can certainly make for some long hours. But her employer appreciates the work ethic she possesses, she says.

"In every job I've ever had, my bosses have said there's no work ethic like that from a farm kid," Amanda says. "And I look at showmanship and showing cattle as a job interview. Every time you enter that ring, you're promoting yourself as if you were in a job interview."

This mentality has led to her moment in the spotlight during the 2012 JNHE senior showmanship finals.

A shining moment

Beyond the obvious, advancing to the showmanship finals was special as it was her final chance as a National Junior Hereford Association member to achieve this honor, Amanda says. She says she had aspirations of doing well in showmanship, but she had no idea what Thursday, July 5, would bring.

"When I entered my showmanship class that morning, my goal was to be myself and put a smile on my face," she says. "When I made it out of my class, I thought, 'This is cool!' When I made it through the semifinals, I

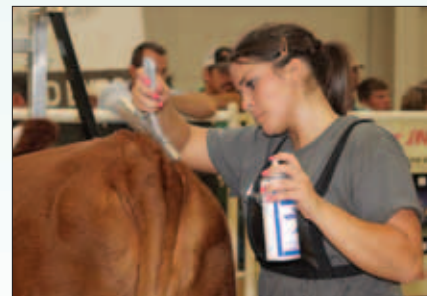
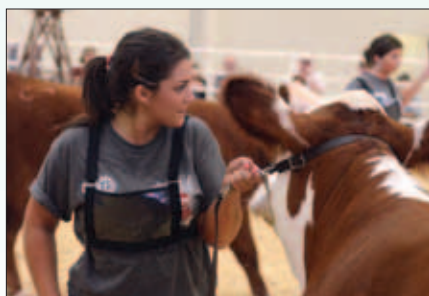


was super excited. And when I made it to the finals and the judge said, 'I'll see you tonight' — well, words can't even describe how excited I was. As I went into the finals that night, I was prepared to get 10th, because I had never done this before. So I put a big smile on my face and decided to do my best, hoping that luck would go my way, just this once."

Amanda says she felt slightly intimidated to fit her heifer in front of the crowds at the showmanship ringside. So, she simply determined she would do her best with a smile. And do her best, she did.

"When the announcer began introducing the placings from 10th place up, I was listening for my number to be called," she says. "When

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Amanda Ash says she's never seen her dad more excited than when she exited the showring as the JNHE senior champion showman.

I realized I was in the top five, I was very excited. When I made the top three, I could barely stand up. When I made the top two, I started shaking — so much so, I was barely able to hold my heifer's halter. And when they called the other number, I was just speechless. I don't think I could stop smiling, and I saw my dad jump up and down, and scream."

As Amanda exited the showring, she was astounded by her dad's reaction.

"I've been alive for 21 years, and I don't think I've ever seen my dad cry like he did when I walked out of the ring," she says. "He gave me the biggest hug. Something like this has never happened before."

Amanda believes she experienced this moment because of her relaxed style in the ring.

Takin' it easy

She describes her showmanship style as "reserved."

"I don't have a sparkly belt or showstick or earrings," Amanda says. "I care more about my cattle than myself in the ring. I always try to make her comfortable. I can sweat and look like I jumped out of a pond, but I want to be sure she's comfortable."

Amanda believes she has learned to hone her showmanship style by watching others, including her sister, Jennifer.

"I used to watch her show, and watch other people ask her to show for them. Someday, I wanted to be better than her," she says with a smile. "I've always watched other people in the ring, too, and learned what I wanted to do to better myself."

Working at home and learning to know her heifers' personalities has helped, as well.

"There's a personal bond between you and your heifer," she says. "If you can have that, it seems to go a lot easier. I go out and talk to her — telling her 'Let's go for a walk,' so she knows me. It's funny — if anyone else tries to lead her, she doesn't want any part of it. It's like she says, 'No, I just want Amanda.'"

Travis Pierce, Baraboo, Wis., has known the Ash family for years and raised the heifer that took Amanda to showmanship success this year. And, he knows a bit about the feeling of showmanship success. He was the reserve champion senior showman at the 2006 JNHE.

Pierce says Amanda's relaxed attitude helps her excel in the showring. In addition, he says, her confidence and calmness help set her apart.

"She knows how to show one," he says. "She is so relaxed, and she never gets worked up. During the semifinals, she got caught in the corner. She stayed calm and collected, and got her heifer out where she needed to be."

Amanda says viewing showmanship like a dance helps her stay in tune with her animal.

"I've taught myself not to use a showstick, but rather, to let the heifer

Top tips for showmanship success

Amanda Ash, Newton, Wis., was named the 2012 Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE) Senior Champion Showman. She shares her top tips for youth pursuing the same showmanship success.

Keep it fun. "Go out and do what you love," Amanda says. "If you don't win, no, it's not the best. But not everyone gets to have this experience. It takes a lot of time and money to do this, and I don't have to have the best heifer. But the things you learn and the relationships you make last a lifetime. And you'll never lose that."

Be calm, cool and collected. "Try not to get too upset in the showring if your heifer isn't acting perfect," she says. "Just 'chillax.' Take five seconds, take a deep breath, and tell yourself, 'I can do this.'"

Amanda says your heifer will pick up the vibes of your emotions.

"Your animal will notice your emotions," she says. "She will be calm if you are. But if you're not confident, your heifer will wonder if she's protected and safe. And she won't be calm."

Make the connection. "My parents laugh at me, because I talk to my heifers," Amanda says. "I talk to them when I can sense they're getting nervous, to help them refocus on me. During showmanship, a stroller went by. I could see it in Paisley's eyes — she got nervous, because she'd never seen that before. So I said, 'It's okay,' and she immediately calmed down."

Know your surroundings. Amanda ensures she knows the showring before a show. If she's in the first class, she examines the ring to see how it's laid out. "I try to determine if people will be sitting along the rail, because some heifers and steers don't like that," she says. "And, if I'm the second class or later, I always watch the first class to determine where we'll walk in, stand and set up. It helps to have confidence on where you're going and what you're doing."

Put in the work. Amanda says there are days when the work seems overwhelming, but it's always worth it.

"There are nights we don't get in from the barn until midnight, and I have to get back up at 5 a.m. to do chores again before I go to work," she says. "I have to have the mindset that the hard work will pay off. And winning this competition has shown me that all of those years of work have done just that — they've paid off." **HW**



naturally do the work," Amanda says. "I just help her through the process. It's like a dance partner — I let her lead, and I just go along with it."

Dave Steinhoff, New Lisbon, Wis., has known Amanda and her family for several years through showing cattle together. He says her true self is highlighted when she steps into the showing.

"Her personality just shines when she's out in the showing," he says. "She's very classy."

Putting in the work

Amanda says no matter the style, there's no substitute for hard work at home.

"Dad has always stressed that hard work will pay off," she says. "And that's what I remind myself — there's always a light at the end of the tunnel."

The hard work also extends to the showbarn, she says.

"We never hire a fitter — my dad is big on doing it ourselves," Amanda says. "We will be the first into the barns in the morning, and we try to get everything in order and keep them on their schedules, and we worry about ourselves later. I'm not sure I ate during the entire showmanship day. The heifers came first — I had to make sure they were good to go."

Steinhoff says Amanda's work ethic and drive set her apart.

"It's not her first rodeo," Steinhoff says. "She does a great job, and she works hard. She's one of the first ones in the barn in the morning, and one of the last ones to leave at night. It all goes back to her having her animals prepared before the show. Their cattle are so well groomed, and it doesn't happen the day of the show. The work begins several months prior."

Pierce agrees.

"They're all-around good people," he says, and they're a pleasure to be around. "They are hard workers, and they love what they do."

Pierce says Amanda captured the showmanship honors because of her dedication.

"It takes a lot of heart and soul to get it done," he says. "They're in the barn every day, rinsing and brushing. Dedication is her biggest attribute."

Aside from her dedication to showmanship success, Amanda has seen the spotlight with her cattle, as well.

Rewards in the ring

This year, Amanda claimed the JNHE Division I champion bred-and-owned heifer honors.

Through the years, Amanda and her family have shown at many shows across Wisconsin and numerous regional shows through the Simmental association.

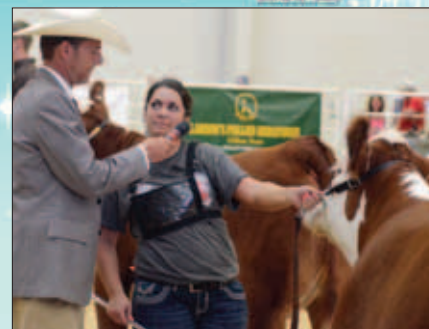
However, Amanda says, she's most enjoyed her times in the Hereford show circuit.

"We began showing Herefords because we heard it was a great breed and people," she says. "We've never had as much fun as we've had while showing Herefords."

Last year, she purchased her first Hereford heifer from Fawcett's Elm Creek Ranch, Ree Heights, S.D., and had great success in the Wisconsin jackpot circuit.

"We showed seven times, and had supreme champion twice and reserve once," Amanda says. In addition, she won her class at numerous shows from Indiana to Louisville and across Wisconsin.

Her Hereford experience would not



During the JNHE senior showmanship finals, judge Brad Gohr, Madras, Ore., (left) asks Amanda Ash to thank those who helped her achieve showmanship success. Family topped her list.

be as great without the great people of the breed, she says.

People make the difference

When her family has needed advice or help, Amanda says, the Hereford family is there.

"We're so new to the breed, and we didn't know what we were supposed to do, starting out," she says. "But the Hereford family has taken us in. It's nice to know people are there to help us. We couldn't have done it without the people, and the Wisconsin Hereford Association."

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Amanda Ash says capturing the JNHE senior champion showmanship title is a result of the support of her family and friends, including (left to right) sister Allison, dad Rob, sister Nicole, mom Christine, and family friend and mentor Travis Pierce.

Amanda says she looks up to many people in the industry, including Pierce and Steinhoff.

“Travis was the JNHE reserve champion showman six years ago, and he’s one of only three of us from Wisconsin to place that highly,” she says. “He gave me constructive criticism between heats during showmanship, and I did my best to learn and remember his suggestions.”

However, Amanda says, her greatest mentors have always been her parents.

“Dad and I are connected at the hip — we do everything together,” she says. “We get up every day at 5 a.m. and do chores together, work full time, and then work the cattle together in the evenings. He’s taught me to be able to talk to anyone, and to be open to constructive criticism, too.”

Amanda says her mom has taught her about caring for a family while working full time — and maintaining balance during it all.

“My mom — Christine — is a school secretary, and my dad — Rob — is a manager at the utility company,” she

says. “Every year, my brother, sisters and I would pick our show heifers by picking a name out of the hat.”

Amanda says she’s learned a lot from showing with her family, which includes brother, Brandon, 26, and sisters Jennifer, 24, Nicole, 13, and Allison, 8.

She is encouraged by her younger sisters — Allison and Nicole — following in her footsteps, too.

“Allison and I go out in our shorts and boots and work cattle together,” Amanda says. “We’ve always been super close.”

Allison has been showing cattle for two years. Her big sister seems to be rubbing off on her, as she placed in the top 10 of the JNHE peewee showmanship competition this year, as well.

She says Amanda is her greatest mentor and supporter.

“We like to wash cattle, and she helps me with my heifer,” Allison says. “She has shown me how to set up their feet and how to keep their heads up high. She also teaches me how to help

my heifer calm down, and I talk to my heifer and settle her down. Then she does so much better.”

And, when her big sister was named the senior champion showman, Allison says, she couldn’t have been happier.

“I was really happy that she won, and I screamed,” she says. “I want to be like her someday, because she’s so good at what she does.”

And Allison isn’t the only young person to desire to be like Amanda, Steinhoff says.

In fact, he says, Amanda serves as a mentor to countless younger members.

“She’s not arrogant whatsoever, and she’s a mentor to a lot of little kids,” he says. “When a little kid comes up and asks questions, she’s always willing to help. She may be getting her animal ready for the showing, but she always takes the time.”

With this focus on helping others and a dedication to being the best she can be, Amanda is sure to go far in life. It’s all a matter of putting in the work. **HW**