



On Her Game

Poise and intensity steered Brooke Jensen to the grand champion senior showman title.

by *Haley Stark*

For many young adults, summer is the mark of fun in the sun, free time and a break from schoolwork, but for 21-year-old Brooke Jensen, Courtland, Kan., summer was time to buckle down, work heifers and aim high to achieve her goal of becoming grand champion senior showman at the 2017 Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE).

It's the week of JNHE, and as a member of the National Junior Hereford Association board of directors, she arrives early to help with the big event. Brooke is consumed with nerves as her plane descends into Louisville, Ky. She knows it will be a long and anxious week, but she trusts the time and hard work she's invested will finally pay off.

It's showmanship day, and she makes the top 10 in the senior division. Throughout the rest of the day, she can't bear to look at, much less eat, any food, and she avoids any conversation about the final drive that's quickly approaching. Yet, Brooke's nerves nearly vanish as the timer is started for the fitting portion of the competition. She and nine other competitive exhibitors get to work fitting and preparing their cattle in the chutes — Brooke is focused on the task at hand.

Suddenly she's on a roll, her hands work in muscle memory and fitting becomes a rhythm. She finishes early, waters her heifer and calmly backs her out of the chute. Her heifer must have picked up on her focused energy too — Brooke and her animal entered the showing as one.

"Once we were in the ring, she worked perfect for me. I knew she was on the mission with me," Brooke recalls. She navigated the ring relaxed and composed, but never once dropped her intensity that demanded, "Hey, I'm here to win."

As the judges place the remaining showmen, working from 10th place and up, the anticipation and excitement build within Brooke. Finally, it is between her and one other showman. The judges shake the reserve champion senior showman's hand and from behind him, Brooke's face lights up. She immediately is overcome with emotion as she realizes her dream has just come true. Fighting back tears of joy and still in shock, Brooke leads her



heifer to the backdrop. Many years and countless hours of hard work and dedication flash before her eyes as she realizes her dream is now a reality — Brooke is named grand champion senior showman.

It runs in the blood

Brooke claims her background in the livestock industry started long before she was even born. Her mother, originally from Canada, grew up around cattle, raising Simmentals and Herefords and showing competitively across both the United States and Canada. In fact, Brooke's grandfather helped start the Canadian Junior Hereford Association and was recognized for his service the same week Brooke exhibited at her final JNHE. Brooke's father dove into the agricultural industry as he became actively involved in youth organizations, livestock judging and starting his own "Jensen Fitting Service."

As a young child, Brooke spent much of her time attending cattle shows and supporting her older brother, Brady, in the showing. She first attended JNHE when she was only 4 years old and has only missed one JNHE since then when it was hosted in Mississippi. She started showing at 7 years old.

Prioritizing showmanship stands as a family tradition for the Jensens.

"Showmanship is something my family has taken great pride in for a long time," Brooke says. "We've always tried to make a name for ourselves in raising our cattle to be sound, functional and impactful to the industry, but showmanship was somewhere we always worked to be individually successful in achieving our goals."

She realized she would have big shoes to fill, as Brooke's father won senior showmanship as a junior Hereford exhibitor and her older brother followed in pursuit, achieving the champion title in 2013.

"Not only is it hard work paying off, but it's also a natural gift as a cattleman that has been passed onto me, Brooke says. "We all work together in working



Pictured (l to r) are Kevin, Brooke, Sheila, Ben, Allison and Brady Jensen.

with our cattle. It's something we have driven for as a family. I'm honored to have the title and share it with my family as well. I truly could not do it without them."

But Brooke didn't just wake up one day with the polished skills needed to win in the showmanship ring; they are something she worked tirelessly for. She credits her third year showing, when she was merely 9 years old, for igniting her fire to win in the showing. That year Brooke showed the champion cow-calf pair and the champion steer and was recognized as the champion peewee showman.

"I got a taste of success for the hard work my family had invested that summer, and I soon made a goal for myself to accomplish a top 10 finish and achieve reserve or champion showman in every age division," Brooke explains. "I'm fortunate to say I was successful in that and I was at least reserve, if not champion, in each age bracket as I got older."

Her journey to the top didn't come without trial and error, however, and Brooke soon realized the final drive of senior showmanship offered unprecedented competition. She humorously recalls the effect her uncontrollable nerves had on her the first time she made the top 10 in 2014. "When I was coming out of the chute I forgot my show stick up against the panel so I had to stretch really far to even get it," she laughs. "You work

through those mistakes though and learn from them."

Brooke's first year in the senior age division, she finished in seventh place. The following year, she again made top 10 and almost achieved her goal, achieving reserve champion senior showman. In 2016 she again received a chance to compete in the top 10 and was recognized in fourth place. It wasn't until her fourth year that Brooke finally accomplished the prestigious title of champion senior showman.

Fierce competition

Brooke is quick to point out just how hard and challenging the competition truly is and says making the top 10 is a huge honor in itself.

Fondly, she revisits the moment she won. Brooke kept telling herself "stay calm, stay intense, stay calm," as the judges began selecting 10th through sixth places. She notes how quickly those placings were filled, but then time seemed to slow down as the judges moved to sorting the top five showmen.

As Brooke maintained her composure the judges made their final considerations. For Brooke, her showmanship style was established outside the ring long before it was executed in the ring. She describes her style as calm and poised, yet intense. She strives to stay in sync with her animal and often talks softly to her heifers to calm them. This summer, Brooke had

continued on page 82...



the added challenge of balancing an internship in Arkansas and going home on weekends to work cattle.

She credits her family greatly for the support of her future career, while still allowing her to chase her dreams in the showing. Brooke and her family rinsed cattle one to two times a day, and she takes 15 to 20 minutes a day when she's home to get each one of her cattle in the rhythm of how she likes to show. Yet, as natural as she looks next to her heifer, there's no mistaking the intense charisma Brooke exudes in the ring.

Humble and thankful

Behind the scenes, and out of Brooke's sight as she received the champion

handshake, were her parents' and other family members' priceless reactions. Not long after she won, Brooke was greeted by her family and caught in an emotional embrace with her father. With a humble heart, however, Brooke is quick to point out the monumental influence her parents have on her, serving as her greatest role models.

"My mom is the backbone of our family. She gets us out of bed when we don't want to, she keeps us motivated and reminds us why we do what we do. She is truly the behind the scenes." Brooke says. "My dad is the wisest cattleman I know. He cares so deeply for the livestock industry, and making him proud is all I could ever hope for."



Brooke has also worked to give back to the organization and industry that helped make her who she is today. From 2013 to 2014, she served as the National Hereford Queen. "That pretty much sealed the deal for me, and serving as queen was an amazing honor as it allowed me to network within the senior and junior associations," she explains. "It's rewarding experience further pushed my decision to run for the NJHA board of directors after my term as queen." Brooke was elected to the National Junior Hereford Association (NJHA) board in 2015 and is serving as vice chairman.

Brooke's younger brother has a few more years of showing, and since the Jnens go to the JNHE as a family every year, Brooke promises to be there to support him. "He's sure helped me the past few years as I've been away at school," she says.

Brooke plans to stay actively involved in the association. "I owe a lot of success to those programs. I will still raise cattle. I have a great cow herd now and I want to maintain that," she says.

Currently Brooke is a senior at Kansas State University and will graduate in December. She already has big goals for her future career in agriculture. Her passion lies within agribusiness, where she hopes to help put more beef products on the shelf, driving that business forward and educate consumers from farm to fork.

Brooke's ultimate goal is to make a difference in the industry that gave her a purpose and inspired her to find success. **HW**

Advice from the champion

Grand champion showman Brooke Jensen gives a few tips for Hereford youth.

Posture and poise. "Stand up straight and be one with your animal. Know how to control your animal in every environment. Stay composed in the ring"

Don't over-do it. "Don't dress to distract. Be modest and professional, because you don't want to take away from your animal."

Stay educated. "Don't just know about your animal's details, take time to understand and be aware of what's going on in the industry like the ups and downs in the markets, challenges in cattle productions, EPDs and genomics — generally topics you need to understand as you get more involved in the industry."

Stay involved, get involved. "We have so many programs and contests that help individuals get involved, network and build relationships. You'll be thankful you took hold of those opportunities because they make you a better person." **HW**

