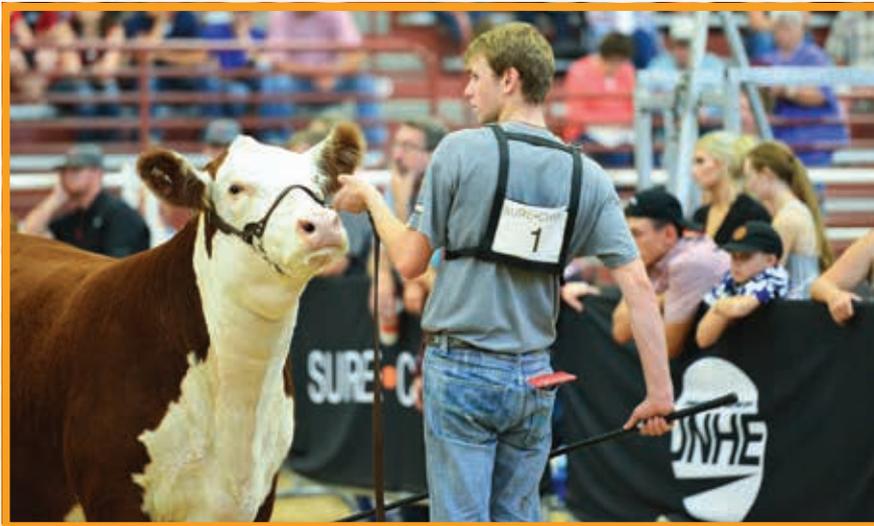




As Perfect as Possible



The champion senior showman wraps up an illustrious career while adding to a family legacy

by **Brooke Roberts**

An 18-year-old Texan wearing backtag No. 1 held his breath each time the judges passed by, trying to contain the butterflies fluttering in his stomach. After judges John and Melissa Davis had distributed nine other handshakes, the first exhibitor to enter the ring was the sole showman left standing. Years of showmanship accolades could not prepare Tyler Allan for the subsequent moment he will never forget — when the judges extended their 10th and

final handshake, making him the youngest exhibitor in Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE) history to earn the top spot in the esteemed senior showmanship competition.

Fit for a champion

After numerous talented heats of senior showmen had passed through the Five Points Bank Arena in Grand Island, Neb., on Wednesday, July 4, 10 exhibitors, 10 head of cattle, 10 chutes and 10 sets of fitting supplies

were all that remained from the day's chaos. Amidst the hum of clippers and blowers, the minds of the final seniors were racing as they prepped their animals for the ring.

With “belly, tailhead, legs, show halter, ready to go” adapted as his mindset, Tyler went through the nearly memorized motions of fitting his heifer. Having been trained by well-known industry professionals like his father, Dave Allan, as well as Jay Carr, Tony Jeffs, Mark Kelly and Drew Schmidt, Tyler knew exactly what to do.

Having missed the top 10 just once in his entire junior career, the former champion of the peewee, junior and intermediate divisions had every reason to feel confident as a contender for the senior champion title. Still, recognizing the caliber of competition in the senior showmanship finals at the JNHE, the champion admits to feeling a bit nervous.

“Once you get into that top 10, it’s a totally different atmosphere,” he says. “You’re going to have nerves going into it because it’s so competitive.”

Tyler stayed focused and committed to his priorities. “I just kind of went in there and did what I do,” he explains. “That’s just to stay calm and try and do the best of my ability.”

Winning ways

Competition and Hereford cattle run in Tyler’s blood. The history of successful — and competitive — Allan siblings

“There is no such thing as a perfect heifer. You’ve got to do what you can to make them look as perfect as possible.” — Tyler Allan



in the Hereford breed runs back a few decades to when Tyler's uncle, Mark, claimed the senior showmanship title in 1985 and his father, Dave, was named reserve champion in 1990. Mark and Dave were also honored as Hereford co-herdsmen of the year in 1992 at the National Western Stock Show in Denver, Co.

Tyler's own journey of showmanship success began in 2010 with a victory in the peewee division in Indianapolis. One year later, Tyler topped the junior division and advanced to intermediates, from which he emerged victorious five years later. Ironically, that victory opened the door for younger brother Mason to win the intermediate division this year in Grand Island.

As the oldest of three boys, Tyler is especially thankful for his family's support and shared appreciation of showmanship competitions. "It's kind of always been our family thing," he says, noting the family has traveled to all but one junior national since 2007.

The Schulenburg native recently wrapped up a successful career in the Texas majors, which included champion polled Hereford steer at the Fort Worth Stock Show, champion British steer at Rodeo Austin and reserve champion polled Hereford heifer at the Houston Stock Show. But all of Tyler's accomplishments started at home.

A heart for Herefords

For the Allan family, showing and raising cattle is a lifestyle rooted in an appreciation for good cattle and a desire for those animals to reach their full potential.

The entire family is drawn to the red-and-white breed, as Tyler's father raised and showed Herefords growing up. Dave worked for Kevin Jensen, Adam Bros. and Co., and Barber Ranch before moving the family to Texas, where he started Bar A Cattle and raised club calves. The Allan boys have grown up showing Herefords to stay out of direct competition with their customers.

In 2012 the family dispersed their club calf operation and founded Genesource, a semen distribution company. At that point, they decided to concentrate on expanding their

Hereford herd and have not looked back since.

Although Tyler has exhibited numerous other breeds, he could not imagine showing anything but Herefords. "I've always had a soft spot for Herefords," he says.

But even with the laid-back Hereford nature, many hours of hard work and effort are required to suitably break and train cattle for the highest level of showmanship competitions.

"We spend every day of the summer working with our calves," he says. Between washing, rinsing, brushing and getting the cattle used to human interaction, the Allans keep their hands full breaking calves year-round. They teach calves to walk into each setup, practice without showsticks, size show halters, rinse and work hair, and more — when showmanship day finally arrives, it is just business as usual.

The desire to consistently compete at a high level motivates the Allans in their daily efforts. "We're not just trying to win, we're trying to do what we can to be competitive," Tyler says.

Effortless style

While Tyler's showmanship skills have evolved with time and experience, his self-described style is calm and collected. Most notably, his style appears almost effortless as he has learned to be more comfortable and natural in the ring, while easily walking his heifer into each setup. Immediate feedback from his dad shortly after heats has also helped finesse his technique.

"I always ask what I can do differently," Tyler says. "It could be a foot moving an inch back, my stick being slower, her head being higher — there's always little things you can change."

His fine-tuned style has been a favorite of many different showmanship judges and has caught the eye of fellow exhibitors and their parents. "It's such an awesome experience when people tell me they had their kid watched me yesterday," Tyler says. "I want people to say, 'hey, watch him, look what he's doing.'"



Tyler Allan is the youngest exhibitor on record to receive the champion handshake for senior showman at the JNHE.

A cool composure serves Tyler in his quest to present cattle at their best. "Judges don't want someone who is more worried about how they look than the calf," he says. "They want someone who is pretty much invisible. They want the heifer to catch their eye, not yourself."

"There is no such thing as a perfect heifer," he adds. "You've got to do what you can to make them look as perfect as possible."

Presenting cattle well requires both the showmen and the heifer to be at the top of their game.

"We treat showmanship like a show day," he says. "We're going to get up early, we're going to get them rinsed, we're going to get them full and they are

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Tyler was greeted by his proud parents after his big win.



going to look how they need to — like the judge was judging a normal show.”

Although he prepares as much as possible, Tyler approaches each showmanship competition with low expectations and a high desire to be competitive.

“When I go in the ring for showmanship, I always just go in and do the best of my ability,” Tyler says. “My expectation is that I am going to do the best of my ability, get my heifer looking right, and whatever happens, happens.”

The last lap

Fast forward, and the best of Tyler’s ability has landed him a spot in the center of the ring, where he grasps the chain of his heifer’s halter and rhythmically strokes a black show stick back and forth across her brisket. John and Melissa Davis, as well as 2018 Hereford Herdsman of the Year Eric Eldridge, share their final thoughts with the crowd after spending a day evaluating the intermediate and senior showmanship divisions.

At last, the long-awaited champion selection unfolds. The three judges

take turns extending handshakes, beginning with 10th place. Tyler’s backtag lands him at the end of the head-to-tail lineup, resulting in heart-pounding moments between each placing as the judges circle around and pull exhibitors from the backside of the lineup.

“Every time the judges walked by, I held my breath and the butterflies came by,” he says.

Eight individuals are pulled until the final two remain — Austin Matheny of Mays Lick, Ky., and Tyler.

“Just looking over at my mom and dad — my mom’s biting her fingers and dad can’t even watch,” Tyler says. “It was the most death-defying feeling, waiting for them to choose.”

As Austin received the reserve champion handshake, a flood of relief and accomplishment washed over Tyler. “Once it happened, I just relaxed and let my head back and was like, ‘wow, this just happened,’” he recalls.

Reality sank in as Tyler was greeted with congratulatory hugs, smiles and

teary eyes from family and friends. For Tyler the moment easily ranks above his previous wins. The victory was sweeter still because of the effort and time invested well before setting foot in Grand Island.

“It was definitely an emotional experience, but it was awesome,” he says. “I don’t think anybody ever imagines this happening, and now that I’m here it’s kind of incredible. It’s something I obviously will never forget.”

The 2018 JNHE will forever be a special memory of the Allan family. Between Tyler’s senior showmanship win, Mason’s champion intermediate showman title, multiple division and class winners, as well as reserve champion owned female honors, the family achieved extraordinary feats.

Winning senior showmanship — or all four divisions for that matter — was never an initial goal for Tyler or his family. “If you told me five years ago I’d be at this spot, I never would have imagined it,” the record-setting champion says. “Now that it’s here, it’s like, ‘yeah, we did work for that and it really was a goal.’”

Now, a new set of goals awaits. Tyler plans to attend Texas Tech University in Lubbock next fall, where he plans to major in animal science while remaining active in the industry. As far as junior nationals go, he will be a familiar face at the event for years to come. “I obviously wouldn’t miss this show for the world,” he says. Still, he does plan to slow down and to soak in the memories for a moment.

“I should still be an intermediate showman this year,” Tyler points out. “It’s crazy to me that this is all coming to an end, but at the same time I’m so lucky.”

Tyler undoubtedly wrapped up one of the most illustrious showmanship careers in JNHE history. Despite his accomplishments, he remains humble. “Winning senior showmanship was something I never even dreamed would happen,” Tyler says with a smile that doesn’t appear to be leaving his face anytime soon. “It’s just something I will always hold dear, the Hereford junior nationals.” **HW**



Tyler’s tips

Exude confidence. “In the showing, your cattle can feel what’s going on. They understand when you’re nervous and it can have an effect on them. Just be slow with what you do.”

Present yourself and your calf in the best light. “In showmanship it is about how you show, but it’s also about getting the cattle to look their best. Judges do pay attention to hair coats, cleanliness, show halters, the way you’re dressed, everything. It’s not just the way you show.”

Practice without the showstick. “We practice without the stick — walking them into it and teaching them how to walk and stop the way we want them to.”

Keep your calves comfortable. “When you get to shows, make sure your cattle are comfortable. Don’t try and work them up.”

Practice with the show halter. “Obviously, this helps because you know what the show halter size needs to be if you’re running late — it’s there, ready to go.”

Practice controlling your nerves. “As a young kid, you’re going to be nervous in the ring. It’s something you have to practice, and after enough times in the ring you will learn to relax.”

Learn from those around you. “Take in everything you can. Pay attention to the people above and around you.” **HW**