



Showing for Cody

Illinois Hereford families rally together in a time of need.

by *Adrian Austin*

The wooden gavel taps the auction block as auctioneer Monte Lowderman begins his chant. The surprisingly cool mid-June weather blows a brisk breeze around those in attendance, but no one seems to notice as the sale wears on. Rather, at this year's Illinois Hereford preview show, everyone's focus is on something much bigger than themselves.

Flash back to the night of May 15, roughly five weeks before the Illinois Hereford preview show. Just a month prior to the show they were planning, Buddy and Lisa Edenburn, Illinois Junior Hereford Association (IJHA) advisors, felt their world shift on its axis, as Cody Conrady, fiancé to Buddy and Lisa's daughter, Bailey, had his life flash before his eyes.

Cody was injured when the boom of the crop sprayer he was loading on a field call for work came into contact with a high voltage power line, sending approximately 7,400 electric volts racing through Cody's body. Although his heart had stopped on the scene, Cody was revived and rushed to OSF Hospital in Peoria, Ill., then Life-Flighted by helicopter to Memorial Hospital in Illinois state capital of Springfield.

What happened next was nothing short of a miracle, as Cody's long road to recovery began. His fiancée, Bailey, detailed the extreme changes of their time following the accident. "Slowly Cody and I are settling into a new definition of normal," she shares. "The staff in the burn unit at Memorial Hospital have been second-to-none when it comes to treating not only Cody's numerous injuries but also for making sure that we both have the resources around us to get Cody back to as close to pre-injury as possible."

In the weeks following the accident, Cody was faced with the amputation of his left arm below the elbow, the amputation of his right leg below the knee and the amputation of three toes on his left foot. Aside from a multitude of physical challenges, Cody began to realize his memory was missing for the hours leading up to the accident and roughly two weeks afterwards.

"He does have numerous other injuries, but to be quite blunt, he probably shouldn't even be alive at all," Bailey shares in her statement following the accident, well aware of the magnitude of what her fiancé would be going through in the weeks to come.

In the following weeks, Cody, Bailey and both of their families would go through something more challenging, life-changing and overwhelming than they ever thought possible. Ultimately, though, this tragedy, the struggle that would ensue and the family's positive attitude through it all would inspire Illinois Hereford youth across the state to join together, to encourage each other and to conquer the summer under one similar resolution. This would be the summer competitors and friends alike would set aside their differences — instead agreeing they would all be “Showing for Cody.”

Turning nothing into something

Now, flash forward to the weekend of June 15 and 16. The Illinois Hereford preview show was well underway. IJHA directors spent the weekend cloaked in orange and blue — the colors of the University of Illinois (U of I) Fighting Illini — as each of them demonstrated the true fighting spirit of Illinois Hereford families. With the words “Showing for Cody” branded across their chests in U of I blue or with show harnesses filled with “Showing for Cody and Bailey” cards, Hereford youth stormed the showring with a passion for Hereford cattle and, perhaps more importantly, an undeniable devotion to their IJHA advisors, Buddy and Lisa.

However, the loving support of these Hereford members did not end with their “Showing for Cody” motto. Rather, they put their heads together and devised a plan to help Cody and Bailey any way they could.

“I was part of the awards committee that ordered Yeti® cups for the show, and so we had these extra cups that had been made and we weren't really quite sure what to do with them,” says Lauren McMillan, IJHA vice president. “At first, we were just going to sell them to everyone in the association, whoever wanted them could buy them. But then we thought that it would be a really great idea to donate the money that we get from the cups to Bailey and Cody. And by doing that, we thought we should have an auction to hope we get more money for them.” With that decision, the auction was on!

Circle back to Monte Lowderman on the auction block. The sale lasted longer than anyone expected,



considering at the beginning of the day there was not even going to be one. The leftover award cups sold for unbelievable bids, followed by extra “Showing for Cody” T-shirts. Tom Boatman, an Illinois Hereford breeder and longtime family friend of the Edenburns, was one of the buyers.

“Having Tom Boatman pay \$500 for a commemorative Yeti cup and then handing it to me to give to Bailey was incredible,” Buddy says.

Auctioneer Jack Lowderman, Monte's father, decided the cups and shirts would not be the last gesture of the evening, though. Fresh out of items to sell and with a desire to do more for the Edenburn family, who have given their all to the IJHA, Illinois Hereford breeders had a willingness to bid weighing on their minds. Therefore — even though Monte had run out of items — rather than leave the auction block, Jack spoke to the crowd, stating plainly, “I'm going to sell nothing, and we're going to see how many people buy nothing.” And with the option of absolutely nothing up for grabs, the bids began rolling in.

“It was so heart touching to see the generosity of the people from Illinois,” shares Lisa Babbs, past IJHA advisor. “They just kept bidding. And it was amazing how many people just bought nothing and donated the money to go to Cody and Bailey. It was an inspiration for all. I mean, no one had a dry eye in the place because everybody was just there for them.”

With cups, T-shirts and “nothing” lining the sale order, the auction brought in well over \$7,500, which the Illinois Hereford members donated to

continued on page 40...





the needs of Cody and Bailey. Noah Benedict, recently elected National Junior Hereford Association (NJHA) board director and current IJHA board president, says while he had an incredible preview show, the auction night was the only time he felt goosebumps running down his arms and tears in his eyes.

If you ask Buddy and Lisa, they call Noah the son they never had, and they were quick to comment on his admission of emotions from auction night.

“Having Noah Benedict, who won everything he touched that Saturday, including the heifer show, telling me his biggest goose bump moment was during the benefit auction... that’s incredible,” Buddy says. “Every showman wearing a harness card supporting Cody and Bailey and the showing for Cody t-shirts on the junior directors was amazing. To say we were overwhelmed with the outpouring of love and support for Cody and Bailey is a huge understatement. I told a few people this would be the toughest preview show I had ever attended prior to the weekend. After being there it was the best one I have attended.”

United on The Hill

Yet, the “Showing for Cody” motto did not end with the final drop of the gavel on auction night. Instead, that same fighting spirit was found On The Hill in Denver during the week of the 2019 VitaFerm® Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE).



While campaigning for the NJHA board throughout the week, Noah was touched to see several of his Illinois friends wearing their “Showing for Cody” shirts in various contests.

“We kind of kicked some butt, our Illinois teams pretty much dominated!” Noah exclaims. “I wasn’t on any of the teams except for fitting, so I can brag about them.”

Admittedly, Noah is not wrong. Illinois members won multiple divisions of the JNHE 5k race, both the junior and senior divisions of the Hereford bowl, several team judging contest divisions, the team fitting contest, and countless individual awards in other JNHE competitions.

However, what truly struck an emotional chord with the Edenburns and Noah was the Hereford bowl team members who competed in their “Showing for Cody” T-shirts.

“That was all their idea, that wasn’t something that myself or Buddy, or anyone really organized,” Noah shares. “Instead, those younger kids and people that may not even have a super close connection to the Edenburn family, still wanted to show up and show out with their support.”

Inspired by the Hereford bowl members sporting their “Showing for Cody” gear, Noah and his fitting team decided to wear their shirts during the fitting contest. While the Illinois fitting team reigned victorious, Noah recalls the emotions that washed over him following the competition had little to do with the win itself.

“After the contest Buddy came up and hugged me tight, and it was pretty cool to know that I had ‘Showing for Cody’ written across my t-shirt, because we all knew what it meant. To win that contest was even more special just because of the t-shirt I had on and what it represented.”

Little did Noah know, the “Showing for Cody” spirit still had more magic left to come. On Thursday, July 11, an indescribable moment became a part



of history for this strong, well-deserving family. In the legendary Stadium Arena, lifelong dedication to the Hereford breed was recognized for both a young man and a loving couple, as Noah was elected to the NJHA board and Buddy and Lisa were awarded as the 2019 Advisors of the Year.

While this recognition was outstanding, a small miracle also unfolded at home. After 45 days in the hospital and seven surgeries, Cody, accompanied by his future bride, made the trip to Denver to be present for these special moments. With a hint from Amy Cowan, American Hereford Association (AHA) director of youth activities and foundation, that it might be a good idea for Cody and Bailey to be present on awards night if it was at all possible, the young couple dove into action.

“I’ve spent every year since 2005 at the JNHE in July, and I figured this year would be the year to break the streak,” Bailey recalls. “But, when I got word that being at the awards banquet might be a good idea, Cody and I said, ‘Why not?’ and booked flights Wednesday night.” She vividly recounts the excitement surrounding the spontaneous trip to head to Denver.

“We checked with the doctors and they said ‘go live life’, so we did,” she adds. “Only Dad knew we were coming, and he thought it was solely because Noah might make the board. We wanted to surprise all the people who have been so supportive of us. The Hereford family has always been my family and they’ve adopted Cody as one of their own as well. To see Mom and Dad honored as Advisors of the Year for their outstanding work for the kids in the IJHA and to see Noah Benedict put on that maroon jacket once again made JNHE the best week of the year.”

Pulling off what some may consider the surprise of the century, Cody and Bailey were able to witness a beautiful moment with their family and friends. No doubt, the night of the awards ceremony will not soon be forgotten for Illinois Hereford families.

“Lisa and I are truly honored and humbled to receive the honor of National Advisors of the year. We have been blessed to serve for such a great group of kids and we love them all,” Buddy mentions. “Words cannot begin to describe how



Awards night at the 2019 JNHE was one to remember for Illinois members as their representative, Noah Benedict, made the junior board, their advisors, Buddy and Lisa Edenburn, were awarded Advisors of the Year, and Cody and Bailey made a surprise entrance to see it all.

special it was to have Bailey and Cody with us. To receive this honor the same night a kid I love like a son fulfills his dream was very special as well.”

Hereford means family

In reflection, this entwined group of Hereford breeders reflects what the week spent at JNHE truly meant.

“Buddy and Lisa very well could have stayed home that week to take care of their daughter and soon to be son-in-law, but they chose to come and support their Hereford family,” Noah says. “It is just kind of surreal because you know how much fight and how much effort they’ve put into their lives during this time. Cody went through an awful thing but how much power and positivity they displayed throughout the whole process kind of came full swing in that moment at the awards ceremony.”

In the end Bailey and Noah work together to perfectly sum up the way this tragic scenario brought together an entire state, exemplified by the passion young Hereford enthusiasts demonstrated with their desire to be “Showing for Cody.”

“This summer we really saw Illinois come together,” Noah says. “We may be competitors and some people may not like each other in the ring — but something like this happens, and you bet we have each other’s backs.”

Bailey agrees and leaves Hereford breeders and families everywhere with one final thought — a reason to remember why we do what we do and why perhaps spending more time with fellow cattle people than we do at home is not so bad after all. “Family is everything. Even if that family isn’t blood.” **HW**

