



During her National Junior Hereford Association career Rylee Barber, Channing, Texas, has learned hard work and determination are the keys to success.

Working Toward the Top Spot

Practice makes perfect, and practice led Rylee Barber to be honored as grand champion senior showman.

by *Rachel Dotson*

The fitting chutes are assembled on the cedar chips as 10 exhibitors stand beside their animals. The clock starts counting down and the sound of buzzing clippers and aerosol cans spraying fills the air, while senior

showmanship competitors compete for the grand champion senior showman title. Rylee Barber, Channing, Texas, remains calm while maintaining one thought in the back of her mind — this is her last chance.



Rylee spent countless hours over the last few years sharpening her fitting skills.



She enters the ring and heads for the chutes, and her grandmother, Mary Barber, calls out an encouraging reminder to believe that “she can do it.” As Rylee clips, combs and analyzes her heifer, she relies on muscle memory, what she has learned over the years of competing and the advice given by her mentors.

The allotted time for the fitting portion dwindles to zero, and the retiring junior, Rylee leads her heifer over to the other ring to showcase her showmanship skills one last time for the judges. She finds herself in the top three, standing amongst two exhibitors she respects the most and enjoys competing against — one of those being her brother, Bryden.

“We got down to the final three and it was Mason Allan, myself and my brother and I just started smiling and laughing to myself,” Rylee laughs at the memory. “I kept thinking, if I get beat by my little brother or Mason, who is like a little brother to me, I thought goodness gracious that’s not going to go over well with me.”

Then, after years of competing in showmanship at the Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE), Rylee is finally in the running for the top spot. In eager anticipation, Rylee watches as judges Todd Herman and Kasey Heindel shake the reserve champion senior showman’s hand.

“The moment that Todd and Kim turned to select me as the champion showman, relief flooded through me,” Rylee says. “I had been dreaming of that moment, and for it to finally



Rylee’s brother, Bryden, has been her longtime competitor and someone who constantly pushes her to succeed.

happen, my last year, will be something I carry with me forever.

“Once I was selected I started crying. I was so happy, and I am not an emotional person. It was extra special to have my brother competing with me. He knows how hard I’ve worked at it over the years. We might talk smack between each other, but I think he was just as happy for me as I was happy that I had won.”

Surrounded with support

Stepping into the ring is second nature for Rylee. She has been going to the JNHE since she was born, and her family has not missed one in the last 15 years. “I don’t imagine we’ll miss any in the years to come,” she adds. The first JNHE she attended as an exhibitor was in Louisville, Ky., in 2006.

“There weren’t very many times as a younger exhibitor that I missed watching the top 10 showmanship.”

For this Texas A&M University alumni, the two most influential people in her show career are her grandmother and Robyn Samsel, herdsman for Barber Ranch.

“My grandmother, Mary, has always been the one out there with us in the barn,” Rylee says. “In the summers she always offers to help where she can. If we’re out in the practice ring, she is always out there tailing us and critiquing my siblings and I, but she’s



always been our number one supporter. She’s kind of hard on me sometimes. She’s always been 100% team Rylee.”

As Rylee continued to compete in showmanship over the years, she set a goal to make it to the top 10 in senior showmanship. She sought help from Robyn to achieve this.

“I went to her that first summer she came to Channing to help us and told her I wanted to be in the top 10 in showmanship,” Rylee shares. “That was the first year I was eligible for the

senior division. She was the one who told me I needed to start practicing. We got a heifer up just about every day and worked on my fitting skills and worked on time management.

“She really believed in me and told me, if I really wanted it, I could do it. She’s been there every step of the way. Every summer she helped me practice and get ready for it. I told her before we started showmanship [at this year’s JNHE] that if I did well she better hop over the fence and come get me.”



Rylee wrapped up her career as a member of the NJHA, which began for her just 14 years ago.





Rylee and her father, Brett Barber, exit the ring after celebrating her showmanship victory.

Robyn was able to follow through with Rylee's request.

Rylee also extends her gratitude to the Worrell family for helping her prepare for the steep competition. This spring, she moved nearby the Worrells in Mason, Texas, after accepting a job as the youth programs and membership coordinator at Beefmaster Breeders United.

"They rounded up all of the old show heifers they had and lined them up for me to fit anytime I came over," Rylee says. "Jarrett and I each took a side of a heifer and James and Shannon were there to critique and give direction anytime I asked. I couldn't thank them enough for allowing me to practice on their cattle and for helping me become a better showman.

For Rylee, showmanship is an outlet to showcase her skills as a showman beyond what is on the end of the halter. "What I enjoy about showmanship is it's not so much about

my family or our breeding program," she continues. "Showmanship is the one area where it's not necessarily about the cattle I'm leading into the ring, it's about my ability and my personal talents. That's one thing I've really taken pride in—it's me getting her set and it's me doing the work to make her look her best."

Stock for the future

Despite this year's JNHE schedule looking different from previous years, Rylee and her brother, Bryden, and sister, Aidyn, prepared as normal and looked forward to competing in showmanship.

"I am constantly critiquing my siblings on their showmanship style, they really get annoyed with it," Rylee laughs. "I try to set a good example and try to do what I tell them to do. It always takes practice. There's always room to improve, but the best thing you can do for someone watching you or for your little sibling, you're trying to help just give a positive encouragement."

Although Rylee's chapter as a National Junior Hereford Association (NJHA) member is coming to an end, she plans to maintain a presence within the operation — and making sure her siblings compete to the best of their ability.

"My dad's family and mom's family are both heavily involved in the Hereford industry, and so junior national has always been a family event," Rylee says. "My siblings and I have grown up competing against each other and the chance to do it [at the] JNHE makes it really special."



Rylee (l) shares a special moment with her mentor and Barber Ranch herdsman, Robyn Samsel, after her big win.

As Rylee reflects on her time as a junior member, she hopes future and current junior members recognize how far hard work and determination can lead them in life.

"Set a goal and strive for it. If you know you want to be selected as the champion showman, you need to get out to the barn and start practicing," she says. "No matter your age you are never too old to practice and learn something new. I was out in the parking lot in my khaki skirt and junior board clothes the night before showmanship practicing. You can never have too much practice."

Although she has stepped into the showing for the last time as a junior member and slipped off her maroon NJHA board jacket, Rylee has cemented her legacy within the youth livestock industry.

"The livestock industry, specifically youth livestock, obviously has had a large impact on my life," the fourth-generation rancher says. "I was involved in the NJHA since I could walk and the last three years I served as a junior board member which really influenced my college and career choices.

"Ultimately the NJHA led me to land the career I have now as the youth programs and membership coordinator for the Beefmaster Association," she reflects. "The experience I gained from the NJHA is really what gave me the leg up and provided me with the experience needed for this position. I really have Amy Cowan and Bailey Clanton to thank and the entire NJHA for leading me down this path and giving me the chance to work with young kids within a cattle breed association." **HW**



Rylee and her brother pose at the backdrop with their mother, Nicole, after a highly competitive top 10 senior showmanship show.