

Bucket Lists and Peers

Ethan Hopkins' Herdsman win is all about perseverance and family.

by *Wes Ishmael*

“Five years ago, if you had told me I’d be Herdsman, I’d have said you were crazy. It’s a great feeling. I would never have dreamed of it in a million years,” says Ethan Hopkins, Winchester, Tenn., who was named 2021 Junior Herdsman of the Year at this year’s VitaFerm® Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE).

While Ethan may have never imagined actually becoming Junior Herdsman of the Year, it was a dream he long aspired to because of those he watched win the honor over the years.

“That’s like a bucket list thing for me. That’s a once-in-a-lifetime thing,” Ethan emphasizes. “Like I said, when I was younger, those are the kind of people you looked up to.”

Every award at the JNHE is special, carrying its own unique significance. Arguably though, it might be tough to top the Junior Herdsman of the Year. It speaks to the ability of a National Junior Hereford Association (NJHA) member not only to present cattle at JNHE, but also to prepare for the months leading into the show.

Plus, while a selection committee chooses the finalists, peers vote to determine the ultimate winner.



Ethan Hopkins, Winchester, Tenn., (l) was named the 2021 Hereford Junior Herdsman of the Year. Wyatt Lawrence, 2021-22 NJHA vice chairman, presents the coveted award to Ethan at the 2021 VitaFerm® Junior National Hereford Expo.

“Watching past winners and how they conducted themselves, how they presented their cattle ...” Ethan says. “Just being in that group of people, along with the other great candidates this year, means a lot to me.”

Other Herdsman candidates this year were: Noah Benedict, Dewey, Ill.; Ben Holt, Caldwell, Idaho; Ryan Rogers, Eatonville, Wash.; and Emma Rushton, Waverly, Tenn.

Family first

“This award is extremely humbling and means a lot,” Ethan says. “My family, they’re the ones who got me here. They’re my support, my backbone.”

Ethan comes from a faith-based family of humble high achievers. His parents, Roy and Kim, have four sons: Ethan and

his three older brothers — Jordan, Nathan and Zachary. They showed and participated in the NJHA, too.

Even with this year’s Herdsman win, Ethan says the 2020 JNHE is the most memorable for his family because he won his first division and was nominated for herdsman. Ethan says, “When we started out, we were at the bottom of the class. We put in the work toward our goal and our work paid off.”

Ethan had the division VII owned polled champion at last year’s JNHE with H Kelly 9160 ET by H Deberard 7454 ET.

“It really meant a lot to me because, over the years, trying to place high in a class and winning that division was a great moment for me and my family. It meant a lot to us,” Ethan says.

Step-by-step learning and earning

Keep in mind while Ethan is the fourth generation in his family to raise Hereford cattle and the second to raise





“I’ll tell anybody, the Hereford breed, and specifically, the Hereford people are the best people. They’re willing to teach you if you’re willing to learn.”

— Ethan Hopkins

registered Herefords, showing cattle was still relatively new to the Hopkins family when Ethan began his NJHA career. His first JNHE was at Tulsa, Okla., in 2009.

“That’s what I grew up doing, going to these Hereford shows, and Hereford people are wonderful people,” Ethan says. “I’ll tell anybody, the Hereford breed, and specifically, the Hereford people are the best people. They’re willing to teach you if you’re willing to learn. There are just a lot of great opportunities, so take them. NJHA has really given me a great start.”

Ethan says his passion for showing grew when he won his first JNHE class in Kansas City, Mo., in 2012.

“When we started out, we had a lot of mentors help me try to get better because we didn’t know a lot about it,” Ethan explains. “Once we won that class, it was a great feeling. It gave me a lot of motivation and passion to keep it up and to work hard.”

Ethan says there is a long list of mentors and key people who helped him over the years.

Starting out, Ethan explains, “I went to the JWR show clinic. Tom and Tammy Boatman taught us the basics, and probably never thought I was going to catch on with this show cattle stuff.”

The Boatmans started the clinic when they co-managed JWR Land and Cattle at Dallas, Ga. Today, they manage Perks Ranch in Rockford, Ill.

“After that, we went to Randy Mullinix (Purple Reign Cattle Co., Toulon, Ill.) and bought our first heifer, which is the one that won her class. He was really good for our family,” Ethan says. “I think he held me to higher expectations and knew that I could do more than I was actually doing, so I was really thankful for him and his crew.”

Next, Ethan explains he and his family began dealing with the Hoffman

Ranch crew at Thedford, Neb. “Just watching them and how they walk you through it motivated me,” he says.

This year’s Herdsman also found plenty of top-drawer advice closer to home.

“Tommy Coley is the American Hereford Association field representative for us, and he has been great,” Ethan says. “Also, Bobby Singleton, a consultant down our way, has been really good. Both of them have been really encouraging and inspiring.”

Ethan is grateful for the many NJHA opportunities and events that enable meeting people and learning. He encourages other junior members to take full advantage.

“It builds character. You can learn a lot from a lot of people who know



Ethan Hopkins shares the excitement of winning Junior Herdsman of the Year with his parents, Roy and Kim Hopkins. “My family, they’re the ones who got me here. They’re my support, my backbone,” Ethan says.

2021 Junior Herdsmen Finalists



Noah Benedict

Noah Benedict of Dewey, Ill., is a senior at the University of Urbana-Champaign majoring in agribusiness with a focus in markets and management. Noah is the son of Chad and Becky Benedict and is the fifth generation in his family to carry on their Hereford operation. He has plans to continue his involvement with the agriculture industry and further expand Benedict Herefords.

Noah is honored to have been selected as one of the Herdsman candidates because of the group who have already won this prestigious award. "To me, the Herdsman award may look different because of the herd size at Benedict Herefords. I am the guy who runs the operation, and I get to make the major decisions," Noah says. "I have been very fortunate to get to handle all aspects of our operation."



Ryan Rogers

Ryan Rogers of Eatonville, Wash., is the son of Mark and Nikki Rogers. Ryan is currently a student at Peirce Community College where he plans to earn an associate's degree in business along with working at River Road Landscape Supply. He plans to grow his own program and help mentor younger junior members on the West Coast to get them involved with the NJHA.

Ryan's parents had Hereford cattle and he fell in love with the breed. Ryan says, "My favorite JNHE was in Denver because of the historic aspect and getting to see where a major livestock show began."



Ben Holt

Ben Holt is from Caldwell, Idaho, and is the son of Scott and Kim Holt. Ben's grandparents and parents had Hereford cattle which began his passion for the breed.

Ben enjoys the many different facets of the beef cattle industry and plans to pursue a career in the purebred sector. Ben says, "I am honored to be nominated for the junior herdsman award because this is my life and what I look forward to doing."



Emma Rushton

Emma Rushton is from Waverly, Tenn., and is pursuing a pharmaceutical degree at the University of Tennessee School of Health Science. Emma is the daughter of Lee and Andrea Rushton and is a fifth-generation Hereford breeder. She found a passion for the breed with the first Hereford heifer she showed and plans to stay involved with the Hereford breed throughout her lifetime.

At home and JNHE, she is heavily involved with all aspects of getting the cattle ready for the show. Emma says, "I am proud to be recognized for my work and am honored to be among the other candidates." **HW**

what they're talking about. Even if it isn't with cattle, you'll learn a lot of life lessons," Ethan says.

As far as pure inspiration, though, the list begins with his family.

"My whole family has a passion for cattle, and for the Hereford breed specifically," Ethan says.

Building the future

Hopkins plays a key role in his family's operation, Hopkins Ranch of Herefords. He is involved in every step of the program, from breeding decisions to entering the show ring.

The Hopkins will have their first online sale this fall. Next, Ethan says, they want to build toward having their own production sale.

"An idea would be coming back to the farm and making it work financially," Ethan says. "It's a tough business, the cattle business, but it can work if you have a passion for it and work hard."

This is Ethan's last year showing as a junior. He is a senior at Middle Tennessee State University majoring in finance with a minor in animal science. But, he plans to remain involved helping juniors and customers.

"I always want to be involved in the Hereford breed and helping the junior association," Ethan says. "We're starting to get a good market for our cattle. I want to help our customers go to these shows and build our program."

Never ever quit

When asked what sets him apart, Ethan is reluctant to talk about himself, but finally allows, "I'd just say my passion and motivation to never quit. There have been hard circumstances, but just always looking for the good in it. I try to put everything I have in it. Always try to get better every year."

That's the same advice he offers the juniors coming behind him.

"Just never give up. I've been at the bottom of the class. Even this week, I had my struggles," Ethan says. "Always put your best foot forward. Never quit. Your work doesn't go unnoticed. There are a lot of people watching you, so always be a good example and do your best." **HW**