

Meet Cody Sankey — a leader from Oklahoma State's award-winning national champion livestock judging team.



Judging Success

Story & photos by Stephanie Veldman

As a member of a very competitive livestock judging team at Oklahoma State University (OSU) for the past two years, Cody Sankey has been an essential factor in his team's success.

The OSU team placed first in the last two major competitions of 2001, including the American Royal Intercollegiate Livestock Judging Contest, Oct. 28, in Kansas City, Mo. There the OSU team broke the record for high score with a team score of 4,759 out of a possible 5,000 points. They also were the national champions at the North American International Livestock Exposition (NAILE) 2001 Collegiate Judging Contest, Nov. 13, in Louisville, Ky.

At these contests, student teams compete in judging beef cattle, swine and sheep, as well as in presenting oral reasons for their placements. At both the American Royal and NAILE competitions, Sankey placed first in individual judging of beef cattle. He

was also third-high individual overall at the American Royal and fifth-high individual overall at the NAILE.

"He only dropped two points placing cattle classes in the Kansas City and Louisville contests. To be high individual in a species and to be national champion judge in a species is an outstanding achievement. To do it back to back in those two big contests — in the end I thought that was quite an accomplishment on his part," says Mark Johnson, OSU animal scientist and coach of the livestock judging team.

Sankey says there was no better way to end his collegiate career in livestock judging.

"You put all of the work of four years into livestock judging. To come to an end like it did sure meant a lot to me, especially when I was high individual in beef judging at both Kansas City and Louisville," Sankey says. "Growing up, raising registered Angus

Cody Sankey made a name for himself in collegiate livestock judging circles last fall. He placed first in individual judging of beef cattle at the American Royal, where he was also third-high individual overall, and at the North American International Livestock Exposition, where he was fifth-high individual overall.

and having the family history on my mom's side that we do sure made it pretty special."

Family ties

Sankey comes from a family with deep Angus roots. To discover the beginning of his ties to Angus cattle, one would have to look back to the early 1900s when his great-great-grandfather E.B. Laflin established a herd in Nebraska. The Laflin herd is the third-oldest Angus herd in the United States

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and recently celebrated 100 years of production.

Cody's parents, Chris and Sharee Sankey, ranch near Council Grove, Kan., with a herd of 100 Angus cows and 50 Brangus cows. He also has a sister, Jeana, who is a senior in high school.

Both of Sankey's parents competed on the livestock judging team at Kansas State University (K-State). He says that was one of the reasons he decided to learn more about it.

Sankey started out on the livestock judging team at Butler County Community College in El Dorado, Kan., and judged there for two years before transferring to OSU.

"He was interested in coming to OSU to finish up his bachelor's degree, work at our purebred beef center and to become a member of our livestock judging team," Johnson says. "That is not uncommon, we have a lot of students matriculate to OSU just because of our livestock judging team and purebred beef cattle."

Sankey says he also chose to attend OSU because of the purebred beef herd the animal science department keeps at the beef farm and the people who are involved with it. "They seemed like they had really high-quality livestock, and it is a really good school. And I enjoyed the aspect that they showed cattle on a national level, because I had grown up showing cattle, and I got to help out with that."

Many of the cattle shows in which Sankey has participated have been through the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA), which he has been involved in since he was eligible to become a member.

Influence of the NJAA

Mary McCurry, advisor to the Kansas Junior Angus Association (KJAA) and cow-calf producer in Burrton, Kan., says that the NJAA's activities help prepare junior members for high-pressure situations they will encounter throughout life, one of which is the challenge of college.

"I think in college you have to know how to focus. You can get skewed in so many different directions, and I think that a lot of times that is where kids lose their focus," McCurry says. "I do think that the leadership role [in the KJAA] was a stepping stone for Cody in learning and managing multiple tasks. He has always been very involved, but when you take on that kind of leadership role, I think you kind of move to a new level, and he did it very well."

Sankey has held many leadership positions in the KJAA, including the offices of president, vice president, secretary, treasurer and director. He also has been the recipient of national and state scholarships and awards.

Sankey says he has learned a lot from the activities and shows he has participated in as a member of the NJAA. "Growing up in the National Junior Angus Association and being around cattle all the time sure helped my knowledge about livestock judging. Being involved with EPDs (expected progeny differences) and the pedigrees carried over into livestock judging quite a bit," Sankey says, adding that being a competitor through NJAA helped him learn how to win and lose the right way.

He says that he also learned a lot about public speaking through team sales and cook-off competitions, which helped him become a better presenter with oral

reasons in his livestock judging competitions.

James Fisher, director of activities and junior activities for the American Angus Association, adds, "I think his involvement in the junior activities has helped give him confidence. It has also given him the awareness of what good quality cattle, and good quality livestock in general, are. And while his judging team coaches have molded that into making him a top-notch judge, I think some of the junior programs have helped provide the foundation that they have built upon — his ability to talk in front of people, to share his opinions and to openly express how he feels."

Future plans

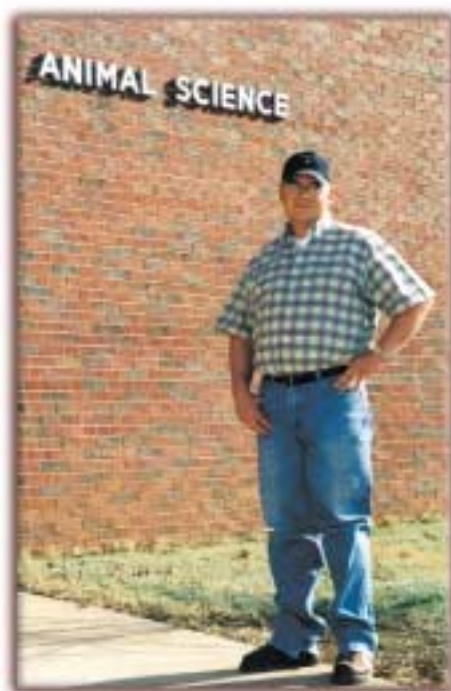
Sankey is currently a senior at OSU, pursuing a degree in animal science. He plans to graduate in the fall of 2002.

He says that he is still considering all of his options after graduation.

"I am thinking about going to graduate school to get my master's in ruminant nutrition. I may also see about coaching a livestock judging team," Sankey says.

Eventually, he says he wants to return home to Kansas to manage his family's purebred Angus and Brangus ranch and carry on the family tradition.

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► Sankey, currently a college senior, says he is considering his options after graduation. He plans eventually to return home to Kansas to manage the family cattle operation.