

The Show Must Go On

Association staff overcomes challenges to host the 2020 National Junior Angus Show.

by Madi Baughman, editorial intern

Social distancing between exhibitors in and out of the show ring, COVID-19 recommendations in between class placing announcements and masks on the faces of spectators were sights never seen or heard before at the arena in Tulsa, Okla. Exhibitors were limited to one helper in the make-up area

leading to the show ring and the judge fist-bumped exhibitors instead of the traditional congratulatory handshakes.

“COVID-19 has changed the look and feel of cattle shows as we know them.” This statement echoed in the barns July 19-24 during the 2020 National Junior Angus Show (NJAS).

While every year brings anticipation and excitement, this one was evidently significant as exhibitors looked forward to

stepping in the show ring quite possibly for the first time since the spring. Though this year brought many changes and modifications, some things about the Angus breed and the livestock industry will never change.

The theme “It’s All OK!” shined through as the people who make Angus great proved their passion and dedication to the breed and junior members by pushing on to host the 2020 NJAS.

How it started

The NJAS was originally set to be hosted in Harrisburg, Pa., July 5-11. After months of waiting and closely monitoring the pandemic in Pennsylvania, Caitlyn Brandt, American Angus Association events coordinator, says she and the rest of the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) staff realized on May 15 it was no longer feasible

to hold the event back east. Following the decision to move locations, the biggest challenge was finding a

facility with available dates big enough to host the NJAS, she adds.

Despite these challenges, the Events and Education department knew they had to do everything in their power to make the 2020 NJAS happen for exhibitors. Madeline Bauer, American Angus Association events coordinator, says regardless of challenges faced, the NJAA team wanted to give members something to look forward to and a chance for last-year participants to have much-needed closure to the end of their junior careers.

“What we continued to say to our exhibitors, to our advisors and to our families is that this is year 52 for

“COVID-19 has changed the look and feel of cattle shows as we know them.”



National Junior Angus Show,” Brandt says. “And it’s not going to be like any of the 51 years prior. This is going to look and feel completely different than what we have all come to know and love about junior nationals.”

Moving forward

Once it was officially decided for the show to be hosted in Tulsa, Jennifer Callahan, Oklahoma Junior Angus Association advisor, helped Jaclyn Upperman, American Angus Association director of events and education, communicate with the facility, the state and City of Tulsa officials to make sure their plans complied with the regulations in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

“It was very helpful that Tulsa was primarily an outdoor facility because it was fairly clear from the CDC (Centers for Disease Control) guidelines that there was going to be a big distinction between events held outdoors and ones in enclosed facilities,” Callahan says.

Although Oklahoma was expected to be in Phase Three of their reopening plan at the time of the NJAS, Brandt says they chose to plan for Phase Two to allow some lenience should Oklahoma have reverted back a phase by the time of the show.

The changes

“The biggest challenge is an event of this magnitude is a lot in itself,” Bauer says. “Jaclyn, Caitlyn and this department have done a really



Sara Sullivan, a junior member from Dunlap, Iowa, receives a fist bump from the judge of the Owned Heifer show. She would go on to win grand champion with this heifer later that day.

good job setting a procedure of how things are done, so there’s no need to reinvent the wheel. This time we had to completely reevaluate and reinvent the wheel for almost everything on the schedule.”

Events that could be socially distanced were planned to be hosted with adequate room at the fairgrounds, such as quiz bowl and the auctioneering and team marketing contests. Others transitioned to online, such as the Auxiliary-sponsored All-American Certified Angus Beef® (CAB) Cook-Off and public speaking. Those competitions that could not be done either way were canceled.

Opening and closing ceremonies

were also conducted virtually, a process that took much creative thinking and revision, Bauer says. Because many junior members compete at NJAS for the contests, Brandt says they wanted to keep the winners a surprise to keep the anticipation, just as a normal, in-person, closing ceremony would.

Thinking through how to conduct these events virtually, Bauer says they asked themselves, “How do we recreate this moment on a computer, not in person surrounded by your Angus family? What can we do that is going to resonate with people and is still going to matter to others?”

Along with announcing contest winners, Brandt says they wanted to

find a way to make announcing the new National Junior Angus Board (NJAB) members still just as big of a moment as in-person. Therefore, they made the decision to join newly announced members in their living rooms, showing candidates' reactions with their families in real-time.

When revising the contests, opening and closing ceremonies, and events like the mentoring program that are a time-honored tradition at NJAS, Brandt says they wanted to let the members focus on the memories they were making — not

the circumstances around them.

“What could we do that makes this memorable because of what happened at the event, not because of the location change and COVID?” Brandt asks.

“The Angus family doesn't know what the word 'no' means. It proves how much the juniors mean to us.” —Kelsey Vejraska

At the show

An air of positivity rang throughout the barns the entire week in Tulsa during NJAS. For

Kelsey Vejraska, newly elected communications director, she says many people felt blessed just to be there with the rest of their Angus family, regardless of the modifications.

Juniors in their final year of membership with the NJAA deserved their chance to compete in the National Junior Angus Showmanship Contest, to walk through the ring one last time and all the other “lasts” that wouldn't have been possible without the 2020 NJAS, Vejraska says.

Bauer noted the NJAS often provides closure for many juniors, and with the many hardships and disappointments 2020 has brought them, hosting the NJAS in any capacity gave juniors something to hope and strive for.

“The Angus family doesn't know what the word 'no' means,” Vejraska says. “It proves how much the juniors mean to us.”

Also an exhibitor at NJAS this year, Vejraska says although some show ring procedure modifications had to be made to allow proper distance between exhibitors, everyone was accommodating because they were so thankful for their chance to show off their livestock.

With social distancing and safety guidelines needing to be put in place, many contests were canceled or moved virtually, and the ones still held in-person had to be altered to adhere to the circumstances. Masks were required in the pavilion if spectators were over the age of 18, and even the process in which the cattle were shown was changed to allow adequate space between exhibitors.

The takeaways

Despite all the obstacles the NJAA staff faced, exhibitors were still able to showcase their animals and make



Members received fist bumps from judges rather than hand shakes widely used throughout the livestock industry.



Madeline Bauer, events coordinator, conducted temperature checks of all staff and volunteers daily to follow safety precautions.



Contest judges wore masks and were socially distanced from each other as well as contestants.

memories with their Angus family. Cattle were shown, contests were hosted and a select few still earned the coveted “champion slap.”

With everything going on in the world around them, tears of joy, smiles as big as the Oklahoma sky and memories to last a lifetime were made at the 2020 NJAS.

When asked why they felt it was so important to continue planning an event of this nature, Bauer says it always comes down to the NJAA members. Brandt says the support the people of the Angus breed gave NJAS in 2020 is truly unforgettable, and why they are so passionate about their jobs.

Vejraska says when looking back on the 2020 NJAS, she hopes junior members and their families recognize

the passion the staff, the NJAB and the people of the Business Breed have to do whatever it takes to see the juniors succeed.

“I hope that if nothing else sticks with [the exhibitors], it’s the fact that the staff, the board, and the volunteers worked with it and accomplished what many thought was not possible,” Vejraska says. “It’s definitely going to be a junior nationals that no one is going to forget.”

This is what makes the people of the Angus breed truly special. The family mindset, the hard work and the dedication to achieve their goals,

and the tenacity to never give up. Just as the show must go on, so must the Business Breed and the people of the livestock industry. **AJ**