

HERDING DREAMS

The peer-chosen 2023 Junior Herdsman of the Year proves hard work pays off.

by Elizabeth Rosson, editorial intern

Amidst the National Junior Angus Show (NJAS) where hustle, drive and determination converge in the show ring and barns, there was a standout — Ashlyn Mool. The Lexington, Ill., native etched her name into Angus history by clinching the esteemed title of the 2023 Junior Herdsman of the Year.

Mool's journey to success began long before she competed in the ring, nurtured by a passion for Angus cattle running three generations deep. Growing up on her family's cattle and grain operation, Hill Top Farms, she imbibed the values of hard work, resilience and the spirit of chasing dreams.

"It's a competitive industry full of people always looking to improve themselves and their operation, which is something I salute greatly," Mool says. "While raising livestock can hold its challenges, when you love what you do, the time and effort pay out in the end."

Her early involvement with the cattle industry shaped her career in the show ring. Surrounded by her family, Mool has a team of enthusiastic cheerleaders and honest critics.

"They have seen the potential in me since Day 1, and have always pushed me to be the best version of myself," she adds.

At first, Mool was a sheep showman. But she was inspired to venture into cattle by her older sister, Lauryn Mool. She recalls her humble beginnings at 10 years old.



Ashlyn Mool's competitive spirit and good sportsmanship contributed to her being selected as the 2023 Junior Herdsman of the Year.

"At first, I didn't really have much success; but it was fun," she says.

The thrill of the competition and the vibrant atmosphere surrounding the shows captivated her. However, it was the camaraderie within the Angus community that won her heart. Building connections and friendships, she found her place within the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA).

Around six years ago, Mool's competitive drive underwent a transformation when she was introduced to the Lampe family, who she credits for refining her into the skilled cattlemaster she is today. Garrett Lampe was the herdsman at the operation where the Mool family purchased cattle, and their relationship grew from there.

"She's just a pretty incredible young

lady," Lampe says. "You can tell a lot of young people look up to her."

Lampe says Mool's strong work ethic also perfectly aligns with that of a Junior Herdsman of the Year. Her passion for competition and the show ring is evident. Yet she also takes pride in the daily management of her cow herd, assuming full ownership of the responsibilities involved.

Mool is honing her skills in cattle nutrition and herd management, particularly focusing on understanding vaccination protocols and incorporating desired genetic traits into her herd.

However, her favorite aspect of working with her cattle is showmanship. Having learned valuable showmanship lessons from the Lampe family, she now enjoys assisting younger juniors to perfect their skills. Emphasizing the importance of practice, she says

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even experienced showmen should continue refining their abilities because ultimately it pays off.

Her craft is proven, placing in the top 15 at the 2021 National Junior Angus Showmanship Contest.

Mool's competitive nature is a driving force for her success, but it has never compromised her ability to maintain strong relationships.

"Getting out in the ring with some of your best friends standing right next to you — but you have to realize in that moment they are your competitors," she explains. "You want to win, but then at the same time, you want to be happy for them when they do well. Never let the show ring get in the way of your friendship."

Her exceptional sportsmanship and her dedication to mentoring have not gone unnoticed by her peers.

The Junior Herdsman of the Year award is annually given to a retiring member who exhibits exceptional work ethic, a deep commitment to their animals and the ability to prepare their cattle for the show ring with skill.

"Out of every show, every award, this is probably the most meaningful," Mool says.

The award is the perfect culmination of the end of her NJAA career.

"It shows my hard work actually pays off, and makes you realize people see it and recognize and respect me for it, which is surreal," Mool says.

Like any tale of triumph, Mool's path to success wasn't without its trials.



After graduating from high school, she entered Illinois Central College, where she spent two years as a student athlete on the volleyball team. Navigating her beloved sport alongside rigorous show preparation was a juggling act.

"Balancing responsibilities was tough," she explains. "Going into shows and not doing the best that I could was hard; but being successful is about prioritizing before-show preparation."

Mool still made an effort to be as present as possible and after her transfer to Iowa State University, was able to fully dedicate herself to the herd.

Mool learned to enjoy the victories and let the losses go. For most, the struggle is getting past the defeats. But for her the losses only serve as motivation, she says.

"I mean, it's just one judge's opinion at the end of the day," she explains. "When I don't do well at a show, it makes me want to work harder, not only to prove myself but to prove my cattle."

For Mool, putting in the work is not only important; it reaps reward.

"Dedicating time long before show day makes all the difference," she says. "You have to be able to learn and adjust, because every animal is different."

Beyond excelling in the show ring, Mool has been an active member of the Illinois Junior Angus Association (IJAA) and has served on the Board of Directors since 2016. This past February, she was elected as the president of the IJAA Board of Directors.

"She has embraced this leadership role with the same drive and passion that she has in the show ring exhibiting her cattle across the country," says state advisor, Stacy Lemenager.

Mool was also named the 2023 Illinois Herdsman of the Year.

"The Angus breed is to thank for a large part of who I am today, and I want the world to know just how great this industry is," she adds.

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Mool offers this advice, “I would encourage kids to get involved early, find your people, and then kind of stick with them.”

She also says never stop learning new things or working on your skills.

“Even now as a retiring junior, I’m still asking a lot of questions,” she says. “To younger juniors still growing up, don’t be afraid to ask the older people for help, because many are willing to give it.”

Mool will soon enter her final year of college at Iowa State University, where she is pursuing a degree in agribusiness. As she envisions her future, she hopes to raise her children within the Angus community, engaging in showmanship and carrying on the legacy of excellence.

After graduating, she plans to focus on raising show cattle with her family to sell to juniors.

“I do really enjoy working with those juniors that we sell to,” she explains. “Being a mentor to them is really rewarding in the end, when you get to see them grow up and find their footing in the ring.”

While the dust has settled on Mool’s time in the Angus show ring, those who have been by her side are proud of the young showman’s career.

“As a competitor, it has been so exciting to witness the success Ashlyn has had in the endeavors she

is passionate about,” Lemenager says. “She simply is the epitome of a teammate, partner, collaborator, mentor and go-getter.”

In a world that often celebrates overnight success, this dream-come-true for Mool stands as a testament to the enduring power of hard work and dedication — forged over years, not just a fleeting night. **AJ**

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