

# A MOMENT AS BIG AS THIS

Tennessee junior becomes the latest to win the National Junior Angus Showmanship Contest.

by Megan Silveira, assistant editor

Andrew Meier was decked out in white tennis shoes and a matching button-up. He couldn't be convinced to wear a belt, but the 8-year-old entered the ring in Louisville with a smile.

His eagerness wavered when his heifer knocked him to the ground; but it didn't take much convincing for him to stand back up and grab the halter again. A gentle tap from a small hand to her nose had the pair back in action.

It might not be the most glamorous memory, but it's the moment Meier says he was convinced the show ring was where he belonged.

At this year's National Junior Angus Show (NJAS), the 18-year-old showed how far he's come in his ability to exhibit an animal to look its best. The Clinton, Tenn., cattleman became the latest to earn his silver pitcher at the National Junior Angus Showmanship Contest as he was named this year's champion.

"When my name was announced, it was a mouth-dropping moment," Meier explains. "When I first started, I was barely making it out of my heat, and now I'm winning one of the biggest national shows you can."

## Born to love the breed

Meier says he has a "stout Angus background."

His mother, Holly, ran Gamble



Angus alongside Meier's grandfather. When she met Lydell at Atlantic Nationals in Baltimore, the rest was history. The pair married and started working on the operation together.

By the time Meier was old enough to show, he felt like his last name was a lot to live up to. National titles and banners were no stranger to his family, but it wasn't until 2014 that Meier says he really took a shine to the beef industry.

He'd had quite a few memorable moments in his show career since those early days. But he spent the beginning of this year debating if he should try his hand at the most prestigious event of them all — the National Junior Angus Showmanship Contest.

He would be one of the youngest competing, but Meier says the timing just felt right. With the move to Redlands Community College looming on the calendar, this was the last summer he'd be home full-time to work his animals and practice.

Winning the contest hosted by the Tennessee Junior Angus Association to determine its showmanship delegates sealed the deal; 2023 was it for Meier.

Arriving in Grand Island, Neb., Meier says he kept a cool head during the days leading up the first round of the contest. Knowing he'd show his own heifer, the junior felt confident he'd be able to put his best foot forward.

With the thought of his home state and peers in mind, Meier says there was a sense of pride in being able to secure a spot in the top 15.

## Dreams become reality

*Give it all you got when you've got it.*

It's a mantra that's been popular in Meier's family — but the words held a little extra weight July 8.

"This was my one shot to do it," Meier explains, reflecting on the moment he led an unfamiliar heifer into the ring for the final round of showmanship.

There was a single moment of concern, where the showman's mind flashed back to his first time showing. Would this heifer be in heat like his animal was during his first experience as an 8-year-old

exhibitor? Would she like her feet touched or prefer to be walked into position? Would she prefer her belly or brisket to be scratched?

Solving those questions helped solidify Meier's focus that morning.

"When I first set her up, I just got comfortable knowing what she likes," he says. "If the animal's not comfortable, then you kind of stick out."

Though Meier kept his movements in "slow motion" to help keep the heifer calm, he says the actual contest sped by. When he was lined up with his fellow competitors awaiting the results, a former mentor came to mind.

"[Chris Johnson] was basically like a second dad for me," Meier says. "I've always looked up to him."

Shadowing his dad as he was growing up on the farm, Meier says Johnson was a constant figure in their work with the herd. Though they lost Johnson a few years ago, Meier says he holds tight to the lessons he learned from the cattleman. Before the top five names were read, Meier told himself, "If I'm going to do it for somebody, it's going to be him."

As his name echoed through the Five Point Banks Arena, Meier felt the years of practice and hard work finally pay off.

His calm demeanor, however, disappeared when he saw his mom.

"She must have jumped the fence," he explains with a laugh. "When I [saw] her, I just couldn't take it. It was real tough trying to keep it together, but there was no way I could've for something as big as that was."

Finding his dad at the backdrop brought forth the same surge of emotion.

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## MEIER'S MASTERCLASS

*This year's National Junior Angus Showmanship Contest champion offers his perspective on growth in the show ring.*

### Always listen.

Even if it's the littlest piece of information you could possibly receive, Andrew Meier says it's important to absorb every bit of advice.

"I think that any piece of information that you learn is critical," he says.

Once you have identified a mentor, don't be afraid of critique. Whether someone tells you what you did right or what you did wrong, Meier says keep an open mind.

"Don't ever get worked up or mad about it," he explains. "Always know that they love you; they're trying to help you succeed. They're not here to make your day worse."

### Control your emotions.

"When it comes to how you present your animal, I feel like your emotions are one of the most important parts," Meier says.

The junior knows if an exhibitor is nervous, their animal will pick up on that energy. Staying calm is the key to success.

That truth extends once the final champ slap has fallen, as well. Win or lose, he says there's always an opportunity to learn.

Meier reminds NJAA members to project a positive attitude even on the days the judge didn't put them in first place. People watch how you act after the class just as much as they do when you're in the ring, so he says it's important to keep a smile on your face no matter the outcome.

### Don't be distracted.

As a showman, Meier says your attention should be on two things: yourself and your animal.

"When I go in the ring, I think about me and the heifer. That's all I think about," he explains. "All I care about is how I'm doing and if the heifer is cooperating."

When he was younger, Meier admits to searching out his parents in the grandstands for confirmation that animals were set up correctly. He encourages juniors to trust their instincts and learn to rely on their abilities, so they don't have to exert any energy to something outside of the show ring.

### Practice makes perfect.

It's not always fun, especially in the hot summer days leading up to major shows like the NJAS. Still, Meier says success isn't possible without spending a significant amount of time in the barn.

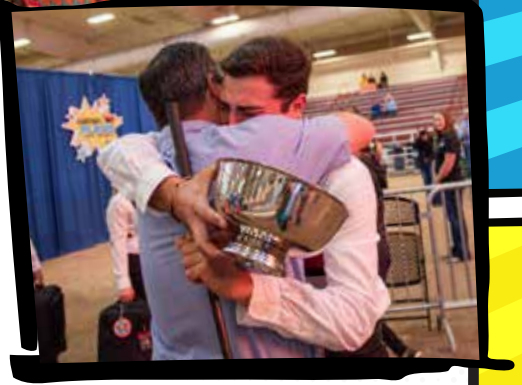
"Getting to know your animal at home — knowing what they like and how comfortable they are — I just feel like that really helps you in the ring," he says.

Practicing helps eliminate any moments of confusion on show day. Meier says preparing for the ring prior to the event can help make your movement as an exhibitor seamless.

**GUARDIANS OF THE PLAINS**  
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**"MY MOM AND DAD ARE PROBABLY MY BIGGEST SUPPORTERS."** — Andrew Meier



"My mom and dad are probably my biggest supporters," Meier says, but he admits the list of cheerleaders doesn't end there. "There's no way I could've done this without help. My friends, my mom and people that I've shown with — because people that we show with, I take in as family."

A winner's smile in place, Meier found that same extended family rallying around him on the final day of the NJAS.

"When I won, everybody else felt like a mom, dad, sister," he says. "Everybody was congratulating me, telling me how great of a job I did. That was just one of the best feelings in the world."

As he embarks on the last few

years of his junior career, Meier looks to take new strides with the Angus industry. He has hopes of focusing on his herd's genetics more than ever before.

"I feel like now I really want to put a big step into the bred-and-owned part," he says. "When you have a bred-and-owned that wins, I think it's pretty cool it's one that you've raised and managed yourself."

He'll balance his ambitions with his studies, pursuing an ag business degree at Redlands while competing on the livestock judging team.

No matter where his future takes him, Meier won't ever lose sight of where he started.

As a young professional in the

industry, he promises to keep the same eager attitude and tenacity he had entering the ring for the first time when he was 8.

The only difference?

He won't ever forget a belt again. **AJ**



**TOP 15**

The 2023 National Junior Angus Showmanship Contest top 15 finalists (from left) are Trey Conley, Clarksdale, Mo.; Andrew Meier, Clinton, Tenn.; Tanner Curtin, Oxford, Iowa; Ella Jordan, Savannah, Mo.; Morgan Hutchins, Charleston, Ill.; Hunter Royer, New Richmond, Ind.; Kathryn Coleman, Modesto, Calif.; Amelia Miller, Gridley, Ill.; McKenzie Kostel, McKinney, Texas; Sawyer Styles, Brentford, S.D.; Carlee Clark, Muldrow, Okla.; Claire Norris, Eudora, Kan.; Jonwyn Ayres, Powers, Ore.; Kyli Kraft, Fort Collins, Colo.; and Kelsey Theis, Leavenworth, Kan.

**TOP 5**

The 2023 National Junior Angus Showmanship Contest top five finalists (from left) are Jonwyn Ayres, Powers, Ore., fifth; Kelsey Theis, Leavenworth, Kan., fourth; Amelia Miller, Gridley, Ill., third; Kathryn Coleman, Modesto, Calif., second; and Andrew Meier, Clinton, Tenn., first. Also pictured are Jeana and Dustin Hurlbut and Courtenay DeHoff, judges.

