

FITTING THE FUTURE

Skill-building and youth development at NJAS team fitting contest.

by Elizabeth Rosson, editorial intern

The rhythmic hum of blowers brought to life, the gentle buzz of clippers and the melodic symphony of scissors cutting through the air — they're the starting sounds of the annual Team Fitting Contest, sponsored by Sullivan Supply, at the National Junior Angus Show (NJAS).

Fitting is a dance that demands meticulous attention to detail and an understanding of how to showcase an animal to the best degree. While this contest may appear to be a mere display of grooming skills, it encompasses far more than a bovine makeover. Beneath the surface lies an educational experience that enforces responsibility, organization, discipline and communication within a team setting, says one of this year's contest judges Ty Bayer.

Eighty-four participants from 23 states took to the arena in Grand Island, Neb., to compete. Teams made up of juniors from all age divisions had 30 minutes to fit their animal, with each competitor required to fit on at least one leg.

The contest encourages participants to study their animals closely and find creative solutions to enhance their animals' appearance. By understanding the power of minor adjustments, juniors learn even the smallest efforts can have a significant effect, Bayer explains.

Two all-girl teams from Kansas and Wisconsin were part of the 2023 field of competitors. Given the diverse age groups involved in this contest, successful teams recognize the

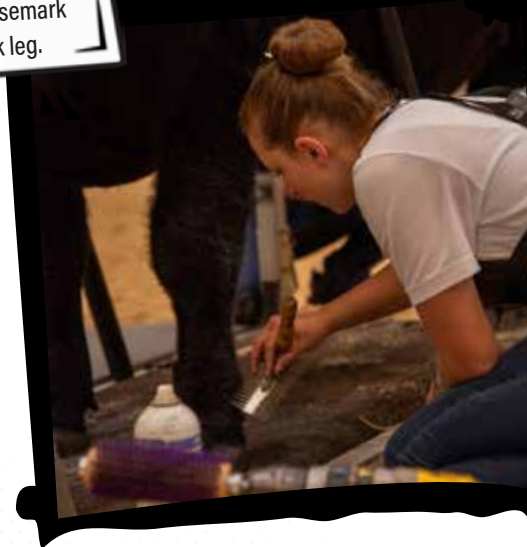
importance of leveraging their strengths and consider teaching younger team members crucial, Bayer says.

For novice contestant Madyson Krusemark, Burlington, Wis., the competition was one of her first exposures to the world of fitting. Prior to signing up for this event, the 14-year-old had never tried clipping before, so she heavily relied on the guidance of her more experienced team members.

"Getting to learn from the older members was a rewarding experience," Krusemark says. "You can tell me how to do something all day, but getting the chance to work on fitting hands-on is when I really had the chance to learn."

This year also marked Neleah

Wisconsin juniors (top, from left) Ava Leibfried, Belmont; and Neleah Bobolz, Janesville, Wis., showcase their teamwork. Madyson Krusemark tackles the show side back leg.



Bobolz's debut in the contest. The competitiveness and camaraderie of fitting with friends motivated the Wisconsin junior to compete.

Her team, though lacking extensive experience together, already shared a close bond. Their familiarity with one another, along with their willingness to learn, made for a cohesive unit.

"Wisconsin is a smaller state association, so we all knew each other pretty well beforehand," says 18-year-

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old Ava Leibfried. “Hailey [Jentz] served as president for two terms, and I am currently on my second term as president — so being in that position has allowed us to get to know a lot of the younger members.”

Krusemark agrees.

“The whole Wisconsin group is one big family,” she says. “I met the other girls when I first started out, so competing alongside them just felt right.”

Jentz and Leibfried have had a taste of success on the national playing field in previous years. They say this year’s focus was to help their younger team members learn.

“It’s not only about winning for us,” Jentz says. “We want to see our own from Wisconsin shine, even after we have aged out.”

With their team being younger this year, a lot less experience was present. But Leibfried says that the eagerness to learn makes up for it.

“This contest is unique,” she explains. “There’s no other contest where you can compete alongside people from your state of all different ages and experience levels.”

Each participant brings their own talents to the table because of differing levels of background experience fitting.

Along with gaining teamwork and leadership skills, Jentz competes year after year because she believes having the ability to understand how to fit your own animal is the key to show ring success.

As for Krusemark, her journey in the world of fitting is only beginning. With a determined spirit, she intends to practice and return to the action next year at NJAS.

She knows fitting is a dance that is never done, a continuous pursuit of



perfection that extends beyond competition day. It is driven by a desire to refine techniques and inspire fellow team members in their own craft.

Bayer notes the difference between a good fitter and a great one lies in their persistence and eagerness to improve, regardless of their previous skill level or experience. **AJ**

FITTING TIPS FOR JUNIORS FROM 2023 JUDGE TY BAYER

Understand the animal: Showmen should learn to assess the strengths and weaknesses of their animals and fit them accordingly to enhance their presentation.

Practice, practice, practice: Showmen should understand regardless of their previous skill level or experience, there is always room for growth and improvement in cattle fitting. Differentiate yourself as a fitter by persistently seeking improvement.

Focus on organization: Developing organizational skills is crucial for effective cattle fitting. Showmen should prioritize careful planning, time management and attention to detail.

Play to strengths: Successful showmen identify their individual strengths and play to them in fitting contests. Don’t try and do everything alone. Coordinate ahead of time with team members to plan out the work accordingly.

Less is more: Avoid excessive use of grooming products like hair sprays or oils. A natural look often appeals more to judges. Use products sparingly to enhance the animal’s appearance, without overwhelming its natural features.

Be knowledgeable about the “why:” Understand the reasons behind the fitting techniques you use. Judges may ask questions about your process and decision-making during the contest. Know the reasons behind each step, such as why you put the halter on a specific amount of time before fitting or the last-minute changes you could make to your animal before walking in the show ring.