



Waiting for the moment of truth with the other finalists, Brady Lee thinks about the last two days of showmanship competition.

STANDING TALL

*Easy-going showman
Brady Lee won the silver bowl
in Columbus, but says he
didn't win it on his own.*

by Lori Maude

Pat Grote, Texas Junior Angus Association advisor, remembers the first time she met Brady Lee. It was the Beef Expo Heifer Show in Austin and it was one of the first big shows the Lee family had attended. The Lee's had some mechanical problems with their truck on the way to the show, so Brady's dad, Bob, went to get the truck fixed. Brady showed his first heifer and won a division championship.

It was time to pick a grand champion and the announcer kept calling Brady's name but he was nowhere to be seen. Glenn Grote, Pat's husband, set out in search of Brady and his heifer. Grote found him — at the wash rack, scrubbing on his winning heifer. Brady didn't realize he had to go back in for overall champion; he thought he was done after he won the division.

Grote told Brady he needed to go back in for overall champion and he needed to hurry because they were waiting for him. Brady said he just couldn't go back in because his heifer wasn't groomed and he wasn't dressed. Brady's mom and Grote finally convinced him to go in. Brady went in for that championship drive wearing his rubber boots, with a soaking

wet heifer in a rope halter. He walked away with a reserve overall champion.

Brady Lee, 19, of Weatherford, Texas has come a long way since then. His years of hard work peaked with him winning the national showmanship title July 20 in Columbus, Ohio.

Ask anyone who knows Brady and they'll say the same thing — Brady is a good kid and a hard worker.

When he won he didn't scream or holler or jump up and down. He just smiled and gave his younger sister Micah a big hug. Brady was humble in accepting congratulations and wishing his parents could be there to share this with him. His parents, Bob and Jeanette, were unable to make the trip to Columbus with Brady and were "stunned" when he called to tell them about his win.

A week later Brady is still smiling, in spite of the chest cold he brought home from Ohio. He looks comfortable during our interview, wearing his NJAA t-shirt, shorts and a Lee Acres Angus cap. According to his mom, Jeanette, the real Brady is casual and laid back. His family is in the middle of the county fair and his sister is getting cleaned up for the parade of champions that evening. Micah has four cattle in the parade of champions and Brady wastes no time in giving her all of the credit.

Brady started with one 4-H Angus steer when he was 12 years old. His dad and mom got him started showing, even though neither of them had ever shown. His dad was an ag instructor and had been around the FFA shows, but his mom is a city girl, so she's learned as much as her kids.

The registered cattle are a family business. Each of the family has a few cows in their name, but the care of the cattle is a family responsibility. They have a ranch near Gordon, Texas, about 30 miles from Weatherford, where Bob was raised. The Lee's also rent an acreage in Weatherford where they keep the show cattle during show season.

Brady qualified for the national showmanship contest at the Texas Junior Angus Show in San Angelo. The other contestant from Texas wasn't able to go, so Brady was the Lone Star state's only chance at the national title.

"I was real, real nervous the first



A smiling Brady shares his victory with his younger sister Micah.

round. That was the hardest day. After I qualified for the final 15, some of the pressure was lifted," says Brady. He felt like he did really well on the first day, even though the second heifer on the first day caused him a little trouble.

Brady remembers what went through his mind as the names of the other four top placers were named. "The one thing that went through my mind was I hope I'm one of the five, but if not, then I'll just have to accept that and go on. You just have to say to yourself that making the final 15 was an accomplishment in itself."

When asked about his parents not being there to watch him win, Brady responded, "It was tough that they weren't there."

On cue, Brady's dad walks in the door after working at the county fair all day. He smiles and says, "We're never there when we really need to be."

Brady disagrees about his parents never being there. He deeply appreciates all of the help they have given him in getting started and with his showing. He sincerely thanks his sister for being with him in Columbus and for the support his parents gave him from home, even though they weren't with him in person. "It's difficult when something that great happens and I felt bad that my parents weren't there to see it," says Brady.

Even though his parents weren't there to share the experience with Brady, their pride still shows in his accomplishment.

"We're delighted and real proud of Brady. We didn't realize that it could culminate with such a phenomenal experience. It started off with a cow-calf pair

and a \$300 scramble certificate in 1988 and has blossomed into an experience we all enjoy," says Bob Lee.

Brady says the person who was his biggest helper and most influential in his showmanship, besides his family, was Cheramie Viator, a former national showmanship champion herself.

Cheramie won the national title in 1989 in Louisville. Brady met Cheramie two years ago, because she attends many of the same jackpot shows his sister does. He asked Cheramie if she would help him with his showmanship and she said yes. They began working together before the Texas state show and she gave him some pointers.

"Cheramie has always been there for me when I'm competing in a showmanship contest," said Brady. "When it was over she was right there to tell me what I could correct or maybe what I overlooked. She gave me a whole lot of support."

Cheramie gave Brady a hard time about the way he held his upper body when he showed, because it looked like he cut his neck off.

"She was always on me about that and she got me where I hold my head up and keep my shoulders straight," Brady says with a laugh.

Cheramie wasn't the only one who badgered Brady about his appearance in showmanship. At the state show, where he qualified, Pat Grote came up to Brady afterwards and told him he better find himself a belt before the national show. Pat says that the belt incident was kind of a joke between them in Columbus. Yes, he wore a belt.

Behind the Scenes Man

Brady has great confidence in his sister Micah. Since graduating from 4-H and being unable to show cattle himself, Brady has become the behind-the-scenes man for his sister. He helps her groom and fit her cattle for shows and gives her advice on showmanship. Brady's mom says the two of them get closer everytime they travel alone to a show and spend time just talking and working together.

He chuckles to himself because Micah often reminds him that he is fitting her calves. He hopes in the future his sister can experience the same accomplishment that Brady has.

Brady admires how hard his sister works with her calves and hopes she can be everything she wants to be. The brother-sister teamwork must be working because Micah currently has accumulated the most Angus exhibitor points in the Texas Club Calf Association jackpot shows.

"We look at showing as an investment in our kids, not as money," says their mom. Jeanette adds that both kids are independent and like to do things their own way, but in the end they are really proud of each other's accomplishments.

On the Horizon

Brady will be a sophomore at Weatherford Junior College this fall and is planning to transfer to Tarleton State University in Stephenville next year. He is a landscape design major and would like to have his own business someday. He always wanted to be an architect, but they spend too much time inside offices and Brady is an outside person.

"I'd like to get a degree in landscape design, but if a job came along to work for a ranch or around cattle, I wouldn't think twice about taking the job. I'd like to do something like that, just to do it and stay around it and have something (the landscape design) to fall back on," says Brady.

His love for the outdoors is reflected in his hobbies. Besides showing cattle, Brady enjoys waterskiing with his friends, playing softball and working on the ranch.

Brady is not only a good showman, he is a good observer of the beef industry and how the Angus breed fits into it.

"It's going to take support from everybody to keep the Angus seedstock business going," he says. "The Angus breed itself has changed a lot in the last 10 years, for the better. Everybody laughs about the belt-buckle Angus of the '50s and '60s. A few years ago Angus were 65 inches tall and weighed 2,800 pounds; just enormous. Now they're sizing them down and looking for higher meat quality, instead of just big framed cattle."

Brady feels that the industry is heading in the right direction and support of the Certified Angus Beef Program will play a major role in promotion of the Angus breed.

Brady Lee may have won the silver bowl, but he brought home something more important.

"I brought home a lot of great memories. Something that will be there forever and I'll be able to tell my grandkids about someday."