

# Getting Back in the Ring



**NJAA member  
overcomes farm  
accident to show cattle.**

*Story & photos by Nicole Lane, freelancer*

**O**n March 10, 2015, just three days before the Dickerson family's annual bull sale, tragedy struck in Paradise, Kan. Stephanie Dickerson and son Jayce, 12, were rushing through the regular chores in hopes of having some extra time to prepare for the event. Jayce was mixing feed for the show cattle, while mom was blowing them dry when the batch mixer became clogged with grain. An ordinary problem, Jayce reached in to fix the clog, something he had done many times before. This time, his hand slipped through the guard and was severed by the mixer.

Trying to remain calm, mom and son rushed to the nearest hospital in Russell, Kan., 20 minutes away. From there, Jayce was lifelifted to Children's Mercy hospital in Kansas City, Mo., where he spent 10 days, undergoing three separate surgeries. Though

surgeons spent many hours trying to repair the damage, Jayce lost the three middle fingers on his right hand, part of his thumb and a portion of his pinky.

For a boy whose passions include hunting, showing and fitting cattle, and who dreams of playing professional basketball, it seemed as though his favorite activities would forever be a thing of the past.

## **The right state of mind**

However, Jayce refused to let anything slow him down. Two weeks after the accident, he was running in a track meet. Although his hand didn't fully heal until the beginning of June, he wanted to get back in the

showing as soon as possible. Unfortunately, showing cattle takes two working hands and Jayce didn't have enough strength to grip a showstick, let alone hang on to a feisty heifer with one hand, even after eight weeks of occupational therapy.

Looking for a solution, his father, David, called Tim Fitzgerald of Cherry Knoll Farms, in West Grove, Pa. Though previously only acquaintances, Tim agreed to help. Tim's son Brody has a harness on his showstick that has allowed him to show competitively after being born with a partial hand. Tim gladly had a similar brace made just for Jayce.

The day before the Kansas Junior Angus Show, the brace arrived by mail. The family added the package to the loaded trailer and hit the road. Adjustments to the brace were made at the show, but they were unsure whether Jayce could handle the showing so soon after the accident. Hours later, with his mom a tearful mess ringside, Jayce led his heifer into the ring. He went on to take third overall in the showmanship contest, and made the state fitting team.

"After thinking I might not ever be able to show again, it was awesome to be out in the ring," says Jayce.

While getting back into the showing was an accomplishment in itself, Jayce was most proud of making the state fitting team. Bound and determined to participate at the National Junior Angus Show in Tulsa, Okla., he earned a spot on the team among much competition. His injury couldn't keep him out of the barn even if it had kept him from the showing. Stephanie shares that he was found practicing fitting legs many evenings during the summer.

She says that it was Jayce's perspective and attitude that helped him succeed.

"He's never looked at it as a handicap," she says. "When we didn't think he could do something, he would go out and prove us wrong."

## **Helping hands**

Stephanie shares that it was her "Angus family" who helped get her and their family through the experience. Normally a huge part of the family bull sale, she never made it to the event and instead spent the day by her son's side, on the opposite side of the state. Countless friends, community

members and family aided the Dickersons to get through their sale while Jayce was in the hospital. Several people visited him during his stay in Children's Mercy, sent gifts and words of encouragement, cooked meals and more.

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►Wearing a brace for his showstick like Brody Fitzgerald (top right), Jayce Dickerson was able to get back in the showing with support of his Angus family. He set the legs for the Kansas six-head entry at the National Junior Angus Show.



PHOTOS BY KASEY BROWN

never seen anyone who had so much ‘family,’” Stephanie says. Many friends who visited the hospital were logged as family as Jayce’s risk of infection limited him to only be seen by relatives.

“He had so many gift baskets, get-well cards, candy and balloons the nurses could barely get through the door,” she remembers.

When Jayce couldn’t take his steer into the ring at NJAS, someone was there to step in then, too.

Still working to gain strength in his hand and adjust to showing with the brace, Jayce still struggles to hang on to an upset animal. At NJAS, when his steer hit the cool air conditioning of the show arena, he became more than Jayce could handle. Luckily, Miranda Raithe, a close family friend, was happy to lead the steer into the ring for a boy she considers “like her little brother.”

Watching from just outside the shavings, Jayce was overjoyed when his animal was sorted to the top of the class. Although he wasn’t the one who showed the steer, it was his hard work and stockmanship that earned his first win at a national show.

Stephanie describes the assistance and support the family has received as overwhelming.

“The Kansas Angus family has always been close, but even people from other states

have reached out and been so supportive,” she shares. “I’m so humbled by the fact that people would do that.”

### In the blink of an eye

Farm accidents like the one the Dickersons experienced aren’t as rare as some would hope.

According to the National Children’s Center for Rural and Agricultural Health and Safety, about 38 children are injured in an agriculture-related accident every day. The same fact sheet shares that according to recent data, every three days a child

dies in an agriculture-related incident. The leading source for fatalities is machinery and vehicles; the leading sources of non-fatal accidents are surfaces (falls), animals and vehicles.

While rates of these incidents are declining, the Children’s Agricultural Safety Network recommends that some of the top things that can be done to prevent accidents are to turn off equipment, lower hydraulics and remove keys when equipment is not in use.

“It happens so fast,” says Stephanie. “He was doing something that he does almost every night at our house.”

She says complacency isn’t something to allow on a farm or ranch, especially when children are present.

“It only takes one time to slip up or make a mistake or not turn something off,” she says. “You never think it’s going to happen to you and then, with a blink of an eye, your whole world changes.”

To other farm youth Jayce says, “It’s important to be safe and always have an adult next to you when you do something.”

### Moving forward

Since the accident, Jayce has taught himself to shoot a basketball, shoot his gun and crossbow, and showed his heifer at the NJAS. For a boy whose eyes welled up with tears at the thought of never being able to show cattle again, he says overcoming obstacles is all about willpower.

“Just don’t worry about it, believe in yourself and don’t give up,” he advises.

Fearless and determined, Jayce says he looks forward to many more years in the showing, becoming a better fitter and playing competitive basketball.



**Editor’s Note:** Nicole Lane was an editorial intern for Angus Media this summer.

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**— Jayce Dickerson**