



PHOTOS BY MORGAN MARLEY

FIT FOR A WIN

Contest teaches young showmen teamwork and the value of friendship.

by **JD Rosman**, communications specialist, and **Shelby Mettlen**, assistant editor

More than 20 teams traveled to Des Moines, Iowa, for this year's team fitting contest at the National Junior Angus Show (NJAS). Illinois took home the gold this year, with team members Troy Rawlings, New Holland; Adam Miller, Gridley; Eric Schafer, Owaneco; and Garrett Handsaker, Pearl City.

Senior fitter Rawlings explains it's all about efficiency and working together as a team.

"It's all about quality of your teammates to be able to do fitting efficiently with one another," he says. "Everything just works so much smoother."



Each member of the team is responsible for fitting an area of the heifer, and she must be completely fitted in the allotted 30 minutes. Rawlings worked on the top, tail and non-show-side front leg. Miller was in charge of the non-show-side back leg and non-show-side belly.

As a senior showman, Rawlings also heads up efforts to keep everyone focused on the task at hand, but says, "I didn't really have anything to worry about on our team."

Starting them young

It's Rawlings's job as the senior fitter to work with the junior fitter, 12-year-old Miller, making sure he learns the ropes the right way to keep him on track for the future.

"Your senior members should be teaching the younger kids to make sure everything gets pulled correctly and that everything comes together efficiently," he says.

Young Miller has been watching his older

▶ **Above:** Illinois senior team member Troy Rawlings clips out his heifer's top.

▶ **Left:** Ellie Kidwell helps her junior team member ball their heifer's tail.

teammates at Prairie View Farms in Gridley, Ill., for so long, "he gets right down there" with them, Rawlings says.

"I didn't have to worry about him and his back leg," he continues. "I had to show him one thing, pulling his hock just a little bit more, but other than that Adam did a tremendous job."

Miller admits he gets "kind of nervous" around his older peers, but he knows they're his friends and there's nothing but respect between members of the team.

"I love fitting," Miller says, explaining that his desire to learn the trade began at just 5 years old. A couple of years later, he and his father worked on a heifer for their county fair, and the rest is history.

"I [keep] on progressing, working hard and trying to get better as I go along," the young showman says.

It's "really a privilege" to have input from more experienced fitters, Miller says, giving extra credit to his dad and his Uncle Brandon.

"I'm really thankful for all of those guys," he says. "They've really helped me a lot with what I've done."

On the clock

Thirty minutes isn't much time, especially to get a heifer looking her best for the showing, but it's not a problem for Rawlings and his team.

"We're glad we had four individuals who could get everything done and to do it efficiently at that. So, 30 minutes was kind of a stretch, but we got her done and she looked really good," he says.

The judges understand the time crunch and need for concentration. Dustin Smith of Storm Lake, Iowa, says he likes to see interaction between team members, but he steers away from interfering during the contest.

"It's a timed event, so being able to be efficient with your time and having a plan on how you're going to attack the situation is important," he says.

Practice makes perfect, and the more experience teams can get at different shows certainly helps the process of establishing teamwork and having a plan.

Judges didn't ask Rawlings any questions, and he's fine with that.

"That was almost kind of a good thing, because I really didn't have time to get away from the top, and I was kind of stressed on time to get everything done," he says.

Even so, Smith says judges pay attention to the interaction between junior and senior fitters.

"It gets a little bit difficult to see everything that goes on during the contest, but we sure do like to see the seniors helping out the junior exhibitors."

That's what the contest is all about, he continues, "teaching the next generation and the younger kids about what we're trying to



► **Above:** The Ohio team works together to put the final touches on their heifer as time winds down.



► **Right:** Adam Miller clips out his heifer's leg with precision.

accomplish within the fitting contest, and it's really good for those senior participants helping those younger kids along."

Miller says the NJAS is one of his "favorite shows on the planet."

"It's really good to meet new people and meet other friends you'll have for a lifetime," he says.

Smith describes the fitting contest as a "unique opportunity to get young people from different age groups together."

Like family

Fourteen-year-old Ellie Kidwell of Walhonding, Ohio, was one of the older members of her all-girl team. Before the show, she was still getting to know some of her teammates, and junior nationals brought all the pieces together seamlessly.

"It was a really great way to just hang out with [my teammates]," she says.

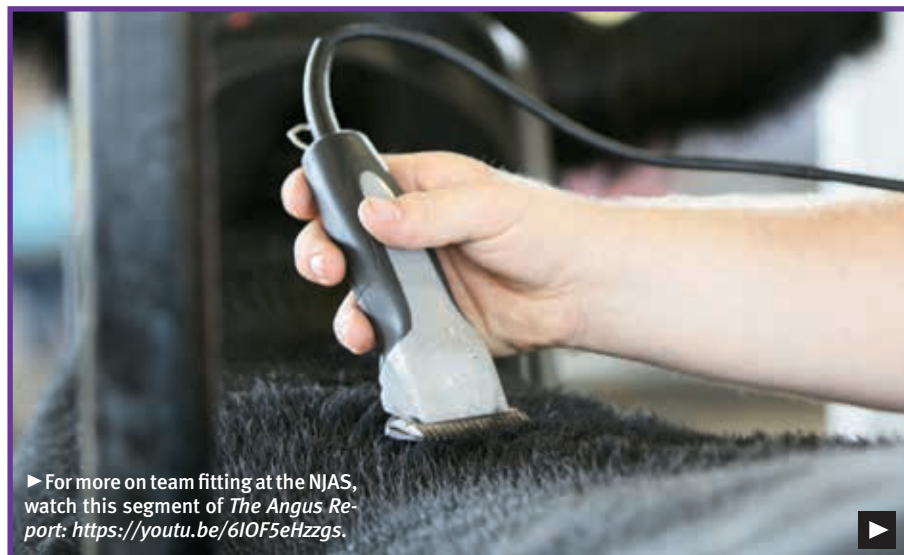
Kidwell points out "nothing will get done if you don't have a team that works together." "You have to have teamwork to get the job done and work together to get the heifer fitted to the best she can be," she says.

The number of cattle and size of the show is "overwhelming — in a good way," Kidwell says.

"It's such a great experience. This is the furthest west I've ever traveled, and I've gotten to meet so many people. It's just been awesome."

Like Miller, meeting new people and gaining new experiences are Kidwell's favorite parts of the NJAS.

"Junior nationals is very exciting, and there's lots of new people to meet and interact with," she says. "You can make lots of new friends, and it's just an amazing experience."



► For more on team fitting at the NJAS, watch this segment of *The Angus Report*: <https://youtu.be/61OF5eHzzgs>.

