

Armbruster Tops Showmanship

Oklahoma native wins 40th Annual National Junior Angus Showmanship Contest.

Story & photos by *Micky Wilson*

► Layne Armbruster of Burlington, Okla., competes for the champion showman title at the 40th Annual National Junior Angus Showmanship Contest. Armbruster went on to be named champion showman.

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As children on the playground, having your name called last was often embarrassing and disheartening, as it usually meant you were the last one picked to be on a team. But just the opposite was true at the 2006 National Junior Angus Showmanship Contest. The best these top showmen could hope for was to have their name called last, meaning they won perhaps the most prestigious junior showmanship contest in the country.

As Saturday morning, July 15, wore on, 15 finalists lined up side-by-side, waiting impatiently for the results of the contest to be announced. Perhaps the most nervous to hear the results was Layne Armbruster, 19, of Burlington, Okla.

Her goal was to make the top five, so she was pleasantly surprised when her name was called last and put up on the screen in the first-place slot.

The contest

The National Junior Angus Showmanship Contest is one of the most prominent and challenging showmanship contests in the cattle industry. Originally organized by Dean Hurlbut to encourage young men and women to become interested in showing Angus cattle, the top showman award is accordingly named the Dean Hurlbut Award.

Participants are chosen to attend the contest by their respective state Angus associations. Two participants and two alternates are allowed to represent each



PHOTO BY SHAUNA ROSE HERMEL

► Layne was one of 43 contestants in the preliminary round of the showmanship competition, which took place in four heats Friday afternoon. Fifteen showmen advanced to the finals.

state. Contestants may compete for the title of champion showman only once.

The contest has two parts. The first part, the preliminaries, were Friday afternoon, July 14. This year, 43 contestants representing 26 states participated in the showmanship preliminaries, showing in one of four classes, each with 10 or 11 showmen. From those 43 contestants, 15 were chosen as finalists to

compete for champion showman. Layne was one of those finalists.

Early Saturday morning brought the showmanship finals where Layne was eventually named champion.

“It was intense,” Layne said of the finals. “It was definitely good, though. I wasn’t too nervous going into it. It’s not like a test that you can study up for the night before. It’s just kind of how you do it and whether the judges like the way that you show or not.”

Layne is no newcomer to the Angus world.

“My family has always raised and shown registered Angus cattle, and I started [showing] when I was 9 and have been doing it ever since,” she said, explaining the family tradition. Her parents, Karen and Alan Armbruster, both have agricultural roots and showed cattle while growing up.

“My older sister started showing before I did, so I was always around and continued the tradition of showing cattle when I became old enough,” Layne said. “Next year is my last year to be able to compete in the National Junior Angus Show.”

The NJAS was a little different for Layne this year, as she competed in only showmanship and the live show. “This year I didn’t compete in any contests. I



► Above: Layne gets some clothing tips from her mother, Karen, before going into showmanship finals at the NJAS.

► Right: Layne was named champion showman during the NJAS. She was awarded a cash prize, a belt buckle and a silver Revere bowl.



just brought one heifer up. I usually do the Cook-Off, quiz bowl, all that other stuff. But this year, this was it," she explained. "I wasn't able to be here the whole time [due to] work and school and stuff." Layne attends Oklahoma State University and will be a sophomore this fall. She is majoring in agricultural communications.

Family foundation

A graceful, confident showman, Layne and her family have emphasized the showmanship part of the showing over placings in the live show.

"Showmanship has always been a really important thing to us because we haven't always had the best cattle. We've always tried to pride ourselves in showmanship, knowing that is one of the most important things in the industry," she explained. Ultimately, she said, it doesn't matter how you do in the showing, it's how you present your calf.

Additionally, Layne's family has portrayed a positive influence on her in and out of the showing.

"My family has always encouraged and supported me, whether I was in the showing or competing in sports. They've always been behind me, and reminded me who I am and what I can accomplish," Layne said. "My sister, Kelli, has paved the way for me my entire life and is definitely one of my biggest fans."

As part of that tradition, she's become accustomed to winning showmanship contests — on the state level, at least. "I've won the Oklahoma Junior Angus showmanship contest three or four times, but I've never competed in a national [contest] or even a regional, so this is the first big one."

The winning moment

While Layne may not have been nervous going into the ring on Saturday morning for showmanship finals, after the heifers left the ring, butterflies entered her stomach.

"I was so nervous. My goal was top five," she said. After the fifth- and fourth-place winners were announced Layne resigned herself to not making the top five. When they announced her as the first-place winner, it was a big surprise.

But after taking a few moments to think about it, Layne said she thought she won the contest, "because I've been doing it so long, it's routine. I wasn't really nervous because to me, it is how you present the calf, not yourself. I always try to stay confident, but calm and relaxed. You can't get too worked



► **Left:** Layne shakes hands with American Angus Auxiliary secretary-treasurer Nancy Thelen after the contest. Sharee Sankey, Auxiliary president from Kansas, holds one of the silver Revere bowls the Auxiliary awarded to the top five showmen.

► **Below:** Layne gets a hug from a family friend after being named champion showman at the NJAS.



up or it just looks like you're trying too hard."

Offering advice for future National Junior Angus Showmanship contestants, Layne said, "Be confident in the way that you show, and just know that maybe some days the judge likes it, maybe some days [they] don't. No matter what, be confident in the way you do things."



Judging considerations and awards

The showmanship contest was judged by Gary Dameron, Lexington, Ill.; Corinne Kephart, Pleasureville, Ky.; and Richie Oakes, Putnam, Okla. Deanna Hofing, Indianapolis, Ind., served as the surrogate judge. Judges were to consider the following items when choosing their champions for the National Junior Angus Showmanship Contest.

- 1) Skill, handling and response of the animal.
- 2) Ability to follow instructions during the contest.
- 3) Use of equipment by the contestant.
- 4) Evidence of courtesy and sportsmanship of the contestant.
- 5) General appearance of the contestant.

Finalists awards. The 15 finalists received a set of Andis® clippers donated by Andis. The American Angus Association awarded \$75 to sixth through 15th place.

Top five awards. Prizes awarded by the Hamilton James Memorial Fund to the top five showmen were as follows: first, \$350; second, \$250; third, \$175; fourth, \$125; and fifth, \$100. The American Angus Auxiliary presented silver Revere bowls to the top five showmen.

Champion showman. The champion showman also received the Jake White Memorial Belt Buckle, a custom-designed trophy buckle made by Howard Feldman.