

# Contestants, Mark Your Cards

Indiana hosts judging contest  
for first time in more than a decade.

Story & photos by **Micky Wilson**

**B**efore journeying down one of the many roads leading to the 2006 National Junior Angus Show (NJAS), James Fisher, American Angus Association director of activities and junior activities, shared with the *Angus Journal* some insights about a contest somewhat new to the event.

“The last time we did a judging contest was in 1993,” Fisher said. “This year the Indiana Junior Angus Association is working with Clint Rusk from Purdue University to help coordinate and host it.”

Rusk hails from Kansas, where he grew up raising Angus and Hereford cattle. He graduated from Kansas State University, coached numerous judging teams at Colorado State University, and is currently in charge of animal projects for the Department of Youth Development and Agricultural Education at Purdue University.

Tom Younts, an Indiana native and Purdue University graduate, also helped organize the contest. He teaches vocational agriculture at

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Hamilton Southeastern High School in Indiana and raises Angus cattle. Younts showed at the first NJAS hosted by Indiana in Logansport in 1972.

Additionally, Phil Reid, a Virginia native and Virginia Tech University graduate, helped secure awards for the contest. He is currently employed by Purdue University in the animal science department.

Fisher said contest organizers felt the judging competition would be something Angus juniors would really enjoy and the organizers wanted to work to provide the contest. The National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) made room on the time schedule, but the Indiana Junior Angus Association was solely responsible for taking charge of the contest and hosting it.

Because it wasn’t coordinated by the NJAA, Fisher explained, the judging contest did not count for sweepstakes points.

“During the time the judging contest is planned in the schedule this year the staff and NJAA Board is stretched to the limit coordinating and running other contests and competitions,” Fisher explained. “Thus, having a hosting state group or university’s involvement in the contest is vital to its overall success.

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► **Right:** Cody Washam, Pierce City, Mo., marks his card after placing a class during the judging contest.



"I would anticipate it to be an excellent competition," Fisher concluded.

**And that it was ...**

Conducted Tuesday, July 11, the judging contest pulled in a total of 342 participants, making it one of the largest contests at the NJAS. Judging participants placed four classes of cattle — two classes of heifers, one class of bulls and one class of steers — answered 10 questions, and guessed the weight of a bull.

"We decided that we'd put one of these puppies on," Younts explained enthusiastically. "It was a new frontier [for the NJAS], but it was old hat for us. There's so many Angus people that judge on judging teams, so we thought this would be a good fit."

Rusk and Younts had helped with judging contests for the American Hereford Association and the American Shorthorn Association at their junior nationals a few years ago, making this the third time they had coordinated a judging contest for a national breed show in Indiana.



► While many judging contests include an adult category to get more numbers, contest organizers opted to reserve this contest for juniors, Tom Younts explained.

"We both really believe in livestock judging and feel there are a lot of life skills that can be learned from the judging contest," Rusk said. "Eventually, regardless of what job you go into, you're going to have to be able to make decisions. The people that are paid well are those that can make decisions and verbally explain their ideas. We think this activity develops these skills."

Rusk went on to explain that all through one's school career, from elementary school to high school and on through college, there are opportunities to gain verbal skills. "We have debate teams that teach public speaking," he said, "but livestock judging teaches a combination of decision-making and public speaking. You have to make a decision in a set amount of time."

Being in the judge's shoes can also give juniors an appreciation for the judge they'll be showing under in the next few days, Rusk continued. "I think it gives them a little more appreciation for somebody standing out in the ring making decisions all day long on difficult classes."

**Organization tactics**

"We tried to make these classes placeable, so there were

some really good animals, and some that weren't as good, so the students could see the differences," Rusk said as he explained the selection of the cattle classes.

Because it had been a while since the NJAS had conducted a judging contest, the contest organizers weren't sure what kind of participation to expect.

"Being a first, you just never know," Younts said. "We thought we would have a good turnout, but we didn't know whether to expect 600 or 150."

"I had my graduate student put together enough card packets for 500 contestants," Rusk said. "That was our upper end." Brian Howell, Rusk's graduate student, is a former National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) Board member.

Anticipating a good turnout of participants, the organizing committee wanted to recognize as many winning participants as possible. Instead of just a few people receiving prizes, the awards were broken down into 13 age divisions, from nine thru 21, and the top five in each division were recognized at the awards ceremony Friday night.

Wilson Trailer Sales, managed by Rick Davis, sponsored the awards for the judging contest, Younts explained. "We talked to Rick, and he wanted to sponsor part of the NJAS. He really believes in the benefits of judging."

**Future contests**

Looking down the road to future junior nationals, Younts said, "Hopefully this will be something the Association will pick up and say, 'We had over 300 kids involved. Maybe from now on we'll offer a judging contest.'"



► Left: The judging contest had a total of 342 participants, making it one of the largest contests at the NJAS.



► Phil Reid (left) helped secure awards for the judging contest. Rick Davis, manager of Wilson Trailer Sales, sponsored the awards.

Rusk agrees. "I would guess that, other than showing cattle, we had more kids participate in the judging contest than any other single activity, besides the opening ceremony. Any kid that wanted to could sign up and come mark cards," he said.

Fisher agreed the contest was a popular addition to this year's schedule, adding that the possibility of future contests will rely on assistance of state hosts.

"Making the judging contest a permanent fixture at the National Junior Angus Show will require full involvement and

organization by the hosting state," he said. "If the host state works with the land-grant university in the state or other colleges and universities to coordinate the contest it could become a very educational and fun part of the competitions at the NJAS."

### Sincere appreciation

"We want to thank the people that donated their animals and showed them in the contest," Rusk said. "We couldn't have a good contest without high-quality animals. We also want to thank the officials." Serving as officials for the contest were Jack Ward of Missouri, and Steve Patton and Carroll Bloom, both of Indiana.

"It takes a lot of people to put on a judging contest," he continued. "If Tom and I would have stopped last night and thought about it, we'd have been so nervous we couldn't have slept, because we were counting on so many people to help us with the contest.

"When I went through the barn and asked people if I could use their animals, I only had one person that didn't say 'yes,'" Rusk explained. "Everyone else that I asked said

they would be glad to help. They were willing to show their own animal or get someone to show it."

Exhibitors can be sensitive about using their animals in a judging contest prior to the show, Rusk said. "But, several of them commented how much it helped their animals to make them stand for 30 minutes at a time in the same showing they're going to show in later in the week."

Both Younts and Rusk were very pleased with the participant turnout, volunteer enthusiasm and facilities. Said Rusk, "I don't know anywhere else in America you could go and have a contest on green shavings with gold curtains in the background."



► Right: A judging contest participant kneels during the placing of the classes.

► Left: Clint Rusk (left) helped organize the judging contest, while Carroll Bloom served as an official.



► Above: Some of the younger judging contest participants relaxed as the end of the contest neared.