

Curless Named World Champ

Illinois auctioneer wins
2017 World Livestock Auctioneer Championship.



Brian Curless of Pittsfield, Ill., proved his world-class talent as a livestock auctioneer at the 54th annual World Livestock Auctioneer Championship (WLAC), presented by the Livestock Marketing Association (LMA). Public Auction Yards, Billings, Mont., hosted the contest Saturday, June 17.

Curless was raised in the livestock marketing industry, but did not originally have any interest in becoming an auctioneer. During his mid-20s, Curless recognized the need for livestock auctioneers as the population of current auctioneers was aging. He attended auction school and from there, had “put WLAC champions on a pedestal.”

The newly crowned champion notes

Jack Lowderman and Bob Evans as personal mentors, while recognizing other auctioneers like Stanley Stout and 1987 WLAC Champion Jeff Stokes as “heroes” in the livestock auctioneering world.

In 2012, Curless competed in a WLAC qualifying event for the first time. Six years of competing later, he won the title and is now looking forward to a year of representing the LMA and livestock marketing industry. Curless reminds other auctioneers that perseverance is key in pursuing the WLAC Championship and to not get discouraged.

This year’s champion takes home a customized 2017 Ford truck to use during the year of his reign; \$5,000 cash;

a championship bronze sculpture; world champion Gist belt buckle and a hand-tooled leather briefcase from LMA; world champion ring sponsored by Public Auction Yards; the Golden Gavel Award sponsored by the World Wide College of Auctioneering; and a James Reid Ltd. money clip sponsored by *CattleUSA.com*.

Curless was sponsored by Fairview Sale Barn, Fairview, Ill.; F&T Livestock, Palmyra, Mo.; and Kirksville Livestock LLC.

A special WLAC show hosted by 2010 World Livestock Auctioneer Champion Kyle Shobe aired on RFD-TV on June 26. The show included a special segment highlighting the 70th anniversary of the LMA.

Other awards received

Cody Lowderman from Macomb, Ill., earned reserve champion honors, and Will Epperly from Dunlap, Iowa, was named runner-up champion.

As reserve champion, Lowderman received \$2,000 cash, a Gist knife and reserve champion Gist belt buckle from LMA. Additionally, Lowderman was named the 2017 Audrey K. Banks “Rookie of the Year” and was awarded \$500 cash by LMA in recognition of an impressive display of talent at his first WLAC competition. He also won the award for high interview score. Doing so, he received \$1,000 cash and a hand-tooled leather padfolio from the LMA. Lowderman was sponsored by Carthage Livestock Inc.

Epperly took home \$1,000 cash, a Gist knife and runner-up Gist belt buckle, sponsored by LMA. He was sponsored by Dunlap Livestock Auction, Dunlap, Iowa; West Point Livestock Auction Inc., West Point, Neb.; and S&B Cattle Co., Lexington, Ky.

In addition to Curless, Lowderman and Epperly, the 2017 WLAC finalists were Colton Brantley, Clovis, Calif.; Mike Godberson, Pawnee, Okla.; Brennin Jack, Prince Albert, Sask., Canada; Jacob Massey, Petersburg, Tenn.; Justin Mebane, Bakersfield, Calif.; Jared Miller, Leon, Iowa; and Russele Sleep, Bedford, Iowa. All received Gist belt buckles from LMA.

Remaining semi-finalists who competed in the WLAC: Mitch Barthel, Perham, Minn.; Neil Bouray, Webber, Kan.; Ab Carroll, Downeyville, Ont., Canada; Leon Casselman, Long Lane, Mo.; Lance Cochran, Medford, Okla.; Eric Drees, Nampa, Idaho; Phillip Gilstrap, Pendleton, S.C.; Brandon Hamel, Damar, Kan.; Garrett Jones, Los Banos, Calif.; Dan Koupal, Dante, S.D.; Corey Lawrence, Thorsby, Alta., Canada; Wade Leist, Boyne City, Mich.; Blake McDaniel, Tallasse, Ala.; Brandon McLagan, Unionville, Mo.; Daniel Mitchell, Cumberland, Ohio; Lander Nicodemus, Cheyenne, Wyo.; Jay Romine,

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Mount Washington, Ky.; Curtis Wetovick, Fullerton, Neb.; Tim Yoder, Montezuma, Ga.; Billy Younkin, Cecil, Ala.; and Zack Zumstein, Prairie, Idaho.

Each of the semi-finalists received a custom WLAC hat can from LMA and a jacket, gift certificate for a custom hat from Rand's, and a basket of Montana Proud items from the host market.

WLAC qualification and scoring

Thirty of the semi-finalists were selected during three regional qualifying events that took place at LMA member markets in the United States. As the international auctioneer champion is always given a "bye" to become an automatic semi-finalist, Corey Lawrence qualified as the champion from Calgary Stampede's International Livestock Auctioneer Championship in Canada.

When not on the auction block at the livestock market at which he regularly sells, Curless will spend his year traveling the country sharing his auctioneering skills with other livestock auction markets, and acting as a spokesperson for the industry. Therefore, each semi-finalist had an opportunity to establish their knowledge of the livestock marketing business, and to show their ability to express that knowledge with clarity in a judged interview session on Friday of the championship.

The auctioneering phase of the contest is conducted during an actual sale, with live bidders in the seats. Contestants were judged on the clarity of their auction chant; vocal quality; their ability to catch bids and conduct the sale; and finally, if the judge would hire the auctioneer for their own livestock market.

Following the semi-finals, 10 finalists were selected to return to the auction ring for the

About the championship

In June 1963, the Livestock Marketing Association (LMA) hosted the first World Livestock Auctioneer Championship (WLAC) at the Cosmopolitan Hotel in Denver, Colo. The purpose was to spotlight North America's top livestock auctioneers and to salute their traditionally important role in the competitive livestock marketing process. That year, 23 auctioneers from the United States and Canada sold the same 20 head of cattle over and over again.

The contest was conducted at hotels until 1967, when it traveled to its first LMA member market. Since then, the WLAC has been hosted in conjunction with the LMA Marketing Industry Convention at member markets around the United States and Canada. Recent locations include California; Missouri; Montana; Tennessee; Kansas; South Dakota; and Alberta, Canada.

Though the rules have changed, the enthusiasm for the competition hasn't. On average each year, nearly 100 auctioneers enter the qualifying events and only 31 (10 from each qualifying event and one from the auctioneering competition at Calgary Stampede) are selected to compete in the WLAC. The championship consists of three stages: the regional qualifying events at different markets around the country, followed by the semi-finals and the finals that are hosted each June in conjunction with the LMA Annual Convention. Contestants competing for the World Champion title must be 18 years old, employed as a livestock auctioneer and sponsored by a local, fixed-facility auction market that conducts at least one sale per week.

LMA is proud to sponsor an event that brings together North America's top livestock auctioneers in a competition that showcases professionalism and promotes the auction method of selling livestock.

final round where they sold additional drafts of cattle, and were judged again, based on the same criteria.

The 2017 interview judges were Russell Nemetz, Northern Broadcasting System in Billings, Mont.; Brody Peak, Emporia Livestock Sales, Emporia, Kan.; Curt Sporleder, Unionville Livestock Market Inc., Unionville, Mo.; Fred Wacker, Montana Stockgrowers Association, Helena, Mont.; and Billy Wallace, Valley Stockyard Inc., Decatur, Ala.

The 2017 live auction judges were Billy Easter, Wichita Livestock Sales Co. LLC, Wichita Falls, Texas; Carl McKettrick Jr., Arcadia Stockyard, Arcadia, Fla.; John Rodgers, 1986 world livestock auctioneer

champion and Visalia Stockman's Market Inc., Visalia, Calif.; Thor Roseth, Philip Livestock Auction LLC, Philip, S.D.; and Dan Williams, 1982 world livestock auctioneer champion and WK-3 Cattle Co., Boone, N.C.

The 2017 LMA Annual Convention and WLAC was sponsored in part by the Meadowbrook Star Insurance Group, Cattlemen's Beef Board, and the official animal health sponsor, Boehringer Ingelheim Vetmedica Inc. More information can be found at www.lmaweb.com.



Editor's Note: This article was provided by LMA.