

HUMAN MOMENTS

A champion lives more for the memories than the titles and ribbons.

by Megan Silveira, assistant editor

One might remember the sound of their blood rushing as they stepped foot in the ring. Another could list the shine of the silver pitcher in their hands under the arena lights. Another still recalls the thrill of hearing their name announced over the loudspeaker.

For Paige Lemenager, however, her favorite memory of the National Junior Angus Showmanship Contest is a bit quieter. It doesn't include the cattle or involve the show ring at all, actually.

Lemenager says her favorite moment occurred "backstage," in the tunnel of the American Royal Complex. Though the Hudson, Ill., native says she treasures the moment when her name was announced as this year's winner of the showmanship contest, it was the comradery she had with her competitors in between the events she'll never forget.

"It's become my second nature to be aware of who you're surrounding yourself with. I want to be with people who work hard and are determined," she explains. "We were in the tunnel, sitting in chairs and just talking about our favorite things. I was just trying to enjoy the company of those around me and be human. I



Paige Lemenager

was trying to focus on the good."

It's not about the ribbon, buckle, banner or silver pitcher for Lemenager. Though she possesses a desire to always put her best foot forward, she measures life more by the moments that take her breath away. The 18-year-old is proud of the accomplishments she had in Kansas City; but moreover, she's proud to have shared her latest win with people she calls friends.

"I was surrounded by the best 15 showmen in the senior division at junior nationals," Lemenager says. "The judges sorted the good from the great. I was humbled to stand alongside each and every contestant. It was a really proud moment for me to be an Angus breeder."

Making her moment

Today, Lemenager is a well-known force in the show ring, but she says it's taken years of hard work and

dedication to become a showman worthy of representing her state at the national level.

Lemenager was born into a family passionate about the beef industry. Her family founded Lemenager Cattle and began establishing their Angus herd in the '90s.

Cousin Gabrielle was actually the one who

inspired Lemenager to grab the end of show halter. From Gabrielle's time exhibiting show cattle to the days she wore the green coat of the National Junior Angus Board (NJAB), Lemenager says she always wanted to be like her cousin.

While nowadays she exhibits a variety of breeds as a senior showman, Lemenager says her beginning years were spent alongside Angus females. These early memories first instilled a love for *the Business Breed*.

In addition to moments of family bonding and personal growth, Lemenager says her parents, Luke and Stacy, took her career in the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) as a time to teach her what it takes to excel as a showman.

"Every time I go in and out of the ring — no matter what — my parents coach me on what I could do better. We never settled," she says. "Cool,

NATIONAL JUNIOR ANGUS SHOW



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Beyond the skills it takes to present an animal to the highest standard, Lemenager says she views the show ring as a place to make a human connection with her fellow competitors. Many might focus solely on the relationship they can establish in the moment with the judges, but she says she searches for moments to “be a human” in the eyes of fellow exhibitors.

“The older I’ve gotten, the more I’ve come to appreciate that you only have so many years in the show ring,” Lemenager says. “I try not to let the competition get the best of me, but help others in the process. I hope other juniors get to feel that — it’s a family.”

From a kind smile flashed in the direction of the exhibitor ahead of her to a helping hand lent to the 8-year-old struggling at their first show, Lemenager finds ways to extend a moment of human kindness amidst the heat of the competition.

“I try to get the most out of the experience at all times, whether it’s for me or for someone else,” she adds.

Human experience

Though many wait until their last year in the NJAA to enter the

showmanship contest, Lemenager says she couldn’t resist the opportunity to compete in Kansas City. Beyond having a personal attachment to the heritage of the area and the American Royal facility, she says the timing just felt right.

After qualifying to represent Illinois, Lemenager made it her goal to make the top 15 showmen.

“I had met my goal heading into finals,” she says, “but you don’t settle once you meet your goals.”

Lemenager gave the final round her all, focusing on her animal and staying cool, calm and collected —

just like her parents had taught her. It was a method that certainly worked.

Standing in a line on the final day of the NJAS with her fellow competitors, Lemenager says she found herself choked up with each name that was called. They were friends she had made during her junior career, people she respected and showmen she was proud to stand alongside.

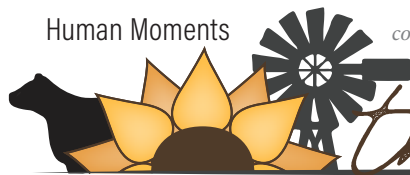
“I was going to be excited for whoever it was,” she says of the moments before the champion was announced. “I thought I had done my absolute best, and I was truly at peace

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Tips from a Champion

Paige Lemenager offers insight into excelling in the show ring.

- ▶ **Adopt the three C’s.** Lemenager was taught to stay cool, calm and collected in the show ring, and it’s a technique she can’t recommend enough to fellow showmen. Stepping into the ring can be intimidating, but Lemenager says it’s vital to learn how to control your nerves. If a showman can stay calm, odds are higher the animal will stay calm as well.
- ▶ **Focus on the livestock.** Though an element of showmanship is how the showman appears, Lemenager says the star of the show is the animal. It matters less how the you’re standing and more so how you’re making the animal appear. She encourages junior members to keep the spotlight on their cattle rather than themselves.
- ▶ **Learn to connect with the animal.** One of the things Lemenager thinks sets her apart is the connection she has with her cattle. She says she loves her stock, and she hopes people outside the ring can see that love in the way she handles herself at the end of the halter. Showing is a team effort, so Lemenager says the better you know your animal, the better you’ll perform together.
- ▶ **Never settle.** There’s something new to learn every day. Being involved in the agriculture business requires a persistent passion, according to Lemenager. She adopted the mindset from her father, and she hopes other showmen can find their own grit, too.



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with how I had done in the ring. I thought to myself, 'no regrets.'"

When the number 45 was announced, Lemenager says she immediately had a new favorite number. The tears flowed and hugs were passed around before the Illinois junior stepped forward to claim her silver bowl.

"I get choked up. That's just how I am," she says with a laugh. "It is emotional. It is something you work for. I heard my name called, and it was indescribable — it was just pure joy."

This sense of happiness, pride and comradery is what Lemenager finds so addictive about the cattle industry. She is set to attend Lake Land College this fall where she will compete on the livestock judging team. She will later transfer to a university to pursue a degree in agricultural economics.

It's a choice she says reflects her desire to one day find a career as an attorney, where she can give back to the industry that built her by supporting farmers and ranchers in estate and succession planning.

No matter where life takes her, the young Angus breeder knows cattle will always be a part of her future.

"Once I turn 22, I won't be done," she explains. "And I think that's one of the most empowering things about the breed. There are countless ways to continue making a difference. There's a bigger goal in mind than just winning the show. There's a greater purpose for showing cattle."



After hugging the family members present in Kansas City, Lemenager says the first thing she did was call her grandfather with the good news.

As a showman in the height of her junior career, it is more than just a livestock competition. For Lemenager, it's a chance to have a human moment.

It's a chance to create memories, find her role in the agriculture industry as a powerful female figure, enjoy the company of others who share her passion and, hopefully, inspire others to do the same. **A**

TOP 15 SHOWMEN



PHOTO BY PEARLS PICS, COURTESY OF AMERICAN ANGUS ASSOCIATION

TOP 5 SHOWMEN

1. Paige Lemenager, Hudson, Ill.
2. Walker McDermott, Wiotia, Iowa
3. Lauren Frederick, Hutchinson, Kan.
4. Taylor Kelner, Bradley, Ark.
5. Olivia Gerloff, Bland, Mo.

The 2022 National Junior Angus Showmanship Contest top 15 finalists (from left) are Dalton Chambers, Tenino, Wash.; Lily Gisclair, Longville, La.; Tyler Getzlaff, Ocala, Fla.; Jordyn Wickard, Greenfield, Ind.; Olivia Gerloff, Bland, Mo.; Taylor Kelner, Bradley, Ark.; Lauren Frederick, Hutchinson, Kan.; Walker McDermott, Wiotia, Iowa; Paige Lemenager, Hudson, Ill.; J. Gordon Clark, Gretna, Va.; Mycah Weaver, Dougherty, Iowa; Dawson Johnson, Pipestone, Minn.; Karson Patton, Frankfort, Ind.; Sydney Johnson, Orlando, Okla.; and Victoria Gerken, Cashion, Okla.