



Courtesy of Ronald Blackwell

The tie that binds

His palms were sweating as he looked over his notes for the last time.

"I shouldn't be nervous. I've done this hundreds of times," he thought.

But as he tried to calm himself, the butterflies began fluttering in his stomach. Suddenly, the door opened into the room before him. It was time. He took a deep breath, closed his eyes and entered.

Once inside, the room seemed to close in around him. He moved into position, and the reasons taker signaled for him to begin. He opened his mouth to speak but nothing came out.

He thought, "Hey! Get it together. You can't let your team down!"

Then suddenly in his mind he could see the four steers before him and he began.

"I placed this class of market steers 2, 4, 1, 3. ..."

Few experiences in college prepare students for life like participating on a judging team. Judging livestock, meats or horses is fun and a great way to see new places. For some, it becomes a way of life that continues long after their college days are over.

The experiences and memories made during that one year of judging are forever glued in their minds. Some can still vividly remember this experience more than 50 years later. While each team is unique, a few special teams stand out, among them the 1953 Oklahoma A&M livestock judging team.

The team consisted of 10 members, all male. They are unique because all 10 plus their coach became leaders in their careers and because most of them stayed within the livestock industry.

"We were truly dedicated to the livestock industry. We each had a farming and livestock background," said team member Ron Blackwell. "This is the sole thing that made us successful."

The team was challenged that year when their original coach, Glen Bratcher, became head of the animal science department in the middle of the judging season. Robert Totusek took over.

"Coaching was a new venture for me," Totusek said. "It was my first year as a coach, and these guys taught me so much. They were really a fun bunch to work with."

The team won at contests in Ft. Worth and Oklahoma City, but it was hard having a new coach in the middle of the season, especially a first-time coach. However, in spite of not winning the championship at Kansas City and Chicago, the team won a number of individual and team trophies.

"The guys were very, very capable, and all had great livestock backgrounds,"

Totusek said. "After college, they were all successful in their careers and most of them stayed in the livestock industry. They had a great sense of humor and had a lot of fun with each other."

Blackwell said Totusek took over as coach at a contest in Oklahoma City.

"It was a pretty hard transition to make," Blackwell said. "But it didn't affect us as a team. It worked out."

Team member Grady Ford said being on Totusek's first team was really a highlight for them.

"I remember going to a contest in Chicago," Ford said. "We used to travel in a station wagon. As you can imagine, with seven team members and a coach it was very crowded. We practiced judging all the way to Chicago, stopping off at various places to practice such as the University of Illinois and Purdue. It took us about a week to get there."

Team member Gene Kuykendall said the personality of the team was really great then and still is today.

"Every few years we get together for a reunion that mainly consists of fishin' and golf and a lot of visiting and reminiscing," he said.

Kuykendall also said the 47-year reunion in 2000 was very special, because all 10 team members and their spouses were able to attend."

Totusek said each of these men learned from being part of the team and this experience has proven beneficial throughout their respective careers.

"College taught me how to think, and the team opened my mind to being able to make quick, appropriate decisions," Ford said. "This really helped me with my fast-paced business."

Ford said having to give oral reasons on the classes — a one-to two-minute speech defending the way you placed a class of animals — helped him to get up in front of people and be able to explain himself in a believable, positive way.

Blackwell said he learned that nothing takes the place of hard work. He also said that even giving oral reasons gave him a sense of individuality.

Kuykendall said his experience on the team was unbelievable.

"Judging helped me learn how to make decisions," Kuykendall said. "It taught me how to speak in front of people and not be afraid. By giving oral reasons you are able to express yourself in a convincing way. This really helped me in my career because I sometimes gave two or three speeches a week."

"So many people out of college today have a problem communicating," he said. "Judging helps us overcome that."

Totusek said judging today only differs from that of 1953 in terms of the desired type of animal, where there have been drastic changes.

Ford said being on the team helped him adapt to these changes. He said livestock has changed during the last 60 years and continues to do so in the areas of marketing and production.

When asked what today's teams can learn from their example, Kuykendall replied, "Work ethic is very important."

The 1953 team members have used this work ethic to be successful in their careers. Kuykendall is the former executive vice president of Beefmaster Breeders Universal and Blackwell is the former executive vice president of the American Quarter Horse Association.

Ford worked for Wilson Meat Co. in top-level management along with Buddy Bonfy. Leon Freeze was a fieldman for the American Hereford Association. Melvin Greeley established his own worldwide nutritional consulting and manufacturing company. John McKnight is the former president of the American Hereford Association and the American Brangus Breeders Association.

Art Knox was successful in the steel

business. R.J. Cooper taught and did research at St. Louis College of Pharmacy, and Dale Wooderson was successful in the livestock and seed industries.

Kuykendall, McKnight and Blackwell are graduates of distinction in the OSU Department of Animal Science.

In addition to teaching and research, Robert Totusek successfully coached the OSU livestock judging team for eight years. He later became head of the animal science department.

Totusek summed up the team's importance: "They illustrated to the highest degree that commitment and dedication can be carried over from the judging team to lifelong professions."

"And for these reasons I placed this class of market steers 2, 4, 1, 3." He breathed a sigh of relief. "It's over! I did it," he thought. He smiled as he walked back to greet his coach and team, he thought, "This has truly been an amazing year." Gg

*By Summer DeHart
Chickasha, Okla.*



Courtesy of Ronald Blackwell

Bob Totusek (left) coached the 1953 livestock judging team: Gene Kuykendall, Leon Freeze, Melvin Greeley, Art Knox, Grady Ford, Buddy Bonfy, R.J. Cooper, Dale Wooderson and Ronald Blackwell (not pictured John McKnight).



Courtesy of Art Knox

All 10 team members were present at the 47-year reunion. Coach Robert Totusek (left), Gene Kuykendall, Leon Freeze, Melvin Greeley, John McKnight, Art Knox, Grady Ford, Buddy Bonfy, R.J. Cooper, Dale Wooderson and Ronald Blackwell.

Opposite page: The 1953 team won the Ft. Worth contest: Ronald Blackwell (front from left) Art Knox, Dale Wooderson, Gene Kuykendall, (back) Buddy Bonfy, Grady Ford, John McKnight and coach Glen Bratcher.