

Judging pays off for coach, team

By Barb Bierman

From September through May his teams practically live, eat and breathe together. Every spare minute is spent practicing, in hopes that little extra effort will give them the winning edge.

The mind behind the scenes, however, is not that of a typical coach, but that of Richard B. Warren, head of the UNL livestock judging team.

Warren has been coaching judging teams at UNL since 1958, and they are consistent winners.

"We're ranked higher than the football team. We've won the American Royal (Kansas City) three times, the National Barrow Show (Austin, Minn.) eight times and were ranked number four in a national contest out of 40 teams last year," he said.

Well-traveled judge

The 55-year-old professor received his bachelor's degree from Kansas State in 1948 and his master's from Oklahoma State in 1950. He began working with judging teams at Michigan State in 1949.

He said he has judged livestock contests in 38 states and Canada.

Warren said his interest in livestock dates back to the years he spent growing up near Silverdale, Kan.

Family affair

"My great-grandfather had a world champion pacer and was interested in purebreds. On the other side of the family they raised purebred Jerseys and thoroughbred horses. Because I wasn't financially able to farm, this was a related field," he said.

Known as R.B. to his students, Warren has always had a competitive drive. He lost an arm at the age of two and because he grew up without it, he said he never has much of an opportunity to miss it.

"The biggest problem amputees have is balance" he said. But that didn't stop him from playing football and basketball in college.

"I was a lineman at Kansas State and guess I enjoyed football because it was more competitive."

Competitiveness passed on

Warren passes that competitiveness on to his team. "They practice every minute they can stand," Warren said.

The 10-member junior team that traveled to the National Western Livestock Show in Denver last week put in more than 150 hours of preparation for the contest,

Warren said.

The team members worked for two weeks during semester break and judged 43 practice classes and gave 30 sets of reasons, he said.

Team members completed Animal Science 301 last semester, during which they judged 42 classes and gave 34 sets of reasons, Warren said.

Learn responsibility

According to his estimates it takes about 40 practice classes to get a team ready for competition.

Warren said students learn responsibility and gather decision making skills by working long hours, both of which give them a competitive edge against others.

Warren said that Nebraska's system is different from most states in that there are no junior colleges which have active judging teams.

He said many large schools have students on their teams that transfer from junior colleges where they have had judging experience. Because of this there are hardly any students from outside Nebraska on the teams, he said.

"Most of our kids have had some 4-H or FFA judging, but it takes us about six months to catch up with some states who go to a series of shows," Warren said.

Jobs await

Students who stick with the judging teams often find many job opportunities waiting for them upon graduation, Warren said.

"Though livestock types change, the procedure of decision making is still a good one and this is a quality sought by employers."

Warren also is an extension horse specialist. He said he spends 50 percent of his time teaching and 50 percent working with the state horse program.

"The horse project is the number two project in 4-H with an enrollment of 4,200," he said.

However, that number reflects a drop from an enrollment of 5,700 a few years ago, Warren pointed out.

He said that money required for stable rent and higher gas prices were reasons for the drop.

Horses important

Warren himself owns four quarterhorses, two of which he keeps for his extension work and judging classes at the university.

He said he feels that horses still have an important part in modern-day ranching.



Photo by Jerry McBride
Professor R. B. Warren, coach of UNL's livestock judging team.

"There are certain things you can't do with a motorcycle or pick-up, and a horse will go into these places for you." He added that they could be used more if fuel becomes a big problem.

Modern-day ranchers can also make use of new technology to improve their operations, he said. Record-keeping, production testing for breeding purposes, computer information and new information on backfat probes in hogs, testicle circumference in cattle and measurements for rate of gain will help to make ranchers more competitive, Warren said.

Warren said meeting people, making decisions and dealing with students make his work worthwhile.

"I've been on and have been working with judging teams since 1950. To my knowledge we have never had problems with breakage or rowdiness, which is more than I can say for some others," he said.

"Seeing students change, finding an ability and building on it, this is what makes it (his work) satisfying."

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