

Open to Suggestions

NCHA president Don Bussey learns from the association's membership.

By Larri Jo Starkey

AS NATIONAL CUTTING HORSE ASSOCIATION PRESIDENT, DON Bussey has gotten an earful.

He doesn't mind, though.

"I'm glad (members) feel free enough to call me," he said.

In fact, he puts learning to listen at the top of his list of advice for the next president.

"You know, so many times, when people do complain or tell you something, they're justified," Bussey said. "Sometimes you'll draw a conclusion, thinking it's a complaint. But a lot of times – a lot of times – they just want to tell you something that is important that you need to hear.

"And they might be right."

Bussey grew up horseback in Shawnee, Oklahoma, doing ranch work without a thought of competing in the show ring. He graduated from Oklahoma State University with a degree in animal husbandry. After graduating, he worked for the college as a herdsman in charge of purebred Hereford and Angus herds.

"There weren't any crossbreds back in those days," he said.

And despite the presence of all those fresh cattle, Bussey didn't cut any. There was no temptation to do so. He wasn't a cutter.

"Cutting wasn't even real popular during those days," Bussey said.

Bussey didn't get involved in cutting until his youngest son, Bret, bought a cutting horse. In the late 1970s, Bussey followed suit, buying Lucky Bottom Kate and sending her to a trainer.

"That was our first futurity horse we showed," he said. "And I wasn't showing then. We were just going the route of hiring a trainer and showing in the open class."

Meanwhile, Bussey was watching videos.

"In 1985, I showed my first cutting horse myself in Montgomery, Alabama," Bussey said. "And it was an experience. I had learned by video."

How did he do?

"I finished the run. I think it was a big 6-0."

That wasn't quite Bussey's target score.

"My first goal was to score a 70. You are supposed to have a 70 when you go into the herd, so I was hoping to break even," the banker said.

A Family Business

BUSSEY GOT INTO BANKING IN 1978 AS AN INVESTOR, BUT WHEN a partner died in 1995, Bussey left the farm in Guin, Alabama, and became chief executive officer at State Bank and Trust in Winfield, Alabama. Meanwhile, son Bret left his veterinary work to return to the farm.

"He told me the only reason he became a vet was because I told him he couldn't make a living farming," Bussey said.

The family interest in agriculture doesn't stop there. Bussey and his brother own a ranch in Tecumseh, Oklahoma. Bussey's oldest son, Buck, also a veterinarian, lives in Tennessee. Bussey's wife, Brenda, competed in barrel racing and pole bending in high school.

A family connection is important to Bussey as he competes in what he considers a family sport.

"Part of the pleasure of cutting is the people you meet," he said. "We have a lot of friends all over the United States."

WHAT'S NEW FOR NCHA?

Beginning December 28, the National Cutting Horse Association started a new judging system.

Field monitors will be reviewing some judging tapes from weekend competitions.

"It will more or less be continuing education for the judges," said NCHA President Don Bussey, adding the change will benefit weekend cutters the most.

Each NCHA judge is assigned to one of four field monitors.

"When (a judge) gets home (from an event), they can take the video and the judges sheet and view it," said Russell McCord, director of judges for NCHA. "They can call and ask any questions, and they've got someone to help answer them."

The actual judging of cutting events hasn't changed, McCord emphasized, "just the system set in play to support, teach and educate our weekend judges."

The field-monitor system has been in place for years for aged-event judges, McCord said. NCHA has about 400 approved judges, and about 150 of those are aged-event judges. The change puts the 250 remaining judges into the monitor system.

"We feel like this is something that has been needed," Bussey said. "Anytime we can improve our judging in any category, we feel like it would be an asset to the whole association."



Don Bussey

COURTESY OF THE CUTTING HORSE CHAPTER

Balancing Act

BUSSEY, A MAN WHO TRIES TO LIVE BY THE PHRASE "GOD FIRST, the other fellow second and I'm third," puts that into action in his NCHA duties. He stresses the big picture.

"It is so easy to complain about one thing that affects you, but when you turn it around to 16,000 people, you would affect a lot more," Bussey said. "You cannot taper any association to fit the needs of one person, and we have to always keep that in mind. Sometimes it's hard to make a decision knowing it's going to affect your barn, but it would be a betterment for everyone else. I think our executive board has done a wonderful job trying to keep a fair and honest outlook."

Keeping personal preferences out of decision-making may have been hard, but Bussey said he has had the support of the board and the general membership.

"My job has been easier because of the way they have supported me," he said.

That support has meant Bussey still has time to indulge himself in his favorite sport.

"Telephones are a wonderful thing," he said. "I still have as much time for my weekend cutting and for my aged events and for my everyday activities as I did (before becoming president)."

Bussey's current favorite mount is Smart Blackbird, a 2001 stallion by Smart Little Lena in training with Mike Mowery of Weatherford, Texas, president-elect of NCHA.

When Mowery takes over in June, he can learn from Bussey's advice: "You've just got to learn that patience is a wonderful thing."

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