

More Than Just A Photo

Good Day, Horse People!

I, like many of you, enjoy the various posts and photos from all of the large shows and fall futurities that are posted on social media. Recently, one photo caught my eye. It was a picture snapped at the conclusion of the National Cutting Horse Association (NCHA) Futurity Open finals. Lindy Burch and Kody Porterfield were standing face-to-face with their arms intertwined. Lindy was looking straight into Kody's eyes, and he was looking into hers. Obviously, it was an emotional moment.

What did I see in the picture? I saw a well-respected cutting horse veteran (who had just won the Open Reserve Championship) giving sincere congratulations to a young man just starting to make his mark in the business. At the NCHA Futurity, Kody won the John Deere Open Championship and tied for third in the Open finals – an impressive feat by anyone's standards. Thanks to his stellar performances and courageous showmanship, Kody won the hearts of all who attended the Futurity. The event lasted almost four weeks and the crowd was behind Kody every step of the way. In fact, his performance in the Open finals generated some of the loudest applause of the entire show.

What really touched my soul when I first saw this photograph was the sincerity with which each person was trying to convey his or her message to the other. I know Lindy well enough to realize that she was not only congratulating Kody, but she was also offering the kind of encouragement that a young trainer so desperately needs in this difficult discipline to "keep on keepin' on." I am sure that Kody was also telling Lindy what a great performance she had just put on with her first-hole draw in the most prestigious event in the cutting horse world. This photo, more than any other in my recent memory, says a lot more to me.

This photograph is the best example of a dynamic that occurs too seldom in this horse business. It shows the mentoring by a Hall of Famer of an aspiring young person



Lindy Burch and Kody Porterfield at the NCHA Futurity

who is doing his best to break into a difficult, unpredictable profession. You have all read my columns that, from time to time, speak of the importance of mentoring our younger trainers and showmen, and giving freely the solid advice so necessary to carry on the horsemanship and traditions in all of our equine disciplines. This advice and counsel is the most important driver behind the perpetuation of our horse industry in the proper fashion.

Those of us in my generation figuratively lived from one day to the next on the words spoken from our mentors. Now, sometimes those words weren't the ones we were looking for in terms of an "atta boy" or "good job." Rather, they came with stern tone and criticism for less than respectable demon-

stration in the way we were conducting ourselves with our horses. Often, many of us had to "read between the lines," so to speak, in order to understand if we were receiving praise for work well done. Our teachers were from a different era, one in which compliments were given few and far between. When we were on the seldom end of praise, we often were expected to comprehend the hidden meaning in those words in order for us to gather any boost to our conviction to remain and keep on trying.

My mentors were two of the very best at handing out veiled praise. Matlock Rose and George Tyler never told me straight out that I had done something well. Their comments of approval were off-handed and indistinct when given, but "boy howdy!" I lived for those times! They kept me going, trying harder to please them with my work.

Today, many of us are in such a hurry that we don't stop long enough in our workday to think about and give words of advice, assistance or encouragement to the next generation. This generation is hungry for those words. All of us older horsemen have a responsibility to pass on our observations to them if we ever expect to sustain our equine culture in the proper sense.

Do yourself a favor – and, by doing so, a favor to all of us in this business. Give of your knowledge and experience to these young folks trying to make their way to becoming solid representatives and horsemen that we can all be proud to carry on this lifestyle and culture we hold so dear.

That's what I saw and what it meant to me when I first cast my eyes on this photograph.

As always, I remain
Frank

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