



New Mexico Activities Association Student-Athlete Spotlight

Davis and Donkey Kong Win State Fair

By Kevin Wilson

Cutter Davis has never carried a football for Clayton High School. He's never dribbled a basketball for the Yellowjackets. And he's never pitched a baseball while wearing the school's orange and black.

The Clayton senior is a competitor, though. The leather he works with is just a lot bigger.

Davis has raised animals for show and market, starting with pigs and sheep when he was nine and most recently his Union County Fair grand champion steer, Donkey Kong.

Davis, a 15-year native of Clayton, was always a little different from other kids, starting with the day he was born. His mom was going to name him Cutler, but a nurse suggested Cutter because it was more unusual. His mom liked it, and the name stuck.

When he was 3, the family moved to Clayton. It's the seat of Union County, the 29th-most populated county in New Mexico and the state's geographical northeast corner.

For the last half-century, Clayton has been a town of about 2,800 residents give or take a few. Clayton High Principal and Athletic Director Ray Maestas just moved back this year after 30 years away, and the only difference he's noticed is a higher concentration of people who identify as Hispanic.

"The cool thing about Clayton," Maestas said, "is you have that small-town atmosphere. Everybody gets along very well. It supports students in any way it can."

Davis says he has always felt that support, whether he's at the Union County Fair, a larger fair across the state or a national FFA competition. There are about 30 Clayton FFA members in a school of 120, and a farm business management team (which didn't include Davis) that took sixth place nationally; Davis said it's basically a math competition that is applied towards agricultural matters.

In 2007, Cutter began showing pigs and sheep at the Union County Fair. Since then, showing animals became his love, and the draws of two-a-day football practice failed to lure him from a fair.

He's a real reserved kid, kind of quiet. But by no means is he timid. He takes deep pride in showing his animals, to the point where he's sacrificed playing football or basketball. His heart is really set on showing his animals.

But Davis, who intends to raise show cattle for a career, wouldn't consider it a sacrifice. Instead, he's one of the lucky people who found the thing he wanted to do as an adult before he became one.

"I never was that much of an athlete," said Davis, who readily admits he's always been a bigger kid. "It's not my cup of tea;



I'm not about hitting people. I just fell in love with showing animals at a young age."

In his years raising animals, Davis has shown steers (five years), pigs (six years) sheep, (eight years) and goats (one year; "They're not the smartest," he said).

Just like an athlete practices, Davis dedicates time to his craft. When the craft is raising a steer, it means getting up at 4:30 a.m. and getting to the barn by 5 a.m. so you can wash him, blow dry him, feed him and put him in a cool room. It means dedicating the same two hours at night. If you do that right for a few months, it's reflected in how the animal looks during fair week.

"You've got to get up on time, do everything every day," Davis said. "It's like not lifting weights all year, and then trying to play in the football game."

Around 2010, Davis wasn't even a teenager yet. But he'd developed an adult approach to showing the animals he'd have to eventually sell to market. He stopped naming most of them to avoid attachment. He also realized the purpose all along is to prepare an animal for market, just as you'll prepare the next one for market, and the only thing you can do is treat the animal as well as you possibly can while you raise it.

But he broke his own rule with Donkey Kong, because he was different. He wasn't sure on a name, and the man who sold it to him suggested Donkey Kong. He liked it, and the name stuck.

"Most of the time, I don't name them, but this steer was very special to me," Davis said. "He had a unique personality. He was almost like a dog. You'd go out to the pen, and he was standing there waiting for you. I was the only person he would do that to."

The bond may have helped Cutter and Donkey Kong claim the grand champion honor, because good showmanship includes a trust between the animal and the handler. If you scare them or anger them, the animals won't work with you. And at larger sizes, uncooperative animals can be dangerous.

"You can't get in a big hurry with anything, or they won't do it," Davis said. "You're their friend. You're there to help them."

Davis plans to start his college years at Eastern New Mexico University-Roswell, where he can stay with family while getting the basic classes out of the way, then finishing up at a four-year college to be determined.