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MYRON MIXON

THE WINNINGEST MAN IN BARBEQUE

by Margie Goldsmith



Myron Mixon, chef, restaurateur, and five-time world barbecue champion, has won more barbeque competitions than anyone in the world, including over 200 grand championships, 30 state championships, eight Team of the Year Awards and 11 national championships. No wonder he is known as “the winningest man in barbecue.” Mixon is also the chief cook of the Jack’s Old South Competition Bar-B-Que Team and Chef/Partner in Myron Mixon’s BBQ in Gatlinburg, Tennessee. On TV, he stars and/or hosts four Cooking Channel and Discovery’s Destination America shows. Mixon has written five books on barbeque, including *The New York Times* best-selling cookbook, *Smokin’ with Myron Mixon: Recipes Made Simple*, from the *Winningest Man in Barbeque*. Myron Mixon is also the Mayor of Unadilla, Georgia, where I caught up with him.



You were brought up in Georgia, where your father owned a barbecue take-out business in the town of Vienna.

How old were you when you started in your dad's business, and is that what you wanted to do in life?

I was nine years old and, no, I didn't want to do that. I wasn't a pit master. It was tote and fetch and go-get -- all the grunt work. But during my teenage years, I was cooking with my dad, and as I got older, I ran and managed the pit.

In 1996, you entered your first competition.

Why, and how old were you?

I was 34 years old. My mom and dad had started selling Jack's Old South Barbecue Sauce, but my dad passed away in 1996. I thought that by entering competitions, I could help promote the barbecue sauce; so, I got a trailer and some smokers and did my first contest that year in Augusta, Georgia.

And you won that?

I got two first places and a third place out of the three categories. That got me hooked.

Is that when you decided you were going to do this full-time?

Pretty much so. It seemed like I was pretty good at it, and I entered more contests after that, and I was winning. So, I stepped up and kept doing it. And for over 15 years, I did about 45 contests a year. Now I get to do maybe four or five contests a year, because I don't have the time.

How would you describe your cooking style?

What makes you different?

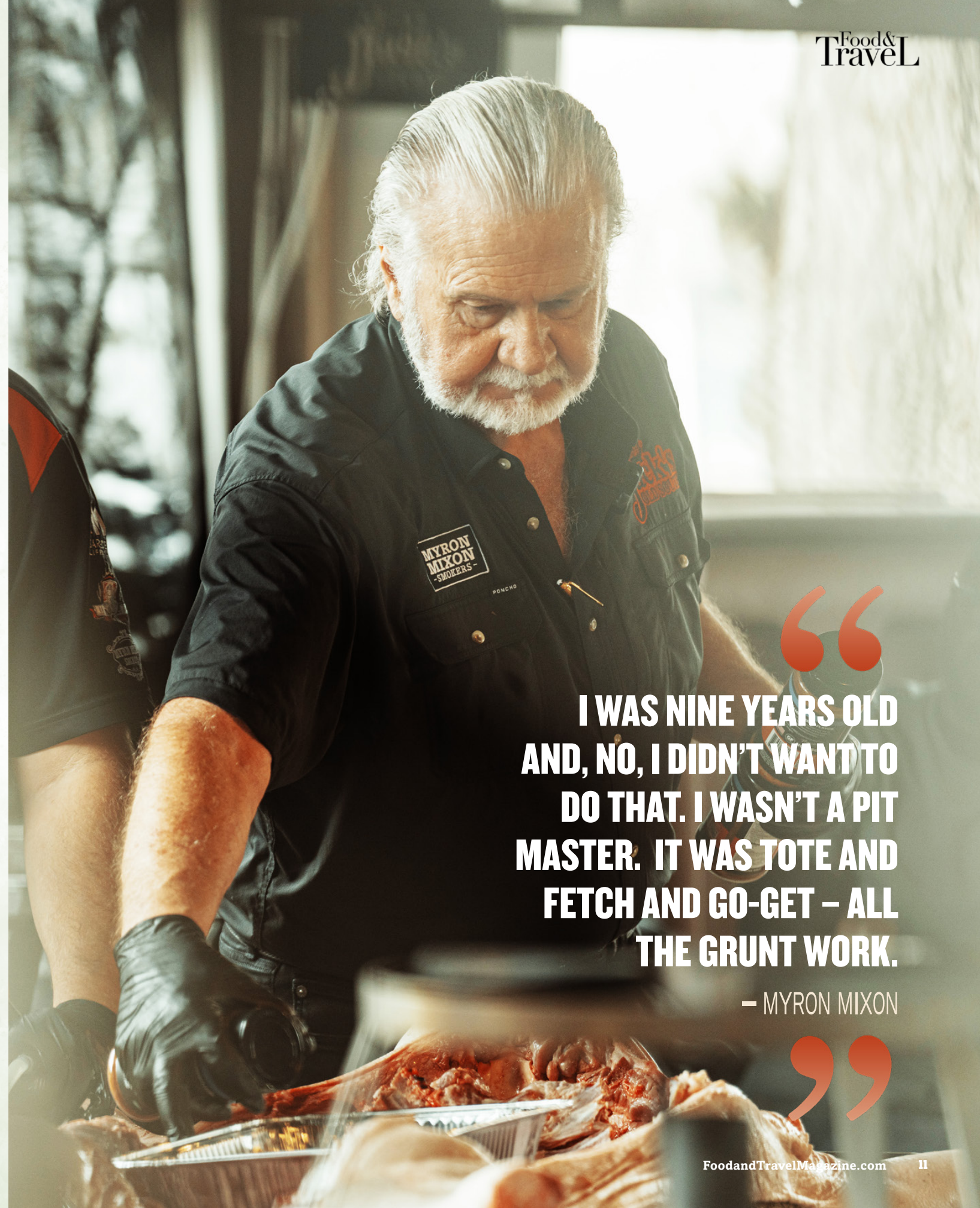
My dad taught me how to cook: shoveling coals, burning wood down, and managing the fire. I learned how to cook old school, what everyone was doing for 150 years and prior to what I call the modern era, when people started having different equipment, like offset cookers. And now we've got pellet cookers, water cookers, electronics, everything.

When you competed and constantly won, what was your secret?

Everybody loves Carolina barbecue that's in the Carolina area. Everybody loves Texas barbecue that's from Texas. Everybody loves Kansas City barbecue, the best from Kansas City. But everybody's not from those regions, and you've got to figure out something that everybody will taste and think is good. You can't just regionalize yourself when you're doing competitions and want to appeal to everybody. You've got to do something new, and that's what I figured out, something middle of the road, and that brings in just about everybody.

So, what did you come up with?

Not everybody loves a hot sauce or a vinegar-based sauce or vinegar-based meat like you find in the Carolinas. But just about everybody likes something a little sweet, and that's the key to it, something a little sweet.



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— MYRON MIXON



What to you is the most important thing about making barbecue?

It's the execution: making it perfect. You never have everything, but you always strive to have that perfect rib or perfect brisket. The key is execution and being consistent, whether you're doing competitions or a restaurant barbecue or just feeding your family and friends. You need to be consistent and stay on point with your recipe and not deviate.

How important is choosing the piece of meat?

You've got to have great meat. You can't buy discarded stuff and think you're going to turn that into great barbecue.

What do many people do when cooking that they shouldn't?

They shouldn't cook barbecue without using a meat thermometer. I've been teaching classes since 2005, and everybody always asks for the silver bullet, 'What's going to make me better? What's going to make me a world champion?' It takes a lot of things to do that. You've got to have different flavor profiles to make the meat better. But people always forget that a thermometer tells you exactly what the internal temperature should be and when it's done. With a meat thermometer, you'll never be undercooked or overcooked, no matter what piece of meat you're doing.

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And next?

Then you can move on to what I call the easier thing: getting a flavor you like and that everybody else likes. But getting that meat perfectly internally cooked is the hard part.

What is your grilling style?

Once the temperature's right, you've got to decide, are you going to go savory? Are you going to go sweet? Are you going to do a balance of both? Are you going to have a savory-type rub and then finish it off with a sweet sauce, which is what I like to do?

What are your best tips and tricks for making barbecue?

Besides the meat thermometer, make sure you cook it till it's done. But also, especially with heat, like with spice, something that's hot, to go in moderation with it, because everybody doesn't like something hot. Go in moderation with the heat. Also, overcooked always beats undercooked. I'm not a big sauce guy. I like the meat to be able to stand on its own and have the sauce to the side. For me, that tells the difference between good barbecue and great barbecue.

In 2021, you lost over 100 pounds.

How did you do that?

And what made you decide to do it?

I weighed like 300 pounds. I knew I had to get the weight off. Everybody has this misconception about barbecue, that they can't eat barbecue to lose weight. Well, the barbecued meat is one of the best keto-friendly things you could possibly eat, and that's why I wrote my book, *Keto BBQ*. The top of the list for keto food is barbecued meat. What gets you is the potato salads, the baked beans, the carbs, and the sugars in the sauces. If you get all that figured out, the meat is your friend. I make sauces, but I drop the sugar out and make them with monk fruit extract. It doesn't have the calories, and it doesn't act like the fried sugar.



You sell your own rubs and sauces.

How are those different than store-bought ones?

I started doing my own rubs for sauces in the early 2000s, just for me. I wasn't thinking about retailing them. Then, in 2005 I started a website, and put my original rub on there, which I still sell today. I developed all these blends for me to use to win contests. Everything I've ever put out there to sell is something I've used for a contest or competition, and I think that's what makes them different. Now we make our own rubs. We have our own manufacturing plant right here in Unadilla. My son David runs the rub division, and he makes sure it's done properly.

Is your barbecue cooking school for novices or experienced pit masters alike?

It's an all-hands-on class. We'll cook over 800 pounds of meat in that class, because every student is prepping meat, cooking, and doing everything that I show them I want done.

You are about to moderate a Q&A at the Columbia Food & Wine Festival at Putnam's Harbor on Lake Murray, South Carolina, on April 25th. What is this?

It's the first time I've been there. But the thing is, South Carolina, especially Columbia, has gotten really impressed with food. South Carolina, in general, is a big food state. Columbia, being the capital of South Carolina, has a lot of different foods. And the Food & Wine Festival is going to showcase all this.

What kind of questions do you think they're going to ask you?

What do I think or consider is great barbecue, how you attain that. They'll probably ask me about the different regions of barbecue, because South Carolina has their own distinctive region of barbecue. They'll ask how it compares to other regions.

What haven't you done that you want to do?

Right now, what I really want to do is make sure, maybe not the legacy, but the brand, carries on even after I'm gone. That's something I hope my kids continue to do, because they all work inside the industry, inside the business. I want to make sure it's carried on, whether they all get out and compete or not. As long as the brand's running and we still turn out that great product, and the quality is there, then I can sit over there in the cemetery and be happy. •



Smoke on the Water | Saturday, April 25th, 4-6pm

Location: Putnam's Harbor

Restaurants and Collaborators: Robbie Robinson (City Limits Barbeque), Rodney Scott (Rodney Scott BBQ), Myron Mixon, Chris Williams (Roy's Grille), Marvin Ross (Peculiar Pig)

Beverage Program: Spirits, Wine and Beer

Q&A: Fireside-style chat with Myron Mixon as moderator



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