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Massive Pumpkins Face-off At The Kansas State Fair  
The two heavyweights stepped up to the scale.

In one corner, coming in at an astonishing 643.2 pounds, the defending champion and six-time title-holder.

In the other corner, weighing only 376 pounds, the rookie challenger in his first-ever bout.

You can imagine how this fight ended.

Growing giant pumpkins can be a brutal [contest](#).

On Thursday night, inside the Pride of Kansas building on the Kansas State Fairgrounds in Hutchinson, the weigh-in for this year's giant pumpkin competition took place.

For the second year in a row, drought conditions across the state made growing the behemoth gourds a difficult task. Only two pumpkins were entered. Last year, only one survived the brutal summer heat to make it to the state fair, and that pumpkin weighed only 366.5 pounds.

Of course, that one pumpkin was grown by 64-year-old Doug Heathman of Liberal. He is the undisputed grand master of growing giant pumpkins in Kansas, having won the state fair title six of the last seven years.

Despite his success, the ultimate title still eludes Heathman. The state record for a pumpkin is 976.2 pounds, grown by Brian Stanley in 2007, which also is the only year since 2005 that Heathman hasn't won the contest. He finished second that year.

"Ol' Stanley got me pretty good," Heathman said of the loss.

But this year Heathman faced a surprising challenger: 12-year-old Ryan Grabman of Wichita. This is his third year of growing giant pumpkins, but the first year he's been successful enough to enter one in the state fair.

Grabman says he was inspired to try it, in part, by seeing giant pumpkins at the state fair when he was "5 or 6 years old."

"It was 4, 5, maybe 600 pounds, I can't remember," Grabman said. "I just kind of thought that'd be cool, so I tried it."

Heathman won both of those years, growing a 618-pounder in 2005 and a 680-pounder in 2006.

"I think that's a good deal," Heathman said of the inspiration offered to Grabman. "I wish more people would do it."

As the sun set outside of the Pride of Kansas building, the two growers - the one with a bushy mustache that covers his mouth and the one with an "ESPN SportsCenter" shirt - talked pumpkin seed genetics like two people might discuss the weather. Their pumpkins, both sitting on [wooden pallets](#) in the back of pickups, were removed by forklift and placed on a scale. A crowd of about 20 people gathered to help and watch.

Grabman's beaming mother, Shari, shot the whole spectacle on video.

There was never any question about which pumpkin was going to win. Heathman's pumpkin was

clearly larger than Grabman's.

The question became what the exact weight of each gourd would be. Grabman talked about the other pumpkin in his yard that rotted out last week, estimated to weigh 680 pounds. Heathman showed pictures on his phone of other pumpkins he has grown, some of which suffered splits or rotted out much like Grabman's.

"This one was 917, but it split out," Heathman said while showing a picture.

The two pumpkins were carted off to the northwest corner of the Pride of Kansas building, where they will be displayed for the rest of the week, and the Grabmans and Heathman took pictures. Later, the two growers shook hands, and Heathman jumped back in his truck to make the long drive back to Liberal.

Though Grabman came up short in his quest to grow the largest pumpkin in the state this year, he vowed there would be a rematch.

"I'll do it again." Grabman said. "Next year."

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