



Champions Crowned at Wrangler National Finals Rodeo

Zeke Thurston is first and foremost a winner.

And he proved it again at the 61st edition of the Wrangler National Finals Rodeo. In the final go round, the Big Valley, Alberta saddle bronc rider posted an 88.5 score on C5 Rodeo's Kitty Whistle to split 3/4/5 in the round to add \$11,141 to his round earnings. And Thurston added a fourth place average payout of \$31,431 to give him total WNFR earnings of \$170,064. His overall season total of \$347,055 reflected his domination as his margin of victory over second place man Brody Cress was \$61,000.

"I don't know if I have words for how I feel right now. I wanted this one even more that I wanted that first one," the 24 year-old second generation bronc rider admitted. "I've had more fun this year than I ever have. This is awesome, just awesome."

To say that Zeke Thurston has already fashioned a storybook career is to understate the situation dramatically. In 2008 he was the Canadian Steer Riding Champion and followed that up with a Novice Saddle Bronc title in 2013. Then there were two Contract Act of the Year honours while a member of The Thurston Gang. He was the World Champion Bronc Rider in 2016, Canadian Champion in 2019, collected three Calgary Stampede \$100,000 cheques and wins at virtually every important rodeo on either side of the 49th parallel.

And now the biggest prize of all—the coveted gold buckle emblematic of a World title for the second time. Thurston's double win—Canadian and World titles in the same year—mark the first time that has happened since Taos Muncy accomplished that feat in 2011.

It was also a very good week for Thurston's traveling partners—the other two Canadians in the saddle bronc riding, Jake Watson and Dawson Hay. Watson, the Hudson's Hope, British Columbia bronc rider was second in the final round with an 89.5 point ride on Sankey Pro Rodeo and Phenom Genetics Marquee for \$20,730. He finished sixth in the average, won over \$127,000 during the ten days of the Finals and checked in at \$236,406 for the year, good for sixth overall. WNFR rookie Dawson Hay completed the Canadian trio's spectacular week as he was part of that 3/4/5 final round split with Thurston and Ryder Wright, and added an eighth place average cheque of \$6346 for an NFR total of \$97,435 and season earnings of \$197,747 good for seventh place.

Clayton Biglow was not to be denied. The Clements, California bareback rider came to the WNFR with a commanding lead, increased that lead in the first nine go-rounds at the Thomas and Mack Arena and finished it off in the tenth round by tying the arena record he set a year ago; this time the 93 point score was recorded on the Canadian Bareback Horse of the Year, Northcott-Macza's Stevie Knicks. The \$26,230 first-place cheque, coupled with his win in the average (\$67,269) gave the four time qualifier a record season total of \$425,843.

2019 Canadian Champion and five time WNFR qualifier Orin Larsen rode Stace Smith Pro Rodeo's Junior Bonner to finish fourth in the final go-round (\$11,000) and held on to fourth place in the average as well for another \$31,731 to bring his season total to \$296,403, second only to Biglow.

The third of the Canadian bareback riders, Cadogan, Alberta cowboy, Clint Laye was out of the money in round ten but rode all ten of his horses and finished 6th in the average for \$16,500 to take home almost \$79,000 at his second WNFR and a season total of \$170,415.

It came down to one tenth of a second to decide the Tie Down Roping Championship of the World. The amazing Miles City, Montana rookie, Haven Meged, prevailed with a season total of \$246,013, just \$1182 ahead of 2013 World Champion Shane Hanchey. Hanchey split the final round with a 7.1 second run with Texan Adam Gray, each man collecting \$23,480. If Hanchey had been a tenth of a second faster or Gray a tenth slower, the outright winner's cheque of \$26,230 would have been enough to give the Louisiana superstar his second title. The Meged-Hanchey 1-2 finish was the exact reverse of the Canadian Championship battle the two staged just over a month ago at CFR 46 in Red Deer. Meged is just 21 years-old and is just months removed from having been the World Collegiate Rodeo Champion.

It was a coronation in the bull riding. Sage Kimzey had set his sights on tying the great Jim Shoulders' record of six consecutive world titles and the 25 year-old Oklahoma sensation did it with authority. Kimzey was 88 points on Pete Carr Pro Rodeo's River Monster to win second in the round, finish first in the average and put a ribbon on a season that saw him top \$480,796 in earnings, another record.

2016 Canadian Champion, Jordan Hansen enjoyed his finest hour at this Finals as he topped the field in round 10 with an 88.5 point go round win on Four Star Rodeo's Hell Hound. The \$26,230 payday, along with an eighth place average cheque of \$6346, gave the Ponoka, Alberta bull rider an NFR total of \$100,044 and a season total of \$214,792.

Round ten of the barrel racing event included some heart-stopping moments that saw defending Champion, Hailey Kinsel-Lockwood, who came into the final round in first place, hit a barrel to finish out of the money. But seven placings through the week, including two round wins, gave the Cotulla, Texas cowgirl \$141,153 in NFR earnings for a grand total of \$290,020, enough for her second title. Average winner, Ivy Conrado-Saebens was the picture of consistency throughout the Finals, and the only competitor to run clean over ten rounds with 138.44/10 for \$264,673 overall and the reserve World title.

It was third time lucky for Helena, Montana steer wrestler Ty Erickson. The lanky bull dogger came to the Thomas and Mack Arena twice before in the lead and was unable to seal the deal. This time it came down to the final round for the six time WNFR qualifier. While Erickson did not place in round 10, he clocked a 4.4 to maintain fifth spot in the Average (\$22,846) to win his first World title with \$234,491 in total, just \$17,130 ahead of fellow Montanan, Bridger Chambers. The Average win went to Cross Plains, Texas bulldogger Matt Reeves. Two time and reigning Canadian Champion Scott Guenther pocketed \$46,102 for his 2019 WNFR efforts for a 12th place \$148,853 overall.

Determination of the 2019 Team Roping Champions also came down to the final round with Oklahoma's Clay Smith taking home his second consecutive World Heading title. The five time WNFR qualifier, and his partner Jade Corkill, Fallon, Nevada, placed in six of ten rounds (\$118,307 total NFR earnings) with Smith earning a season total of \$268,819. But it was Throckmorton, Texas heeler, Wesley Thorpe, who enjoyed his first World Championship with an impressive \$249,180 for the season, 161,884 of which came from earnings garnered at this year's Finals with California heading partner, Cody Snow. Thorpe and Snow's six placings over the course of the Finals, including a 4.4 second-place round ten run, gave them the Average win and \$62,269 each.

About the Canadian Professional Rodeo Association

The Canadian Professional Rodeo Association (CPRA) with headquarters in Airdrie, Alberta is the sanctioning body for professional rodeo in Canada. The CPRA approves 55 events annually with a total payout exceeding \$5.7 million. The organization holds their premiere event - the Canadian Finals Rodeo (CFR) - at Westerner Park in Red Deer, AB, November 3-8, 2020 and will oversee the Finning Pro Tour Finals September 6 in Armstrong, BC and the Maple Leaf Circuit Finals December 2-5 at Canadian Western Agribition in Regina, SK. Follow the CPRA on Twitter and Instagram @prorodeocanada, 'Like' Canadian Professional Rodeo Association on Facebook or online at RodeoCanada.com.

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