



Big Bucks Go North of 49

The Canadian saddle bronc riders have been watching the bareback riders and team ropers getting all the headlines. And in go-round six of the 2016 Wrangler National Finals Rodeo, they decided to do something about it.

The youthful trio enjoyed their finest hour to date as all three Canadian bronc riders placed in the round for the first time at this Finals. It was Big Valley's Zeke Thurston leading the way as he put together a spectacular 88.5 on C5 Rodeo's Black Hills for his first-ever WNFR go-round win. The win gives him \$49,923 in earnings to date and third place in the slot machine-like average.

Right behind the second generation bronc rider was Hudson Hope, BC's Jake Watson with his 87 point effort on Frontier Rodeo's Times Up. The second place cheque meant the very consistent Watson is now 6 for 6 and has moved to the overall lead in the average. The third member of the Canuck threesome, Canadian Champion Clay Elliott, saw his 82.5 on Big Rafter Rodeo's Pearl hold on for a split of sixth place and \$2115.

"That's just a really nice little horse of Vern's (MacDonald)," Thurston grinned after his ride. "I've had her a couple of times before and I've won quite a bit of money on her. She felt really good out there."

Thurston had to put the disappointment of a 7.92 second buckoff earlier in the week behind him and is definitely in a groove now. "Yeah, Killer Bee is one of the buckiest horses I've ever been on." Thurston acknowledged. "I set an arena record on him at Tucson but here he got me. You just have to put those things out of your mind and get ready for the next one."

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"It's not over 'till I win."

Those were the words of Canadian bareback rider, Orin Larsen. The talented Manitoba cowboy had not had the finals he had hoped for, particularly as he came into the Wrangler NFR in second place in the world standings and was coming off a terrific Canadian Finals Rodeo that saw him win three rounds.

But it was clear almost from the outset that all was not right with the soft-spoken two time WNFR qualifier.

"I'd torn some ribs back in September but after the CFR I thought I was pretty well home free. But about two or three jumps out on my first round horse here (Frontier Rodeo's Night Watch) I felt a pop and knew I'd tore them again."

Not one to look for an excuse, Larsen was quick to accentuate the positive. "The Sport Medicine Team has done an awesome job of keeping me in one piece," he stated. "I'm really looking forward to the last half of the Finals." That despite admitting to 'feeling it crunch and pop' as he rides.

Larsen noted as well that he's aware of the support of Canadian fans both here in Las Vegas and back in Canada. "That means so much to me; I really appreciate it," he smiled. "I don't have any choice. I have to go out there and win."

It turns out that those fans and Larsen's attitude were just the combination to get his week turned around.

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In tonight's round six, he climbed aboard Bar T Rodeo's Ruby's Girl and did what he has done all season long, spurring out an 85 score to split 2/3 in the round and pocket his first cheque of this finals, a sizable \$18,192 payoff. In fact only one man was better.

And that man, fellow Canadian, Jake Vold, was a half point better on Burch Rodeo's Jim Dandy to post his third go-round win in succession. Vold's \$91,000 plus haul has moved him to 4th place in both the average and the world standings with four rounds remaining.

"I had Jim Dandy here in 2014; I think it was in the same round," Vold recalled, "and I knew he was good. But I think I rode him better this time."

As happy as he was with his own performance, Vold was equally tickled to see his countryman enjoy some success. "Orin is as tough as nails - riding with separated ribs; I was really excited to see him win a big cheque tonight."

A couple of Canadian horses grabbed a share of the spotlight in the bareback riding as well. The Calgary Stampede's Tootsie Roll carried Tanner Aus to an 84 point ride and 4th place in the round while Kesler Rodeo's Starburst was the mount for Jake Brown's 84 point 5/6 split.

The all Canadian team roping duo of Levi Simpson and Jeremy Buhler kept their streak of qualified runs going with a 9.3 to finish just out of the money but maintain their hold on second place in the average. Lady luck continued to plague the third Canadian team roper, Kolton Schmidt, and his Texas partner, Shay Carroll as the team is still without a cheque to date.

The \$416,000 won by Canadian competitors at the 2016 WNFR has made this finals the most lucrative for Canadian contestants in the history of the event.

In the bull riding, Outlaw Buckers' Chip Shot carried Rexburg, Idaho's Garrett Smith to 82 points, just outside of the money in a round that saw Minnesota's Brennon Eldred ride Championship Pro Rodeo's The Duke to a 90.5 score for the win.

There was a three-way split for first in the steer wrestling between Billy Bugenig, Riley Duvall and Tyler Waguespack - all with 3.6 second runs. Two time Canadian Champion Tyson Durfey was the quickest of the tie-down ropers with a 7.4. And in the barrel racing, Utah cowgirl Kimmie Wall ran the fastest time of the finals to date - a 13.46 - for her second round win this week.

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 over 50 events annually with a total payout exceeding \$5.1 million. Join us for our premiere event - the Canadian Finals Rodeo (CFR) - in early November each year in Edmonton, Alberta at Northlands Coliseum. Follow us on Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat at @prorodeocanada, like Canadian Professional Rodeo Association on Facebook, or online at RodeoCanada.com.

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