

# **Julia Dondero**

## **Written Portfolio**

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## **Let er' Buck: A Living History On The Green Mile**

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With over a century's worth of stories told on Pendleton, Oregon's green mile, the Pendleton Round-Up is one of rodeo's most iconic venues.

Story by Julia Dondero

What began in 1910 as a post-harvest, late-September celebration quickly grew into one of the largest PRCA rodeos of the year, earning PRCA's Large Outdoor Rodeo of the Year honors 10 times and welcoming fans and contestants from across the globe.>>

A 100-year-old cowbell rings, a cannon booms, a sold-out crowd of 16,000 rodeo fans roar, rodeo queens dressed in traditional regalia spur their horses into action, and just like that, the otherwise peaceful autumn afternoon in this Oregon ranching-farming community gives way to a tradition unlike any other — the Pendleton Round-Up. It's 1:15 p.m., and it's time to "Let 'er buck!"

On any other weekend in this quaint, historic town, farmers would be tilling their wheat fields, and ranchers would be tending their herds. But on the second full week of September, the town becomes dedicated to all-things rodeo.

### **On with the Round-Up**

The close-knit Pendleton community, home to around 17,000 residents, originated as a stopping point on the Oregon Trail during the mid-1800s and boasts ties to the Umatilla, Cayuse and Walla Walla Native American tribes. In a beautiful crossroads of cultures, the town was built with the spirit of a cowboy and kindred affection for the wild West. Just two years after establishing the city, local attorney Roy Raley decided to host "a frontier exhibition of picturesque pastimes, Indian and military spectacles, cowboy racing and bronco busting for the championship of the Northwest," an exhibition that would quickly become the iconic Pendleton Round-Up.

Even the board members were awestruck by the unprecedented attraction the 1910 inaugural Pendleton Round-Up would bring. So much so that during the inaugural event, volunteers built more grandstands in the middle of the night to accommodate the surplus crowd of more than 7,000 attendees. Virginia Roberts, Pendleton Historian and Round-Up Hall of Fame member, explains how the community event rose to national stardom in an unprecedented manner, with adoption of the rodeo beyond anything they imagined it would be in the early 1900s.

In 1951, an agreement was made with the local school district that the stadium would be turfed and used for high school football games. That recognizable grassy field in the middle of the rodeo arena has become fondly known among rodeo athletes as the "Green Mile," making the Round-Up as unique — and difficult — a rodeo as they come.

Because the rodeo is located in a region rich with American Indian legacy, their presence has always been a significant piece of the Pendleton culture. This can be seen from their

undeniable impact on the Round-Up to their influence on colors and patterns at the legendary Pendleton Woolen Mills.

During the rodeo, native dancing takes place in the arena between events, and there is a tribal market in the park on the rodeo grounds. The most impressive display of American Indian heritage, though, is in Tipi Village.

Members of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation — the Umatilla, Cayuse and Walla Walla Indians who live eight miles east of Pendleton — host a grand tribal village on the Round-Up grounds. It has served as the center of activity for American Indian community members attending the rodeo for more than a century, with teepee sites being handed down through generations. Many families occupy the very same space in the village their ancestors did 100 years ago, bringing tangibility to the significance of tradition and legacy at the Pendleton Round-Up that reaches far beyond the rodeo arena.

The village boasts 300-plus teepees each year, making it the largest annual Indian encampment in North America.

Showcasing their history and culture, the tribes also participate in performances, known as powwows, during the rodeo. In 1914, the Pendleton Round-Up introduced Happy Canyon, a live telling of the region's prolific history and a fan-favorite attraction. Happy Canyon presents a live retelling of Pendleton's founding and honors both the legacy of the region's tribes and the spirit of the West. The show welcomes all ages to join, and many of its performers are descendants of the early actors and crewmembers from 1914.

Aside from the two years the Pendleton Round-Up didn't happen due to World War II, nothing has kept the rodeo from trucking year after year. A Eugene, Oregon, newspaper put it best: "In good times and in bad, Pendleton has gone on with the Round-Up. People on the Umatilla have always been willing to take a chance. Maybe that's the real cowboy spirit. Maybe it's a little bit tougher brand of civic spirit. Anyhow, in Pendleton, the show goes on." The town became synonymous with the rodeo, and that's something that hasn't changed in more than a century.

Roberts was born in Pendleton and raised in a family of Round-Up volunteers.

"There are two seasons in Pendleton: Before Round-Up and after Round-Up," Roberts says.

Today, Round-Up week doesn't look much different from more than a century ago. It remains to be run as a nonprofit, serving as the community's largest fundraiser of the year with funds going towards scholarships, community betterment and more. Local volunteers from all walks of life band together to welcome more than 50,000 fans to the historic town for a rodeo which has an economic impact of more than \$68 million annually on the Pendleton area. In 2022, the Pendleton Round-Up generated annual revenue of \$790,000, excluding additional revenue generated by hotels, restaurants, bars or shops.

Whether you're a rodeo fan traveling to the small Northwest town to experience the world-famous Let 'er Buck Room, or a world-class professional rodeo athlete in pursuit of a

championship gold buckle, the Pendleton Round-Up is a unique intersection of the historical wild West and modern entertainment.

### **More than a Green Mile**

The Pendleton Round-Up has the power to transform rodeo seasons and change lives. Just ask professional barrel racer Stevi Hillman, a native of Granbury, Texas, whose 2023 rodeo season became \$10,000 more profitable after her winning run catapulted her into the top 15 in the world standings and qualified her for her eighth Wrangler National Finals Rodeo.

“Running on the grass is the scariest, most fun thing I’ve ever done,” says Hillman, who won the prestigious Pendleton Round-Up title in 2016.

It’s become a tradition for cowboys and cowgirls to sit out on the grass during roughstock events, testing their bravery in exchange for the best seat in the house.

In the same arena that has been standing since the event's inception, rodeo fans and athletes will quickly notice it looks much different than most of the 650 Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association-sanctioned rodeo arenas around the country. You won’t see national sponsor banners dotting the fence line of the arena, or any advertising at all. You also won’t find an electric roping chute and barrier; rather, roping cattle are run down a hill and into the arena, just as it was done in rodeo’s early days. The Round-Up committee prides itself on keeping traditions alive, and no sponsor flags or electric chute will disrupt this piece of living history.

“Some may call us old-fashioned here, but we pride ourselves on tradition. We’re loyal to it and don’t plan on changing anytime soon,” Roberts says.

The second week of September also marks a pivotal time in a cowboy’s PRCA season. With only two weeks remaining in the regular season, tensions — and, if you’re lucky, celebrations — are as high as the Blue Mountain Range. With more than \$600,000 up for grabs, the prestigious payout is the ninth largest in the PRCA, and has the power to create — or destroy — NFR qualifiers.

Hillman’s last-chance stop at the 2023 Round-Up drastically changed her rodeo season after her 28.23-second Green Mile run. This time presents slow compared to a standard barrel pattern, but it was one of the fastest of the week in Pendleton. The palatial arena tests both a horse’s athleticism on the grass and their stamina to reach the finish line in an enormous barrel pattern.

Many contestants prepare their horses for the treacherous ground with special conditioning and horseshoes designed to run on the grass. Hillman expresses the importance of trust to cover the Green Mile.

“It is so important to be able to trust and feel your horse to push them across the grass and into the dirt to turn,” says Hillman.

The stories told and epic rides witnessed behind the brightly colored bucking chutes make this rodeo a must-stop on PRCA and Women's Professional Rodeo Association schedules. The energy is simply summarized in one statement, "Let 'er buck."

## **Rooted in Traditions**

When you emerge in the Pendleton Round-Up arena, you're greeted with bold, rainbow-colored chutes along the far fence line. While the colors feel vibrant and nostalgic, they also hold significance for the culture and locale of the Round-Up. The chute colors are red, like the bold pigments in a legendary Pendleton Woolen Mills blanket; green, like the bright grass of the Green Mile; blue, like the nearby Columbia River; and yellow, like the golden wheat fields of the Palouse region. The century-old chutes are hand-painted by Round-Up volunteers.

The autumn air is only disrupted by the nearby harvest and the distant shouts of rowdy cowboys from the Let'er Buck Room, an icon of the Pendleton Round-Up boasting one of the longest continuous bars in the world. Throughout the town, you can hear the echoes of sold-out crowds cheering on Indian Relay Racers and the proud drum behind the American Indian powwow dance.

Another significant aspect of the Round-Up's story is the beloved Pendleton Round-Up Queen and her court. Chosen for their dedication to preserving and promoting the Pendleton Round-Up's traditions and heritage, these ambassadors represent the living history of the Round-Up and the Pendleton community.

Josilyn Fullerton, of Dayton, Washington, grew up attending the Round-Up and was welcomed by the community's warm embrace as an official ambassador of the rodeo's legacy.

"It was surreal [serving as queen and princess]," says Fullerton, who first served as princess in 2019 and later as queen in both 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

As a member of the queen and court, those who hold the crown also have the honor of carrying on generational traditions. One of the most noticeable is the court's uniform shoulder-length hair and custom, handmade leather outfits. Weighing upwards of 25 pounds, these symbolic leathers were reintroduced at the event's centennial anniversary and carry the legacy of past Round-Up royalty.

At exactly 1:15 p.m. when the rodeo begins, the queen and court fly over the rail and greet the roaring crowds with thrilling spirit.

"The grand entry is truly unlike anything else," Fullerton says. "We practice for months prior to the Round-Up, but nothing can prepare you for the level of adrenaline and excitement of the crowd. It was so special to experience it alongside my court, with whom I became so close."

In addition to the excitement of Round-Up week, the queen and court work closely with the rodeo's Board of Directors throughout the year to carry the spirit of the Round-Up across the country at various rodeos and events.

“It’s a big family and a true honor to represent the Round-Up all year,” Fullerton says. “I grew up watching the Round-Up, and it has truly been a full-circle moment to continue to be an ambassador for its heritage. When someone says, ‘Let ’er Buck,’ there is a sense of pride in it, and an understanding of the many traditions behind the saying.”

By the third week in September, the rodeo has come and gone. Another year of stories and traditions will be recalled as memories from the Green Mile. Farmers will return to tending their crops. Local tribes will deconstruct their teepees and clear the camping grounds. Contestants will load their trailers and head to the next rodeo. And the Pendleton Round-Up team will get started on plans for the next one. Until next year, let ’er buck!

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# PRESS RELEASE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **WESTERN INDUSTRY LEADERS TAKE HOME WRANGLER BFI WEEK #11.5 TOP HONORS**

**GUTHRIE, Okla.** – Longtime friends and western industry leaders **Barry Berg** and **Monty Crist** took the Monday off from their day jobs and walked away with top honors at the 2025 Wrangler Bob Feist Invitational (BFI) #11.5 Businessman's Team Roping, earning an impressive \$175,000 payday.

Teaming up for the first time at the famed Lazy E Arena, Berg and Crist found great success in their hands. In addition to the substantial payout, the cowboys also received an extensive prize package, including Cactus Saddles, Gist Buckles, YETI Backpacks, Resistol Hat Packs, Justin Boots, Equinety supplements, custom briefcases, and a Turtlebox speaker.

Taking home \$87,500 each, the duo was all smiles as they took a victorious lap around the historic arena, cheered on by their many fans and supporters.

Berg, a Texas-based header, pursues his passions both in and out of the arena as the general manager of Cactus Ropes. For the past 34 years, he has dedicated his career to advancing the sport of team roping through innovative rope designs.

A true businessman, Berg expressed his gratitude for the industry and the opportunity to rope in the prestigious BFI Week Businessman's Roping.

"I didn't really envision winning this thing. I just wanted to focus on catching all my steers for Monty. I love my career—it never feels like work. I love getting to share the sport of team roping with the world. I first won this roping in Reno in 2013, and it is so special to get this win again with Monty," Berg said.

The Businessman's Roping is known for its industry-leading production, spotlighting #11.5 teams with extraordinary payouts and resume-topping honors. It was only fitting for two Western industry leaders to continue the legacy in 2025.

Crist, originally from California but now residing in Oklahoma, has spent the past 35 years at Professionals Choice, where he currently serves as Chief Operating Officer. His dedicated team of employees even paused work to watch his victorious short-go run in their Oklahoma City conference room.

"Seeing my team cheer me on almost brought me to tears. It hasn't quite sunk in yet," Crist said.

The duo, who led the aggregate race by nearly two seconds, roped four steers in 32.75 seconds to claim the title.

Having dedicated their lives to bettering the western industry, Berg and Crist expressed their gratitude for the opportunities it has provided.

"It's a lifestyle that is difficult to explain to those unfamiliar with the industry, but we all come together because of the love we share for the horse and this way of life. Our passion for it is truly indescribable. With this being the Businessman's Roping, this win is even more special to us," Crist reflected.

Marked by high team counts and impressive payouts, this triumphant victory highlights the talent showcased at the 2025 Wrangler BFI Week. The event continues to change lives and spotlight the brightest stars of the sport.

The Businessman's Roping is also distinguished by its numerous opportunities for ropers to showcase their skills and take home life-changing paychecks. In total, three major titles were awarded during the event—the #11.5, #10.5 Incentive, and Three-Steer Consolation—with a total of 70 checks distributed across all aggregate, consolation, incentive, and round fast-time categories. The prestigious payout totaled \$740,500.

On the second-to-last day of the 2025 Wrangler BFI Week, standout ropers were highlighted in the #10.5 Incentive. This exclusive opportunity, designed to showcase ropers at an elite level, awarded \$7,500 to Drew Jordan and Jackson Lee. The duo celebrated on the winner's stage, taking home stunning Gist trophy buckles, Justin Boots, and, of course, the iconic oversized check that cements their names in history.

The Consolation Aggregate, featuring the quickest ropers on three steers, was headlined by Steve Orth and Jack Morris, who took home an impressive \$9,000 for their speedy aggregate time of 21.12 seconds on three steers.



The historic week continues at the Lazy E Arena, featuring several numbered ropings that highlight the sport's most skilled athletes and provide career-changing opportunities. The final day of the 2025 Wrangler BFI Week will feature a #9.5 Over 40 and a #8.5 roping with a #7.5 incentive.

For full results from the Wrangler BFI Week #11.5 visit [HERE](#).

To learn more about the BFI Week, watch the livestream, visit [HERE](#).

## – BFI WEEK –

### **About BFI Week:**

Produced by Ullman-Peterson Events, the Bob Feist Invitational (BFI) celebrates 48 years of team-roping excellence. Known as one of the most prestigious and challenging team roping events, this annual week of high-caliber competition ranks among the best. Featuring a myriad of numbered, all-girl, and youth ropings, the week-long event awards over \$4.4 million in total prize money. This year, the event will take place from March 26–April 2, 2025, at the Fabulous Lazy E Arena in Guthrie, Oklahoma.

## **“Beyond the Arena: How the Desert Rodeo is Expanding the Western Industry”**

*Originally published in COWGIRL Magazine Feb 2025*

**By: Julia Dondero**

Nestled deep in the heart of the Golden State, the Coachella Valley is best known for its breathtaking San Jacinto Mountains views, electrifying music festival scene, and A-list resorts—and now, its premier Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association (PRCA) rodeo scene.

Enter the Desert Rodeo, at a time when it’s never been cooler to embrace one’s inner cowboy.

Set against the scenic Joshua Tree National Park backdrop, the Desert International Horse Park in Thermal is the perfect culmination of unhindered Western freedom and first-class hospitality.

Taking place April 25-26, the inaugural PRCA Desert Rodeo is set to bring the finest hospitality, retail, and rodeo experience to fans and athletes alike.

Country music fans might already have this date circled on their calendars, as it coincides with one of the largest weekends in country music—happening just down the road from the Desert Rodeo. This combination of audiences allows fans to experience everything the Western lifestyle embodies, including the way of life that artists like Zach Bryan sing about in songs such as “Open the Gate” and “Mechanical Bull.”

Born out of a strong love and appreciation for the Western lifestyle, the Desert Rodeo team aims to bring revolutionary hospitality and a window into the Western industry unlike anything else in the Greater Palm Springs area.

Desert Rodeo co-founder and *Entertainment Tonight* correspondent Cassie DiLaura’s unbridled love for the Western industry was the catalyst for creating an event centered around community and growing the sport of professional rodeo.

“We (the Desert Rodeo team) are honored to play a small part in sharing the Western lifestyle and helping the Western industry continue to grow. The resurgence of cowboy culture in mainstream media and event popularity has been incredible. My team and I are so proud to play even a small part in highlighting the sport of rodeo in this way.”

The exciting weekend will feature the nation’s best PRCA competitors, as well as first-class hospitality and opportunities to shop with the industry’s brightest retail stars, including Stetson, Resistol, and Charlie 1 Horse—the official hat of Desert Rodeo. Attendees will also have the opportunity to customize their authentic cowboy hat at The Hat Bar by Kate Kaney.

Also featuring an elite food and drink lineup, the event will include specialties from partners such as Tito's Handmade Vodka, The Ryl Company, Cattaneo Bros., and The Mercantile—bringing California's iconic flair for great flavor and hospitality to the Desert International Horse Park.

“We wanted to make this experience as authentic as possible,” explained DiLaura. “We are excited to partner with the best, like Flying U Rodeo Company and Resistol, as we invite so many new fans to the sport.”

With the goals of bringing the local community together and furthering professional rodeo, this premier event will provide opportunities not only to rodeo athletes but also to local communities.

With the inclusion of a Kid's Day (taking place Sunday, April 27), contributions to Los Angeles Fire Department, and the Golden Circle of Champions, this event shines a bright light on the contributions of the Western industry. The Golden Circle of Champions is an organization dedicated to raising awareness and vital funds for children bravely battling pediatric cancer. As a proud Golden Rodeo, Desert Rodeo will include community-driven fundraising efforts to provide direct support to local families in the Greater Palm Springs area in their time of need while empowering children to build courage through cowboy camaraderie with the help of their friends at Montana Silversmiths, Resistol, and YETI.

Each year, PRCA-sanctioned rodeos raise more than \$40 million for local and national charities.

In response to the devastating wildfires in Los Angeles, Desert Rodeo, a California-based company, will also donate a portion of ticket proceeds to the County of Los Angeles Fire Department to support the brave firefighters who risk their lives to protect Los Angeles County residents.

“Like firefighters, cowboys are courageous,” said Fire Chief Anthony C. Marrone. “Together we face challenges with grit, commitment, and strength, and live each day with integrity to help those in their time of need. On behalf of the County of Los Angeles Fire Department, I'd like to thank Desert Rodeo for extending an invitation for our firefighters to be recognized at this exciting event.”

With a focus on giving back to the community, DiLaura explained, “It is so important to my team and me to give back. We wanted to create an event open to the whole community to gather together and celebrate the Western space.”

DiLaura, in addition to her impressive career as a broadcast journalist for *Entertainment Tonight*, is a cowgirl at heart. The proud Syracuse University alum and Michigan native fell in love with the Western way of life for the traditional values at its core and the authenticity of the people who make it so special.

“I have so much respect for the Western way of life and the sacrifices the athletes make to pursue their passions. I love the Western industry because of the way it is centered around community, strong values, and a welcoming presence.”

DiLaura has teamed up with her husband and Desert Rodeo co-founder Brett Lazar, Balmoral Farm’s Traci and Carleton Brooks, and Locale Concierge’s Carrie and David Isen to bring this dream to life. She reflected, “I am so excited to share this way of life with so many new fans and for them to learn about what cowboys and cowgirls go through, and about the true values of the Western industry.”

With a tip of our Resistols, fans and athletes alike have expressed their excitement and appreciation for this inaugural California Circuit Rodeo, which brings advantageous opportunities for rodeo athletes and elevates the Western lifestyle to new heights.

In a time when it’s never been cooler to be a cowgirl, fans are invited to slip on their favorite boots and celebrate the Western lifestyle April 25-27 at the Desert International Horse Park in Thermal, Calif. For more information or to purchase passes, please visit <https://www.desertrodeo.com/>.

## **Reigning All-Around Cowboy, Mason Stueve, Makes His Return to Shawnee**

*Originally posted June 2024, International Finals Youth Rodeo*

Sometimes, it's the extra swing that counts the most.

That one extra swing to secure a solid run for a major championship. One more rep in the practice pen, or one more video breakdown post-run. It is the extra swing that can make all the difference in the winner's circle.

For 19-year-old Mason Stueve, this steadfast idea of consistency couldn't be more true. It was this rock-solid mentality that took him to the 2023 International Finals Youth Rodeo (IFYR) winner's circle as the All-Around Cowboy. Competing in the tie-down roping and the team roping, the timed-event hand understood the high-stakes environment the IFYR creates and came prepared with a game plan.

"Last year in Shawnee was great. It's a lot of pressure amongst your peers, and it's an event everyone wants to win. It certainly ranks as one of my favorites" said Stueve.

Stueve also explained how the high-stakes payout and format of the competition also challenged competitors and allowed him to excel, utilizing his strong fundamentals and mental game. Winning the first round of the calf roping and continuously placing in the team roping allowed Stueve to take home the prestigious title and National Trailer Supply Champion trailer in tow.

"It was very special to win and to have my family there supporting me. The all-around wasn't on my mind, nor did I know I was even in contention for it until the short go" said Stueve.

Not only did this win top his extensive resume, but it also provided Stueve with the confidence and finances to take his young career to the next level. "If you can win on that level, it's financially and confidence-wise a kickstart for your career. The payout greatly impacted me and has allowed me to continue to take my competition to the next level" explained Stueve, who has already taken his roping game to the professional, amateur, and collegiate ranks at Weatherford College.

Competing in Shawnee also presents competitors with a prestigious opportunity to compete on one of the largest stages in youth rodeo. "It's a challenge to stay focused and keep your goals the same throughout the week, it's a marathon mindset. I had to remind myself to trust my horse, the work we've done at home, and focus on catching the steer in front of me."

Wise beyond his years, the rising college sophomore explained the power of practicing consistency and how focusing on the fundamentals has allowed him to excel in multiple-go, aggregate competitions.

“My Dad instilled the idea of consistency in my mind and always reminds me to ‘just catch cattle’. When in doubt, you have to focus on catching your steer, even if that means taking an extra swing” explained the Newton, Kansas native, who accredits his parents for always supporting him in, and out of the arena.

This level of knowledge is no coincidence, Stueve explained, “I’ve been fortunate to hang out around the right people and have really prioritized my mental game.” Accrediting mentors like Coleman Proctor for his knowledge and pride in breaking down the fundamentals. With big goals ahead, Stueve also accredited his large support system, partially his team roping partner, who has been finishing his runs since junior high.

“Trey Adams and I go way back. We’ve roped together throughout junior high, high school, and now, the collegiate and open levels. We can pretty much finish each other's sentences now,” the header jokes.

The special bond between a header and heeler is one of the most important aspects in a successful team roping run– and for the Kansas duo, it was also the deciding factor in Stueve’s all-around win.

Stueve credited his lifelong friend and partner for securing the all-around win, explaining, 'After our run, Trey turned to me and said, "I could have roped that one a hop faster, but I wanted to make sure you took home the all-around trailer."' This selfless act of foundational roping not only sealed the deal for Stueve but landed the young men from Kansas in the receiving champion spot in the team roping.

This July, Stueve will enter his final IFYR. A bittersweet conclusion to a prosperous chapter, Stueve looks forward to returning to Shawnee. “My plan hasn't changed at all. I plan to go out there and ‘just go catch cattle’.”

## **Double the Breakaway Roping Trouble in North Carolina**

*Originally Published By: World Champions Rodeo Alliance, October 2023*

At the 2023 World Champions Rodeo Alliance (WCRA) Rodeo Carolina, all eyes were on not one, but two 14-year-old cowgirls from Seguin, Texas. Kelsie and Kylie Reininger looked to make history this past October at the Tryon International Equestrian Center in Mill Spring, NC. With both cowgirls entering the competition in the top 16 of the Breakaway Roping leaderboard, they competed alongside many of their idols, including Kelsie Domer, Martha Angelone, and Jackie Crawford.

So, how did two eighth graders find themselves competing at one of the largest rodeos East of the Mississippi?

It first starts with the love and passion for the sport. Both Kelsie and Kylie Reininger expressed their unwavering dedication to the sport of roping from a young age. Since the moment the twins first picked up a rope, they have yet to set it down- and they don't intend to any time soon.

“We have been very grateful for amazing opportunities to learn how to rope. Our Dad has always supported us and pushed us to enter up and gain our confidence,” explained the twins, whose Father also competitively team ropes.

The duo also spends most of their days starting and ending in the practice pen. Bearing the sizzling south Texas heat and taking turns running more cattle up to the rope, the twins have dedicated their time and energy to one of their greatest passions-roping. While it may sound like long days to some, for the Reininger girls, it's simply what they love to do.

“We are so blessed with our family and a strong support system that cheers us on, regardless of the outcome. Spending each day roping is our passion, and I wouldn't have it any other way,” explained Kelsie Reininger.

What the youthful cowgirls lack in age, they make up for in determination and ambition. This gritty mindset has placed the Texan breakaway ropers at the top of the pack, regardless of age or division. With an expansive career ahead of Kelsie and Kylie Reininger, the twins expressed their career goals of success within the WCRA, Women's Rodeo World Championship, and the National Finals of Breakaway Roping.

“Breakaway Roping has come so far. I feel blessed to rope on these stages and for large amounts of money. It's my passion to do this, and I wouldn't want to do anything else,” expressed Kylie Reininger, who will compete for her piece of the exciting \$400,000+ payout in North Carolina, atop of her 9-year-old equine partner “Tyson,” who has elevated her roping to the next level.

Entering one of rodeo's most prominent stages can be nerve-wracking to anyone, but the Reininger twins will stomach the butterflies with grins on their faces, ready to cheer each other on.

"We both aim to keep it simple, rope our best, and keep preparing for the event," said Kylie Reininger, who also explained she is typically the more high-strung roper and Kelsie Reininger keeps the duo calm, cool, and collected.

The duo, who have balanced each other out since birth, explained they shifted their mindsets to focusing on the calf at hand, and it's all business when they get back into the box.

Kelsie, who ropes off her trusted all-around horse, "Snowman," enters Rodeo Carolinas in sixteenth place and expresses her gratitude for their parents and supporters who have coached and cheered them on.

"Kelsie Domer and JJ Hampton are two of our biggest role models. We currently have Kelsie [Domer]'s horse, Roanie, who has greatly helped our roping. We are so grateful for her and our many supporters," said Kylie Reininger.

The duo made history at Rodeo Carolina as two of the youngest and most competitive Breakaway Ropers, and also expressed their gratitude for the many opportunities created by the WCRA.

"It's a dream to compete against our idols. We are both grateful to the WCRA for these opportunities and the chance to grow our skills and confidence at this level," reflected Kylie.

As the twins look to make history at future WCRA events, all eyes will be on the duo as they back into the box. As the duo's year progresses, one thing is sure- the twins will be all smiles and ready to rope their dreams, one calf at a time.



## **Buddy Hawkins On Making Living Doing What You Love**

*Originally published by the World Champions Rodeo Alliance, November 2023*

“I want to make a living in team roping. I'd run the chute or ride horses if I couldn't make a living team roping. I just love it that much.” Buddy Hawkins quoted the late, great Leo “The Lion” Camarillo in expressing his passion for the sport.

Buddy Hawkins, the 2023 Reliance Ranches VRQ Bonus Champion Heeler (alongside his brother-in-law Andrew Ward), closes the year victoriously, pocketing over \$60,000 through World Champions Rodeo Alliance (WCRA) events and bonuses over the past year. These significant paychecks have enabled Hawkins to pursue his passion for team roping while also providing for his family. Rooted by his faith and his love for his family, Hawkins is driven to make a living pursuing his passion for team roping.

“My faith is my priority, My goal is to make a living team roping and caring for my family. I’m very grateful to rodeo full-time,” explained the 2022 Cowtown Christmas champion.

Hawkins also gratefully accredited the WCRA and its leadership for their continued investment in the sport.

“I have a great appreciation for those investing in the sport of rodeo and leaving it better than they found it” reflects Hawkins, who hopes the sport will continue to grow for future generations and allow more athletes to make a living pursuing their passions.

For Hawkins, the copious opportunities allotted by the WCRA, have made a significant impact on his professional career, allowing him to further invest in himself, his horses, and his family. A true gambler at heart, Hawkins views the nomination opportunities as a true investment in the development of his career.

“I look at it like chips. I’m looking to see what is going to be best for myself and my family long-term,” said Hawkins. “Investing in the nomination process, the WCRA has provided many opportunities to make our life happen.”

While at Rodeo Carolina, the Hawkins and Ward did more than defend their leaderboard position. Earning over \$6,000 when the Tryon International Equestrian Center dust settled, the duo concluded the event as runners-up to Marcus Theriot and Cole Curry.

“Rodeo Carolina was a great opportunity to compete against great ropers in a competitive format, and we were grateful for the opportunity to see a different area and compete for the title,” said Hawkins.

Sticking to the same nomination strategy that earned him the 2023 Reliance Ranches VRQ Bonus, Hawkins will look to continue nominating through the nomination period and stay at the top of the leaderboard.

