



CANADIAN PROFESSIONAL RODEO ASSOCIATION

XPLOSIVE ZEKE

June 19, 2023 | Airdrie, Alberta
For immediate release

When two superstars meet, the results are often spectacular. And when those superstars are both world champions, the outcome can be magical.

That was exactly the case on Saturday night at the Wildwood Bronc Bustin' in Wildwood, Alberta when three-time World and Canadian Champion, Zeke Thurston, met up with the outstanding Calgary Stampede mare Xplosive Skies in the championship round. The ride and the score were as advertised as the two combined for an arena-record 93.5-point highlight reel moment that netted the Big Valley, Alberta cowboy a \$5000 cheque and \$6979 overall.

Thurston entered the weekend in 3rd place in the world standings and 4th on the Canadian season leaderboard. With an additional 4th place \$963 cheque pulled out of Innisfail, the second-generation mega-talent continued his relentless quest for four titles on both sides of the border.

Xplosive Skies, for her part, is a true switch-hitter as she won her world title in the bareback riding in 2021, then was Logan Hay's dance partner at the Hardgrass Bronc Match in 2022 when the Canadian set the world record score in the bronc riding with his 95.5-point ride.

Thurston wasn't the only Canadian champion to enjoy success on a busy CPRA weekend. Alberta born and raised team roper (header) Clay Ullery who captured a Canadian title in 2021 and his New York State native heeling partner, Jake Edwards, made a big move up the Canadian standings with twin wins that included a 4.7 second win at Stavely Pro Rodeo for \$2334 apiece, then a split of top honours at Innisfail (with world season leaders Rhen Richard and Jeremy Buhler). Their 4.3 second run at Innisfail ("The House that Jack 'Daines' Built"/Daines Ranch Pro Rodeo) put another \$2209 in the Ullery/Edwards Wranglers for a weekend haul of over \$4500. A welcome injection for the duo that had been languishing in 31st place but could be as high as top fifteen when the updated standings appear later in the week.

"it's been slow so far," Ullery reflected on their 2023 season to date, "but I've got the best heading horses I've ever had (Mr. Wilson acquired from barrel racer Monica Wilson, and Skeeter from former World Champion steer wrestler, Blaine Pederson) and Jake's got the best heeling horses he's ever had, so to be honest we've been surprised that we haven't been winning."

The cross-border teammates were first drawn together at Fort Worth in March of 2020 and won Fort Worth that year. They resumed their partnership in March of this year with what Ullery calls a 'long-term' union and game plan, while "our priority this year is the Canadian Finals and winning Canada." And with Clay's little brother, Cooper Jones, taking over some of the driving, all systems are go. Ullery joked that since Cooper has been driving, the team has been winning.

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That's good timing – with SMS Equipment Pro Tour rodeos and Cowboy Christmas (July 1 Canada and July 4 – US) around the corner, the Ullery/Edwards duo looks poised to make some noise.

Another chapter was written in a 2023 feel-good story as bull rider Cauy Schmidt continued his comeback – with a pair of weekend successes – from what was a career-threatening injury at the end of the 2022 season. The Coronation, AB cowboy mastered Vold Rodeo's 267 Wolf Bait for 89 points to split the Stavely win with former Canadian Champion, Jordan Hansen as both men pocketed \$1663. Schmidt then added a solid second place effort at Innisfail – 86 points for \$1432.

The rodeo world said goodbye to an all-time favourite as the legendary Calgary Stampede saddle bronc horse John Wayne passed away at the remarkable age of 32 years. The brilliant buckskin carried dozens of cowboys to hundreds of pay windows during a celebrated career that ended at the National Finals Rodeo in 2013. Since that time "the Duke" has been enjoying a well-earned retirement at the Stampede's 22,000 acre ranch near Hanna, AB running with the colts and showing them the ropes as they prepare for life as bucking horses that may one day be as great as their beloved mentor.

Next up on the CPRA schedule are SMS Equipment Pro Tour stops, Wainwright Stampede and Sundre Pro Rodeo June 23-25 and two Maple Leaf Circuit rodeos, Guy Weadick Days (High River) June 23-24 and Bassano Rodeo June 24-25.

See complete unofficial weekend results at rodeocanada.com

The Canadian Professional Rodeo Association (CPRA) with headquarters in Airdrie, Alta. is the official sanctioning body for Professional Rodeo in Canada. The CPRA approves 55 + events annually with a total payout exceeding \$6 million. The organization oversees the SMS Equipment Pro Tour Finale each fall in Armstrong, BC, holds their premiere event—the Canadian Finals Rodeo (CFR)—at Westerner Park in Red Deer, Alta. in early November and endorses the Maple Leaf Circuit Finals as part of Canadian Western Agribition in Regina, Sask.

For details, please see RodeoCanada.com

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