



Three World Champions For Canada!

It might have been the greatest fifteen minutes in the history of Canadian Professional Rodeo.

For the first time ever Canadians have ridden away from the Wrangler National Finals Rodeo with three world titles. Levi Simpson and Jeremy Buhler in the Team Roping and Zeke Thurston in the Saddle Bronc Riding are all sporting the coveted gold buckles of World Champions.

Simpson from Ponoka (via Claresholm) and Buhler from Arrowwood had already made history when they became the first all-Canadian team to qualify for the WNFR. But that apparently wasn't enough for the Alberta duo as they put together a 4.3 second run in the tenth and final go round at the Thomas and Mack Arena to split 1/2 and pick up a cheque of \$23,480.77. That was good enough to take the team to the average title and a whopping \$67,269.23 per man.

Put all that together along with the fact that some of the teams they were chasing struggled in the final round and the first-time qualifiers were World Champions—Levi with \$249,133.31 in season earnings and Jeremy, sporting the most famous beard in rodeo, earning \$258,311.13.

The talented twosome roped nine of ten steers, placed on seven, winning the first round and splitting first and second in two more including the critical tenth round. When the announcement was made, both cowboys were close to speechless, unlike the Canadian fans, both in the arena and back in Canada. The roar of approval was long and very loud.

Barrhead's Kolton Schmidt, and American partner Shay Carroll, after winning the ninth go-round with the fastest time of the entire WNFR (3.6) took a no time in the tenth round.

The saddle bronc riding event follows team roping on the NFR program which meant that almost exactly fifteen minutes after Simpson and Buhler had laid claim to their title, Big Valley, Alberta cowboy, Zeke Thurston, climbed down in the chutes on the back of the Andrews Rodeo bronc, Fire Lane. The second generation qualifier, who came into the final round two points out of the lead for the average put together another solid ride for an 86 score to split 3/4 in the round and a cheque for \$13,326.92. When Jake Watson posted 82.5 points and world leader/defending champion, Jacobs Crawley missed his horse out, Thurston vaulted to first place in the average and a season total of \$265,449.45 to edge Crawley for the world title by just \$2831.

"I wouldn't trade it for anything," the recently married Thurston grinned. "I just can't believe it. It's crazy. I had a good week. I started off a little slow but things picked up. Luckily I was able to stay on nine of them. I knew the only way I could beat Jacobs was if they got him down or they missed him out and that doesn't happen very often with Jacobs. It just goes to show you that anything can happen."

For Watson, the Hudson's Hope, BC cowboy, the 82.5 on Frontier Rodeo's Short Stop was enough to split sixth in the round and finish up second in the average. The twenty-three year-old had a brilliant WNFR in his own right, as he climbed all the way from 15th place going in to fifth place in the world standings.

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The third member of the talented Canadian bronc riding trio, Canadian champion Clay Elliott, captured fifth place in the final round on Frontier Rodeo's Delta Force to collect \$6769.23. The Nanton cowboy finished up 11th in the world with season earnings of \$139,759.79.

Jake Vold ended his Wrangler National Finals Rodeo almost exactly the same way he started with a sixth place finish, this time with an 84.5 score on J Bar J's All Pink. In between the first and last rounds, Jake won three go-rounds and finished the WNFR with \$165,339.75 in earnings to end up second in the world standings with \$240,161.06.

Manitoba's Orin Larsen who re-injured separated ribs in the first round of this Finals, finished strong - placing in the last five rounds including a go round win in round #8, and wound up third in the world standings with \$219,372.59

That means that of the eight competitors who proudly rode for the maple leaf, there were three firsts (two in one event), a second a third and a fifth, and a total WNFR haul that exceeded one million dollars - making this group easily the most successful in Canadian rodeo history.

Tim O'Connell of Zwingle, Iowa won both the average and the world title in the bareback riding.

There was a Canadian connection in the Tie Down Roping as well as three time Canadian Champion Tyson Durfey, the Weatherford, Texas hand, roped his way to the world title with \$212,445.46 to slip by the Brazilian Marcos Costa by less than \$4,000. Riley Pruitt of Gering, Nebraska was the average winner.

Tyler Waguespack, from Gonzales, Louisiana, was the average winner and world champion steer wrestler as well as the Top Gun winner, emblematic of being the highest money winner of the finals.

One of the very popular wins took place in the barrel racing where 68 year old Oklahoma barrel racer, Mary Burger, hung on to win her second title with just a five thousand dollar margin of victory over first time qualifier Amberleigh Moore of Keizer, Oregon. Four time Canadian champion, Lisa Lockhart of Oelrichs, South Dakota won the average title with ten clean runs.

And in the bull riding, it was Sage Steele Kimzey, the mega-talented Strong City, Oklahoma cowboy, making it back to back to back titles as he finished up with earnings of over \$300,000 and a \$24,000 margin of victory over fellow Oklahoman Breenon Eldred. Former world champion, Shane Proctor, of Grand Coulee, Washington won the bull riding average title.

Team roper Junior Nogueira was the All-Around champion with \$231,728.33.

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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