



Grass Roots Drama Leads to Standings Shuffle

Airdrie, ALTA – October 2, 2017

In its first three years of existence, the Grass Roots Pro Rodeo Tour Final has been marked by Cinderella stories, joy and heartbreak.

All three were in evidence once again this weekend for the 2017 edition of the Grass Roots Final. At the top of the list on the upbeat side of the ledger was the team roping duo of Riley Warren and Stacy Cornet. The pair entered the weekend in 16th place in the Canadian standings, four spots out of a qualifying berth for the Canadian Finals Rodeo. But a 'lights out' performance over the two day event propelled Warren and Cornet into the top twelve and assured them of six more runs—this time in Edmonton's Northlands Coliseum in five weeks' time.

For Warren, the result was especially sweet as the six year pro missed the CFR last year in this event by just \$17. One year later, the Stettler cowboy exacted his revenge as he and his veteran heeler split 3/4 in the first round (5.2 seconds), added a 3rd in the second round (5.3 seconds) to win the average and take home \$3593 and the Grass Roots team roping championship.

"This is a lot better feeling this year," Warren noted, "and this will help me in the high point race as well." Warren is locked in a three way race for the high point title with Curtis Cassidy and Morgan Grant.

"I was riding Clay Ullery's horse, Peggy Sue, here," Warren added. "He told me I could use the horse but I'd 'better make the CFR' and ride her there as well!" This wasn't the first time that the Grass Roots Final had a major impact on the 28 year old's season. At the inaugural Final in 2014, Warren had to win the final round to qualify for the CFR... and he did with then partner Grady Branden.

Warren and Cornet got together part way through the 2016 season, and for Cornet, the Brant, Alberta cowboy, CFR#44 will be his sixth appearance and first since 2014.

"We knew we had to win today," Cornet said. "But to be honest, I was kind of distracted all day. I found out from a neighbour that there were some free farm buildings available near our place; I spent the day working on that. The good thing about coming in as far back as we were was there really wasn't much pressure. We just had to rope as well as we could in the go rounds and see what happened."

But the team roping drama didn't end there as the 13th place team going in, Jesse Popescul and Kevin Schreiner were part of the first round 3/4 split and finished second in the average for a \$2343 payday that lifted them to 11th place. The CFR appearance will be the Glentworth, Saskatchewan cowboy's first while Schreiner will be heading northward from his Medicine Hat home for the 10th time.

The two teams that were bumped from the CFR were the American duo of Lane Mitchell and Brady Tryan and the cross-border team comprising Cory Kidd (North Carolina) and Cole Davison (Vulcan, Alberta).

The bareback riding too saw a change as the 13th place Cole Goodine picked up a 3rd place finish in the Saturday night go round, and added a 4th place average cheque. The \$1250 haul carried the Carbon, Alberta hand past Innisfail's Dylan Bilton and punched his ticket to CFR '44. Goodine knows the other side of the Grass Roots emotional coin as he watched Billy West blow by him for the Rookie of the Year honours in the first year of the Calgary event.

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And a similar scenario unfolded this time around in the Rookie race as barrel racer Diane Skocdopole caught the teenage sensation, Taylor Manning, with her last run prior to the CFR. Skocdopole and her eight year old mare, Sonic, topped the field on Saturday night with a 15.653 second run - the fastest of the weekend. That run, coupled with her 5th place Friday night finish, earned the Big Valley cowgirl 2nd place in the average as well - for a \$3100 weekend, to clinch the rookie title.

The overall Grass Roots barrel racing honours went to Sydney Daines as she managed to survive a weekend that included a university exam, two intercollegiate soccer games for her U of A Pandas team (both games and the exam were in Edmonton) and two blazing runs aboard 'Flame' to take home \$4062. The win vaulted her from 9th to 5th heading into the CFR.

Kyle Lucas will be making his 4th trip to the CFR but he had to avoid near disaster to make it happen. After an opening night broken barrier, Lucas' season came down to one final run. But a split second after he nodded, his calf stumbled coming out of the box. Somehow the 23 year-old managed to check his horse, then put together a brilliant 7.5 second run to win the round and secure himself 3rd spot in the average. The win carried the son of four time Canadian champion, Joe Lucas, past Saskatchewan roper Jesse Popescul who had hoped for a two event appearance at the CFR but would have to settle for that team roping qualification.

Two stories that come under the heading 'feel good' added a couple more chapters at the Agrium Western Event Centre over the weekend. Baillie Milan's almost unbelievable late season run was capped off with his Grass Roots Final win. Milan was sitting in 50th place in the steer wrestling standings going into Strathmore in early August. He had \$2000 won. But the turnaround started with the Cochrane cowboy's Strathmore win and continued with a remarkable seven week winning streak that was capped off with his Grass Roots title. The oldest of the three Milan brothers won the Friday night round (4.0 seconds), then was third on Saturday night (4.5) to easily win the average for a \$4375 payday and the win. But perhaps even more remarkable is the fact that Milan's season earnings total has swelled to \$21,326 and he will head to the CFR in 4th place in the standings.

The other heart-warming story coming out of the weekend was the performance of bull rider Tanner Girtetz. Since announcing his impending retirement a month ago has, Girtetz has, as he says, had "his foot on the gas pedal" ever since. The 2006 Canadian champion added the Grass Roots trophy buckle to his collection with a brilliant showing on the weekend. He rode Eno Bucking Bulls' Done Talking to a go round winning 86.5 on Friday nights, then added a fourth place 82 point ride on Saturday night. His 168 two head total gave him a two point cushion atop the average leaderboard. A large and appreciative crowd gave the veteran a warm ovation as he completed his last Calgary ride of what has been a tremendous career. The third generation cowboy will head to Edmonton in sixth place, an upward move of three spots courtesy of his Grass Roots Final success.

Also in the bull riding, Ponoka's Tyler Pankewitz refused to relinquish his grasp on the final CFR qualifier berth as he held off the hard-charging Lonnie West at Calgary. Pankewitz needed a big ride on Saturday night after being bucked off on Friday and he came through with an impressive 86.5 on X6 Ranch's Muddy Water. The \$1250 for the go round win coupled with a 4th place \$625 in the average meant 'Pank' will be making his way to his 7th CFR in search of his fist Canadian title.

The story in the saddle bronc riding was the Meeting Creek rock star, Layton Green, as it has been for much of the 2017 season. The 23 year-old lengthened his already substantial lead at the top of the Canadian standings' as he '40 percented 'em" with back to back 85 point rides. The first came aboard Frank Wzykoski's Party Code with the second on Kesler Rodeo's Sunset Strip. The \$5000.00 cheque gives Green, who will also be appearing at his first WNFR this year, a whopping \$78,038 in regular season earnings with Rod Hay's single season record of \$101,646 clearly in his sights.

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For complete unofficial results from the Grass Roots Final, check out rodeocanada.com

Next stop, the Canadian Finals Rodeo November 8-12 - Edmonton Northlands.

The PRCA regular season also wrapped up the weekend and nine Canadians have qualified for the Wrangler National Finals Rodeo. 2016 World Champion Saddle Bronc rider Zeke Thurston will be joined by first time WNFR qualifier, Layton Green, and reigning Canadian Champion Clay Elliott. Another rookie WNFR athlete will be steer wrestler Scott Guenther who will be accompanied by returning qualifier Tanner Milan. In the bare-back riding, 2016 finalists, Jake Vold and Orin Larsen are back for another run at the World title. World Champion team roper, Jeremy Buhler, will be without his partner of a year ago, Levi Simpson. Buhler hung on to the 15th and final qualifying berth on the heeler side. And current Canadian Bull Riding Champion, Jordan Hansen, rounds out the group of nine heading to Vegas in December. 2017 will be Hansen's first time at the NFR - and the first time in well over a decade that a Canadian bull rider has qualified for the world finals.

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 September 29-30, 2017 for our 4th Annual Grass Roots Final (at the Agrium Western Event Centre, Stampede Park in Calgary, Alberta) and for our premiere event - the Canadian Finals Rodeo (CFR) November 8-12, 2017 at Northlands Coliseum in Edmonton, Alberta. 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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