



Zeke Thurston's Amazing Race Pays Off

It was an eventful weekend for the 2016 World Champion Saddle Bronc Rider.

Zeke Thurston was back and forth between Reno and Canada a couple of times, had to ride in the short round at Reno with borrowed equipment, including saddle, after his gear somehow got on a different flight than he did, then wait to get his equipment off that (midnight flight). Next, he drove to San Francisco to catch a return flight to Canada and raced first to Sundre Pro Rodeo to compete there before heading to Wainwright for the Stampede Finals.

But when the dust settled and the smoke cleared, the Big Valley cowboy was \$11,000 richer, with the win at the Wainwright Stampede, first stop on the Finning Pro Rodeo Tour, and a second place finish at Reno (riding in Wade Sundell's saddle). The productive, and lucrative, run boosted the second generation bronc rider's standings both in Canada where he moved to #1 overall and in the US where he was sitting in fifth place going into the weekend and is likely to climb a rung or two on that ladder as well.

It was vintage Thurston at Wainwright as he turned in a tremendous 85 point performance aboard Outlaw Buckers' Bright Lights in the Finals to go with an earlier 83 score in the long go.

"I'd seen that horse before," Thurston commented on the nine year-old bay gelding from Outlaw Buckers. "He was pretty nice—a good one to have in a short-go like that."

That draw was a nice contrast to the horse he had in Reno Done Gone from Diamond G—a mare the 23 year-old cowboy noted "fought in the chute and wasn't one of the stronger horses in the draw."

Coming off a nice win at Innisfail the week before that earned him a beautiful Ross Contway bronze, Zeke Thurston has exactly the momentum he'd hoped for heading into the "Cowboy Christmas" part of the rodeo season. He's aiming to extend his current hot streak and use it to get a little closer to reaching a couple of the goals he has set for himself—another world title and a first Canadian championship as well.

"Those are pretty high goals," he acknowledged, "but a rodeo career is not that long and there are things I want to do while it's all still new and exciting for me." And when one considers that the central Alberta superstar already has a world title, a win at Houston and three Calgary Stampede championships to his credit, it might not be a good idea to bet against Thurston reaching those goals.

There is, however, one more goal the young bronc rider has set for himself that might be a little tougher to accomplish. "Yeah, my wife Jayne and I are expecting our first baby toward the end of July, first part of August and I'd really like to be there for that. I realize that could be tough but I told her, just give me twelve hours' notice and I'm pretty sure I can do it," the soon-to-be first time dad chuckled.

Yeah, that twelve hours' notice thing, Zeke—sometimes it doesn't work that way.

Among the other big winners on the weekend were the 23 time World champion, Trevor Brazile from De-

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catur, Texas. Brazile who often doesn't make his way to Canada until the July 1st weekend might decide to make a habit of the Wainwright, Sundre, High River run as he pocketed \$7776 for his trouble. He split the tie down roping win at Sundre with 2009 Canadian Champion, Al Bouchard, won that event outright at High River and placed there in the team roping with World Champion partner Patrick Smith. Brazille then added a couple of Wainwright placings in the tie down roping. Another American—Keatchie, Louisiana steer wrestler, Jacob Talley—also enjoyed his time on both sides of the 49th parallel. He split the win at Wainwright with Provost, Alberta's Scott Guenther and Oregon cowboy, Jesse Brown (14.6 seconds on three runs), then earned a 1/2 split at Sundre with Cochrane bulldogger, Tanner Milan, (4.0 seconds) to give the Cajun a tidy \$5600 Canadian weekend. And for good measure, Talley added a go-round win at Reno to continue his torrid pace in 2018. Talley sits second in the world standings. In the "cowboys to watch" category, the Canadian team roping duo of Tristen Woolsey and Denver Johnson had themselves a \$5900 (each) weekend with the win at Wainwright (17.1 seconds on three runs) and a 3/4 split at Sundre.

Canadian rodeo fans were happy to see three-time bareback riding champion, Jake Vold, hit the winner's circle for the first time since the knee injury he suffered at the National Finals Rodeo in Las Vegas last December. Vold split the win at Sundre with Caleb Bennet as the Airdrie cowboy put together an 84 point ride on Calgary Stampede's Zipper Whitney for a \$1780 payday.

For complete unofficial weekend results go to rodeocanada.com

Cowboy Christmas officially kicks off this week with traditional stops at a pair of Finning Pro Tour events - the Ponoka Stampede, June 26-July 2 and the Williams Lake Stampede, June 29-July 2. The Airdrie Pro Rodeo wraps up the trio of Canada Day rodeo celebrations July 28-July 2.

For those who can't get to the weekend tour rodeos, log on to FloRodeo.com to sign up for the live feed.

For complete weekend results, go to www.rodeocanada.com

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. The organization holds the Grass Roots Final September 27-28 at Stampede Park in Calgary, Alberta and their premiere event - the Canadian Finals Rodeo (CFR) - at the ENMAX Centrium, Westerner Park in Red Deer, Alberta, October 30 - November 4. Follow the CPRA on Twitter and Instagram @prorodeocanada, 'Like' Canadian Professional Rodeo Association on Facebook or online at RodeoCanada.com.

For more information:

Barb Poulsen
Communications and Media
Canadian Professional Rodeo Association
Mobile: 403 625-9225
Phone: 403 625-2797
Email: media@rodeocanada.com

Canadian Professional Rodeo Association

Proud home of



272245 RR 2 Airdrie, AB T4A 2L5

Telephone: 403 945-0903

Fax: 403 945-0936

Email: cpra@rodeocanada.com

