



Canadian Champions Shine at WNFR Opening Night

Call It Canadian Carma

Three of the go-round winners at the first performance of the 2019 Wrangler National Finals Rodeo have big-time connections to Canada.

Reigning Canadian champions—saddle bronc rider, Zeke Thurston and tie-down roper, Shane Hanchey turned in winning performances in their respective events while the 2018 Canadian titleist, Richmond Champion, topped the field in the bareback riding.

Thurston, who hails from Big Valley, Alberta, and who won the 2016 World Championship, took a big step toward a second title with an 88 point ride on Mo Betta Rodeo's Sue City Sue to collect the winner's cheque of \$26,230.77. Just as important, the man leading coming into the Finals, Ryder Wright, bucked off which resulted in Thurston closing to within \$21,000 of Wright's \$234,488 season total.

Hanchey, the Sulfur, Louisiana roper who won his fourth Canadian title this year (and second in a row) turned in a blistering 7.6 second run for the go-round win. Hanchey moved to third overall while Haven Meged, the 21 year old Miles City, MT rookie - who was also a major force at the 2019 CFR - went to the lead in the World Standings after his third place finish (8.3 secs) in the round.

Champion, whose Canadian connection includes his recent marriage to Canadian Olympic figure skater Paige Lawrence, started his 2019 WNFR as he did in 2018 - with a re-ride. This time around, Champion combined with Pickett Pro Rodeo's Night Crawler for 92 points.

"I was definitely excited to have Night Crawler for the re-ride," Champion noted. "I have to admit I had some first-round jitters. And getting on that second horse kind of helped with that. There were three rides in the 90's on the first night. That's crazy - a real testament to the calibre of the stock here."

Evidence of how tough the round was were the 87.5 rides of Canadians Clint Laye and Orin Larsen that only split 6th place money.

2019 Canadian team roping titleists, Matt Sherwood of Pima, AZ and Hunter Koch (Vernon, TX) posted a 4.1 for second in the round - behind Tyler Wade and Cole Davison - while four time Canadian Champion barrel racer, Lisa Lockhart was also second in the round with a 13.70 behind only Emily Miller at 13.63. Lockhart's first night success moves her to number one in the world.

2016 Canadian Champion, Jordan Hansen (Ponoka, AB), competing at his second WNFR, was fourth in the round with an 89.5 point ride on Bridwell Pro Rodeo's Hou's Bad News. Utah's Stetson Wright, who leads the World All Around standings, bested the group of 15 bull riders with his impressive 92.5 point score on 4L and Diamond S Rodeo's Monte Walsh. As was the case in the bareback riding, there were three 90 plus point rides in the bull riding on night one.

Two time and reigning Canadian steer wrestling champion, Scott Guenther (Provost, AB), struggled in the opening round posting an 18.2 second run while Dakota Eldridge, Elko, NV, earned top money with his 3.6.

For complete WNFR results, see www.prorodeo.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 55 events annually with a total payout exceeding \$5.7 million. The organization holds their premiere event - the Canadian Finals Rodeo (CFR) - at Westerner Park in Red Deer, AB, November 3-8, 2020 and will oversee the Finning Pro Tour Finals September 6 in Armstrong, BC and the Maple Leaf Circuit Finals December 2-5 at Canadian Western Agribition in Regina, SK. Follow the CPRA on Twitter and Instagram @prorodeocanada, 'Like' Canadian Professional Rodeo Association on Facebook or online at RodeoCanada.com.

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