



Canadian Champions Declared On Dramatic Championship Sunday

Zeke Thurston has accomplished more at 25 years of age than many athletes do in a lifetime.

Four CFR appearances, five NFR qualifications and a 2016 World Saddle Bronc Championship are a few achievements on the Big Valley, Alberta cowboy's resume. A missing element was a Canadian title. Thurston addressed that today by winning the 2019 Saddle Bronc title and setting a new bronc riding season earnings record in the process.

"I had a good week. Drew some good horses. Made some good rides," Thurston commented. "I felt like I rode solid all week. I had a couple of go-round wins; I couldn't have asked for it to go any better."

The season leader was the picture of consistency with scores in the mid-eighties throughout the six day event and cheques from every round to equal \$37,980 in CFR round earnings. He added the aggregate win as well (\$15,795) for a record-breaking season earnings total of \$110,785.

"The Canadian title is one I've been gunning for a while. I've accomplished a lot of things that I didn't think I would before this one. And to hear I broke the earnings record is pretty cool. It goes to show how rodeo has grown as a whole. It's pretty special for me to do what I love and make that kind of money."

Thurston's total domination of the saddle bronc riding in 2019 was evidenced by the fact that his season money total was virtually double that of his nearest rival, Nebraska's Cort Scheer who put together a \$57,000 season.

A couple of titles went south of the 49th parallel, both of them in the roping events. In one of the most dramatic comeback wins, Shane Hanchey, the 2013 Tie-Down Roping World Champion, overcame a slow start and put together back to back go-round wins to close out the week and claim a fourth Canadian title and second in a row.

"It feels really good," Hanchey acknowledged after the performance. "The way it started I didn't know if I'd be in this position. But I follow the motto 'don't let the highs get too high or the lows too low' and you can never count yourself out in this sport."

The eleven year pro finished out of the money in the first two rounds of CFR '46, then managed modest 4th and 5th place finishes in the middle of the week before mounting his late charge. His final two times, a 7.3 and a 7.2 carried him to the aggregate title and allowed the Sulphur, Louisiana roper to catch the high-flying 21 year old, Haven Meged for the title. The margin of victory was less than \$8000 with Hanchey at \$57,089 in season earnings and Meged checking in at \$49,625.

"When I won the round last night I felt I had a puncher's chance," Hanchey added. "Then when I saw the draw today I had the calf I wanted and I knew if I could win the round and put the pressure on those other guys I had a really good chance. But two in a row and four overall—that's cool."

In the team roping, it was a story of the veteran and the kid. Two time world champion header Matt Sherwood of Pima, Arizona celebrated his 50th birthday during the course of the season while on the heeling side 22 year old Texan, Hunter Koch, was at his first professional Finals. Like Hanchey, they started slowly with a 7th in the first round but righted the ship in a hurry and put together three go round wins and a second place finish in another over the remaining five days of competition. The unstoppable pair won both the

aggregate and the overall title going away with \$74,000 plus in season earnings with second place finishers, Canadians Kolton Schmidt and Jeremy Buhler, well back at just \$47,000.

One of the most popular results of the second CFR to be staged in Red Deer (after 44 years in Edmonton) came in the bareback riding. Inglis, Manitoba's Orin Larsen put together a brilliant week, placing in five rounds, winning the last three, to top the field in both the aggregate and season earnings of \$80,578 to cruise by the defending titleist, Richmond Champion of Dublin, Texas en route to the victory. Larsen's final ride came with the title outcome still in doubt and was a gem as he combined with the Calgary Stampede's Zulu Warrior for an 89.5 point ride that brought many in the sold-out Centrium to their feet. The championship was the first for the 28 year old who will be heading next to the Wrangler National Finals Rodeo as one of seven Canadians vying for world titles.

For the second year in a row, Provost, Alberta's Scott Guenther was the last steer wrestler in the final round. And for the second year in a row, Guenther did what he had to do to win the Canadian bulldogging crown. The five-time Canadian Finals qualifier, whose wife Becky delivered their first child just a few days before the start of the CFR, downed his steer in 4.6 seconds for a fourth place cheque that, coupled with another fourth place finish, this one in the aggregate, enabled the second generation bull dogger to amass \$55,000 in season winnings. That was enough to edge the hard-charging Stephen Culling and 2017 champion Jason Thomas by less than \$3500. Guenther will join fellow Canadian champions, Orin Larsen, Shane Hanchey, Matt Sherwood, Hunter Cook and Zeke Thurston, along with bull riding aggregate winner, Jordan Hansen in the trek to Las Vegas in December in search of world titles.

Kamloops, BC cowgirl Brooke Wills earned the ladies barrel racing win after a tough start that saw the CFR first timer hit two barrels on opening night. Wills and her mare Fames to Blame (aka Famey) picked up two go-round wins, second and third place cheques and fifth in the aggregate for a total of \$60,657 in 2019 earnings. And Bluffton, AB's Stacey Ruzicka wrapped up her fairy tale season by being the only barrel racer to run penalty-free at this year's CFR. Ruzicka picked up three placings and won the aggregate to end her year with an impressive \$55,831 total.

The bull riding was another pressure-packed event that saw the first-ever Mexican-born CFR qualifier, Edgar Durazo, cap a spectacular CPRA Rookie year with a Canadian championship. Durazo dominated early in the week with three go-round wins, then added second, third and fourth place cheques as well as \$11,745 in aggregate earnings to total \$106,641 for the year. 2016 Canadian Champion, Jordan Hansen who, like Durazo, rode all six of his bulls (including the only 90 plus score), battled the leader right to the end and his 89.75 point ride on Sunday aboard the Vold bull Grey Tower III meant that Durazo had to get by Vold's Strong Arm (he did for 87 points) to secure the title. Hansen's outstanding effort gave the Ponoka cowboy the aggregate win and a \$99,357 total.

Both the All Around and High Point titles went to repeat winners. Dawson Creek, BC bull rider/steer wrestler Jacob Gardner captured the All-Around honours while Stettler, Alberta roper/team roper Riley Warren came away from CFR '46 with the High Point award in tow.

The novice champions for 2019 are second generation bareback rider, Chett Deitz, from Milo, AB and Australian saddle bronc rider Lachlan Sheppard. Tristen Manning from Yellowhead County, AB won his second straight Junior Steer Riding Championship.

And the top stock awards of the CFR were split between three stock contractors. 253 Sundance Kid, from the Kesler Rodeo firm won top honours in the bareback riding while 322 Blackstone After Party of Outlaw Buckers, already named Canadian Champion, was also proclaimed Best Bull of the CFR. And the brilliant Northcott-Macza four-legged superstar, 242 Get Smart, made it a triple when the 17 year-old bay gelding added the CFR award to the Canadian and World Champion titles he had already achieved.

For complete results, see 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 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, October 29 - November 3, 2019 and will oversee the Finning Pro Tour Finals September 1 in Armstrong, BC and their inaugural Maple Leaf Circuit Finals November 27-30, 2019 at the Canadian Western Agribition in Regina, SK. Follow the CPRA on Twitter and Instagram @prorodeocanada, 'Like' Canadian Professional Rodeo Association on Facebook or online at Rodeo-Canada.com.

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