

The Two Sides of 'Lady Luck' at the College National Finals

Good luck and bad luck aside, the most highly-skilled contestants generally finished on top.



Richard Hedeman's final, winning ride at CNFR '83.

THIS YEAR'S College National Finals Rodeo, held in Bozeman, Mont., last June, represented a milestone for the Copenhagen/Skoal rodeo scholarship program, because the scholarship awards went over the \$1 million mark.

The scholarships have made a college education possible for hundreds of rodeo athletes since 1974. And in appreciation, the National Intercollegiate Rodeo Association presented Louis F. Bantle, president and chairman of the board of U.S. Tobacco, with a trophy buckle and saddle during the final go-round.

The company has also made a quieter contribution to college rodeo, and the sport in general, with the loan of a full-time employee,

By **BARNEY NELSON**

Photographs by C & B Moore

arena director Darrel Barron, to rodeos like Cheyenne, the PRCA's National Finals, and the college finals, to name a few.

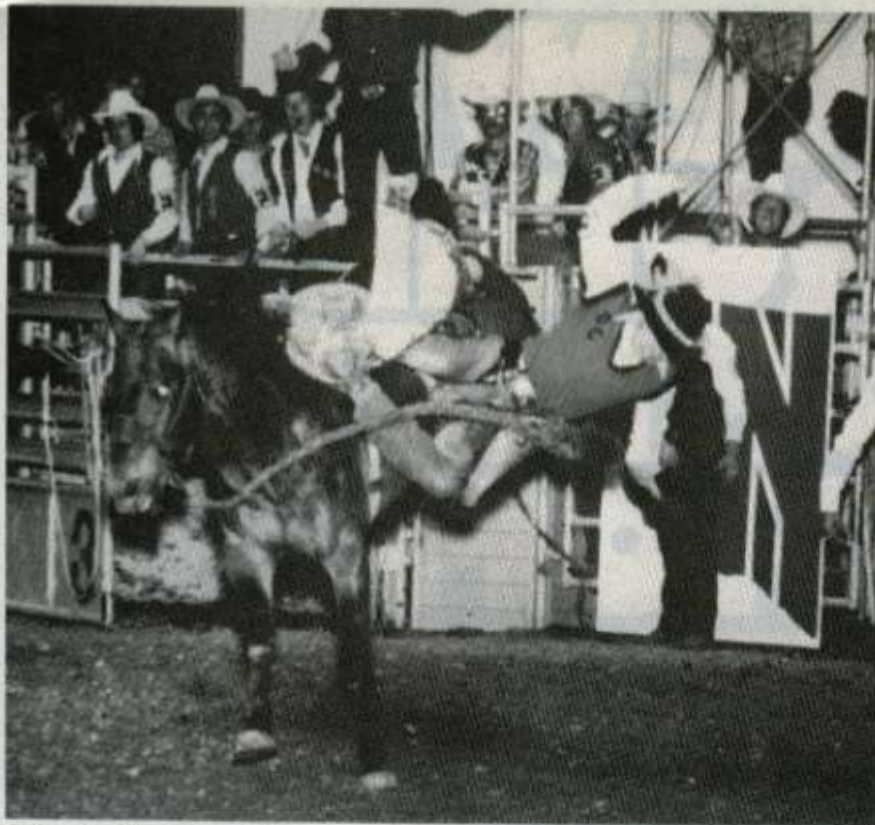
Darrel has never won any big titles, he's not a TV personality, and the average rodeo fan probably doesn't realize he is around. But some rodeos seem to come off like clockwork. By the time the buzzer sounds on one eight-second ride, the next animal is ready—chute-fighter or not. There's no lag between events, and it isn't luck that makes rodeos click like that. It's men like Darrel Barron.

Darrel remembers the temperament and moves of every bronc

and bull, and is alert enough to shout up a correction when the announcer names the wrong cowboy...

Having good bucking stock available isn't simply a matter of luck, either. Stock contractor Harry Vold of Fowler, Colo., works hard to find, feed, keep healthy, and haul a string of rough-stock that allowed only two cowboys to successfully ride all three of their bulls at this year's finals. But sometimes Lady Luck does seem to have a hand in things.

"I was at a livestock sale in Clayton, N.M., when an old rancher who had a cowboy look about him walked up to me and asked if I was Harry Vold," Harry recalls. "He said he'd been to



Rusty, unloading John Smith.

Cheyenne and some other big rodeos, and had seen a horse in an amateur string that I ought to get. A guy that's made his living horseback has a pretty good idea of what it takes, so I kept thinking about that horse."

A few months later the son of that same amateur contractor asked for a job with Vold's rodeo company, and Harry again thought about the old rancher's advice. The son was hired. Yes, he knew the horse, but his dad would never part with him; he was a good son-of-a-gun. But Harry didn't give up. The amateur contractor

needed bulls, and Harry had plenty. The loan, just for a season, of one horse for several bulls, plus the opportunity to see how good his horse really was, proved too good to pass up.

When the horse, Rusty, and Harry first met eye to eye at Odessa, the mule-headed, bug-eyed bay had a look Harry liked. And he bucked off all comers.

He bucked off Cody Lambert at the 1981 college finals—"and Cody can ride," Harry adds—and he bucked off then-reigning world champ Clint Johnson at Prescott, as well as two other top hands at

the rodeo, including Harry's son Doug, who was then leading for the Canadian bronc riding title.

"Call your dad; I want to talk to him," Harry told the contractor's son.

"Some people try to sneak around and get a horse bought before anyone knows what's happening, but I don't do that," Harry says. "I told the man, 'I'm hauling your horse; he's outstanding. He's probably the best horse on the road right now. He's already a contender for the Horse of the Year.'"

But, Harry added: "You're either going to have to sell him to me or take him home. Price him or take him back. It's a matter of principle—I don't want to take him to the National Finals if I don't own him."

Finally, a price was named, and it was a big one. Harry didn't hesitate, and Rusty had a new and permanent home. He is the only horse ever to win both the PRCA's Bucking Horse of the Year award, and the Top Bronc of the NFR in the same year, 1981.

Anyway, that's how Harry acquired one of his top animals. And Rusty bucked off the two riders who drew him at the college finals. Both cowboys initially may have felt fortunate to have drawn Rusty; they didn't feel so lucky after nodding for the chute gate to open....

Rocky Steagall, a 20-year-old junior at Blue Mountain Community College in Pendleton, came into the CNFR with almost twice as many all-around points as his nearest competitor, and had the national all-around cowboy title cinched.

Rocky also led the nation in bull



Lisa Scheffer, making her last run with a broken collarbone.



Rocky Steagall, riding during "slack."

riding, was third in saddle bronc, and tied for third in bareback. One of the few cowboys who compete in all six men's events, he finished the season in the top four in every event in his Northwest region. But he wanted to prove himself against the competition at the CNFR, as well.

This he did, with a little good fortune on the side, perhaps. Wednesday night, when the lucky program number was drawn to see who in the packed coliseum would win a filly donated by the Tee Bar Ranch Company of Augusta, Rocky's mother had the winning program. And Rocky had qualified for the final go-round in three events, and was leading the average in team roping.

His bareback horse bailed out of the chute for a spectacular beginning, but the 68 score was only good enough to move him one notch, to sixth position in the go-round and average, and no team points. However, teammate Tony Stevenson won the event, bringing their team within nine points of Sul Ross. The see-saw struggle continued, and Sul Ross next lengthened its lead in calf roping when Cody Carruthers won the go-round and third in the average.

Bad luck plagued almost the entire field of top ten team ropers, with only three runs under 24 seconds. Rocky and partner were leading the average, and were therefore last to rope. They had to rope faster than 9.7 seconds to win first.

Their ropes came tight at 8.1, but they'd broken the barrier and came up with only one heel for 15 seconds worth of penalties—still good enough for fourth in the go-round and average. A few points, but still not enough.

It was time to get tough. Rocky's saddle bronc, Jackson Hole, was a good draw, and his last chance to catch Shad Boardman for the CNFR all-around, and therefore help his team pass Sul Ross State.

He made a classic bronc ride. The judges scored him 74, highest marking in the event for the entire rodeo, and this gave him first for the go, and moved him into third place in the average. Another teammate finished fourth in the average to bring the score to Blue Mountain 849, Sul Ross 756. Rocky had proven he was worthy

of the national all-around title, but the outcome of the CNFR all-around race—and the team title—was now back in the hands of Lady Luck. Blue Mountain had no one in the bull riding, so they could only sit back and watch....

Purchasing a calf horse four years ago wasn't a lucky break for Chuck Lambert, Sul Ross graduating senior. The horse was far from gentle. He even had to have a foot tied up to be shod. Chuck named him Ginger.

"All those old men at parades and the like seem to call their fat pet mares Ginger, so I just named him that as a joke," laughs Chuck.

Then Chuck tried the ornery gelding in steer wrestling, and the horse didn't look so bad after all. "Once you get him inside an arena, he's perfect. He's easy to ride, and the toughest horse I've ever seen."

Ginger carried 11 steer wrestlers through this year's CNFR, and the judges named him Steer Wrestling Horse of the Year, winning Chuck a handmade Rusty Davis saddle....

Meanwhile, luck had run out for Montana State University's little freshman barrel racer, Lisa Schaffer. Lisa entered college last fall, bringing a big stout Hancock-bred sorrel with her. The 12-year-old horse had been ranch-raised by her dad, and Lisa had been riding him since he was three. She and dad had trained him, and the horse could rope calves, team rope, goat tie, breakaway, and barrel race.

But Sorrelly caught distemper during the rodeo season, and Lisa couldn't ride him for several weeks. They were only able to enter seven rodeos, but the horse was so outstanding, Lisa came to the CNFR leading the nation in barrel racing with 590 points, only ten points less than perfect. They made two smooth runs and went into the short go less than three-tenths of a second away from the lead.

Then bad luck came mid-week. The "Crazy Olympics" are held each year to help cure CNFR nerves and motel boredom. Games and races and crazy stunts are invented with each region competing. Lisa rode on the shoulders of two young men in one race, and the fellows fell, breaking Lisa's

collarbone.

But she strapped on a brace, and made her last run with no complaint. Still, her pain showed on the last barrel; she couldn't prevent Sorrelly from running wide, and the time wasn't fast enough to win. They'll be back....

For Jayne Gentry, there wouldn't be another year. This was her last season of eligibility in college rodeo. Jayne rodeoed for Sul Ross and had come to the finals every summer, winning the regional breakaway title each year, but somehow never quite making it all the way to a national championship.

And it looked like the big title might escape her grasp again. Her faithful "yeller" horse, Ringo, pulled a muscle, and after the second go, it was obvious the horse was too sore to continue.

But Jayne rode a borrowed horse for her final run, made the fastest run of the short go-round, and won the national title. The first person to congratulate her was Anna Crespín of Eastern New Mexico University. The two had been trading titles and races for four years in the Southwest region.

Anna and her horse, Quittin' John, had just sewn up their second national all-around title, and all-around of the CNFR; and their team had taken the women's team title.

And Suzi Wilkie, the 21-year-old Sul Ross rodeo queen candidate, had been named Miss College Rodeo for 1983-'84, so a Sul Ross-Eastern-Southwest region champagne party was already being planned....

The CNFR was now down to the last bull. Shad Boardman was leading the go-round with a score of 75, and even if moved to second, had snatched the rodeo all-around from Rocky Steagall by just 12 points. The men's team title was walking a tightrope between last year's champions, Sul Ross, and Rocky's team from Blue Mountain. The last rider, "Tuff" Hedeman of Sul Ross, would determine the team title.

Tuff needed only to mark a 57 to win the bull riding and team trophy for his school. "Don't try to be fancy, just stay in the middle!" his mother yelled.

College Finals

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It's hard to say how Tuff knew when to hop off the bull and sail his hat to the ceiling, because no one could hear the buzzer for all the shouting and cheering. The noise subsided only long enough for the score to be announced, an 81.

"You've got to draw something really good here if you're going to do anything," explained newly-elected student president Paul Cleveland of the University of Nebraska. "But then you have to ride him, too."

"Does luck really play such a big factor at this rodeo?" I asked.

"I think it's more important to keep a good clear head," Paul said.

But as I walked away, I overheard a friend ask Paul, "Hey, what about those lucky shirts you always wear?"

Summary

National Champions

Men's team: Sul Ross. **Women's team:** Eastern New Mexico. **Men's all-around:** Rocky Steagall, Blue Mountain. **Women's all-around:** Anna Crespin, Eastern New Mexico. **Bareback riding:** Stephen Smith, Hartnell. **Calf roping:** Clay Parsons, University of Arizona. **Goat tying:** Anna Crespin. **Breakaway roping:** Jayne Gentry, Sul Ross. **Team roping:** Billy Dale Haley, Southwest Texas State. **Saddle bronc:** Guy Shapka, Casper. **Steer wrestling:** Chris Hansen, University of Wyoming. **Barrel racing:** Tammy King, New Mexico State. **Bull riding:** Rocky Steagall.

CNFR Winners

Bareback: Tony Stevenson, Blue Mountain. **Calf roping:** Clay Parsons. **Goat tying:** Anna Crespin. **Breakaway roping:** Kerri Beaman, Southwest Oklahoma State. **Team roping:** Billy Dale Haley and Lanham Mangold, Southwest Texas State. **Saddle bronc:** Guy Shapka. **Steer wrestling:** Chris Hansen. **Barrel racing:** Tammy King. **Bull riding:** Richard Hedeman, Sul Ross. 🐾