



NATIONAL FINALS RODEO

Back in the game of thrown



Bull rider recovers from shattered femur to reach Finals

By PATRICK EVERSON
LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL

To fully understand the mentality of a bull rider, one only has to listen to Trey Benton III talk for a few minutes about how things went at his last rodeo of the regular season, in Puyallup, Wash.

It wasn't supposed to be his last rodeo of the regular season. There was still nearly a month's worth of competitions that usually prove vital in qualifying for the National Finals Rodeo.

"It was the first weekend of September," Benton recalled. "I was riding a bull named Blue Light Special. I actually made (the whistle) on my ride and scored 87 points, but when I went to get off, he stepped on my leg and just snapped my femur in half."

So obviously, Benton was most upset and pained over that, right? Not exactly.

"I really thought I won the rodeo with that ride, but I took second, and I was more mad about that than breaking my leg," he said. "I thought I'd won that deal."

But as he sat on the arena floor, there was no getting around turning his attention to an ugly injury.

"I was on my butt the whole time after it happened. I tried to move, and the bone just rubbed together, and my leg was laying funny on the side," Benton said. "I knew I wasn't getting up and going anywhere. It was pretty broke."

Beyond healing from such a gruesome incident, one of Benton's chief concerns was remaining among the top 15 money-winners in bull riding, to qualify for the NFR. But not being able to ride for the final month certainly put that in jeopardy.

JASON BEAN/LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL
Trey Benton III looks for landing place during round 7 of the Wrangler National Finals Rodeo at the Thomas & Mack Center on Dec. 12, 2012. The 22-year-old bull rider broke his femur earlier this year, but was able to heal in time to participate in the 2013 Finals.

► SEE BULL RIDER PAGE 4
'I'm a good kind of nervous'

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Today's Wrangler National Finals Rodeo events

SATURDAY, DEC. 14

Tip of the Day — Montgomery Gentry and Charlie Daniels Band take the stage at The Orleans for the closing night of the NFR.

NFR 9-5

10 a.m. - 5 p.m. — Cowboy FanFest, Las Vegas Convention Center
10 a.m. - 5 p.m. — Cowboy Christmas, Las Vegas Convention Center
12 p.m. - 1 p.m. — Outside the Barrel with Flint Rasmussen with guest Lucas Hoge
1:15 - 2 p.m. — Rodeo Live Unplugged with Easton Corbin (Cowboy FanFest)

NFR IN ARENA

6:45 p.m. National anthem singer — Emly Faith Wilson
7 p.m. — Tenth Go-Round NFR Performance, Thomas & Mack

NFR AFTER DARK

6:30 p.m. - 4 a.m. — Rodeo Vegas 2013, The Mirage
8 p.m. - 2 a.m. — Gary Leffew's Legendary Buck 'n Ball, Gold Coast
9 p.m. - 3 a.m. — Gold Buckle Zone, MGM Grand
10:30 p.m. - 11:30 p.m. — National Finals Tonight Show, Gold Coast

ENTERTAINMENT

7:30 p.m. — Shania Twain, Caesars Palace

8 p.m. — Parmalee, Gold Coast
8 p.m. — Sinbad, The Orleans
8 p.m. — Third Eye Blind, House of

Blues (Mandalay Bay)
9 p.m. — Damsel and LoCash Cowboys
9:30 p.m. —

Montgomery Gentry and Charlie Daniels Band, The Orleans
10 p.m. — Rodney Carrington, MGM Grand
10 p.m. — Easton Corbin, The Mirage
Highlight of the Day — Easton Corbin performs at both the Live Rodeo Unplugged at Cowboy FanFest and at The Mirage's Rodeo Vegas 2013 Party.

For a complete listing of events, go to www.NFRexperience.com or follow us on Facebook or Twitter at [LasVegasNFR](https://www.facebook.com/LasVegasNFR) / [#WranglerNFR](https://twitter.com/WranglerNFR).



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It won't be easy for finale to top first nine exciting days

Well folks, we're here again. On the precipice of history, with just one more round remaining at this year's Wrangler National Finals Rodeo, only two hours of competition separate certain contestants from gold buckles and immortality. Tonight, eight of ProRodeo's best will join World Champion All-Around Cowboy Trevor Brazile in earning world titles at the Thomas & Mack Center.

This is the day they've been waiting for all year, and with gold buckles on the line, the action is going to be intense and the pressure immense as the next set of names is added to the record books. Round 10 is always a thrilling caper for the 10-day rodeo, and there will be hundreds upon hundreds of thousands of dollars doled out when the dust settles.

It has been one heck of a Wrangler NFR so far, and I've been happy to do my part to help bring you some behind-the-scenes access and coverage from the 55th annual "Super Bowl of Rodeo." From Day 1, heads have been turned, dreams realized and dashed and a host of memorable events have transpired in Las Vegas.

Names like Sherry Cervi, Jake Wright, Cody Ohl and Taylor Jacob have become common conversation topics the past nine days as those contestants took their skills to a new level. Cervi has three round victories under her belt, Wright, Ohl and Jacob have four, and Jacob, a rookie, set a new arena record with a 13.37-second run in Round 6.

In addition, Trevor Knowles in Round 1 and Dean Gorsuch in Round 4 came within one-tenth of a second of tying the Wrangler NFR steer wrestling record with their 3.1-second runs.

Throw in a rodeo-high 90-point ride by bull rider Cody Campbell while winning the third round, and there has been plenty of fireworks through nine rounds.

Brazile made the big news of the rodeo by clinching his 11th career all-around world title on Dec. 10 during the sixth round. The gold buckle gave Brazile 19 for his likely Hall of Fame career, one more than 18-time World Champion Steer Roper Guy Allen, who had owned the PRCA record for some time.

The Decatur, Texas, cowboy was ecstatic after earning yet another gold



More than 17,000 fans will file into the Thomas & Mack Center tonight as the 55th Wrangler National Finals Rodeo comes to a close. NEAL REID/SPECIAL TO THE LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL

Neal Reid
IN THE ARENA



buckle. "This is a little bit surreal," Brazile said after setting the record. "World titles never get any easier to win, and that's why they all hold something special for me. I've been blessed way more than I could ever believe."

Brazile will go down in history as one of the greatest ProRodeo cowboys of all time, and I definitely put him in my top five with the likes of Jim Shoulders and Bill Linderman. He can win as many gold buckles as he wants in the coming years, and it will be fun to watch him do it.

A blond beauty from Mississippi was crowned Miss Rodeo America 2014 on Monday, and Paige Nicholson is a great example of all that is right and great with the Western world. She will do a fine job promoting the sport as its top ambassador, and ProRodeo once again

will be in good hands during her reign. We've had Memorial Night, where former Wrangler NFR heroes are honored and remembered, Rookie Night, where the first-year stars are recognized, and Tough Enough To Wear Pink Night, when the industry celebrates the sport's No. 1 fundraising and charity endeavor.

Tonight is Wrangler National Patriot Night, when the sport pays homage to the U.S. military with a big and bright celebration. You won't find any more patriotic people than rodeo fans, and so it will be a special and emotional night for all.

As I said, contestants will claim gold buckles tonight, and here are my picks. In the bareback riding, I see Kaycee Feild — who won Rounds 8 and 9 — to earn his third consecutive championship.

Steer wrestling is a bit of a toss-up, but my money is on Gorsuch to win gold buckle No. 3. The team roping should go to Clay Tryan and Jade Corkill in an extremely close race with Riley and Brady Minor, while Wright will join his brothers, Cody and Jesse, as a world champion saddle bronc rider.

The tie-down roping battle is going down to the wire, but I think the

amazingly consistent Shane Hanchey will edge Brazile for his first world title, while Cervi is almost a sure bet to win her fourth world title. That leaves the bull riding, where three-time World Champion J.W. Harris will end two years of being the runner-up with his fourth piece of gold hardware.

Of course, I could be wrong about some of these selections, but that's part of the fun of prognosticating. There will be at least one surprise, as is the custom, and rodeo fans will be turning to each other and muttering the word "Wow" throughout the night.

In my first column this year, I mentioned that this was my 10th trip here for the Wrangler NFR, and it has been a blast. I can't believe this is No. 10, and the fact that it's already coming to a close is even more of a head-shaker.

Thank you to all of the Las Vegas casinos, businesses and residents for helping to truly make this a "Cowboy Town" during the Wrangler NFR. Goodbye until next year.

A freelance writer based in Colorado Springs, Colo., Neal Reid spent six years as editor of the ProRodeo Sports News. His writing has appeared in USA Today, Newsday, Western Horseman, American Cowboy and the Denver Post, among other publications. Follow him on Twitter: @NealReid21.

★ COWBOY FANFEST TODAY ★

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 14

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10:30 a.m. - 11:15 a.m.
Dusty Tuckness
Steven Dent
Ryan Gray

"OUTSIDE THE BARREL" WITH FLINT RASMUSSEN
12:00 p.m. - 1:00 p.m.
Fred Whitfield
Shada Brazile
Easton Corbin

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11:45 a.m. - 12:45 p.m.

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3:00 p.m. - 3:45 p.m.

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1:00 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.

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Guy McLean - 1:00 p.m. - 1:30 p.m.

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NFR



► BULL RIDER: 'I'm a good kind of nervous,' Finals competitor says

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

"Oh, of course I was worried. I was in 14th before I broke my leg, and I came out 12th after that ride," said Benton, who earned \$12,000 for mangling his femur. "And there was three weeks left in the season. It was frustrating sitting in the hospital, wondering how many guys would pass me up."

It wasn't much better in the comforts of his home in Rock Island, Texas.

"I was sitting on my couch with crutches next to me," said Benton, 22. "You never root for guys to get bucked off. I was just hoping the odds would be more in my favor. I was sweating it out that last weekend. I just kept watching the results to see the money standings."

"The final standings showed I was still in 13th — nobody else had won enough. When I realized that, I was just like, 'Yes, I did it.'"

Then came the harder part: recovering in three months from an injury that often takes twice that long to heal.

"The doctor who fixed it said it could be healed in three months," Benton said. "Me and my dad did the math right there

"Oh, of course I was worried. I was in 14th before I broke my leg, and I came out 12th after that ride. And there was three weeks left in the season. It was frustrating sitting in the hospital, wondering how many guys would pass me up."

TREY BENTON III
BULL RIDER

on the calendar, and I knew I'd have a good chance of making the Finals. Right then and there, the deal was, can I get healed enough to do the Finals?"

The problem was that he didn't need just a typical healing. He needed healing that would allow him to climb atop an angry 2,000-pound animal and withstand getting tossed around some more. The first week of November, he gave it a try, taking practice rides on three bulls, and it didn't go well.

"I didn't know if I could do it," Benton said.

But he came back a week later, on Nov. 17, and practiced on two more bulls.

"It just worked perfect. I rode two bulls perfectly,"

Benton said. "You could say God helped me out. Everything

clicked. That's when I knew I was 100 percent good to go for the NFR."

And that's all he wanted. Last year was the first that he qualified to come to Las Vegas, and he placed in two rounds en route to finishing ninth in the world standings. He made \$73,239 heading into this year's NFR, a place where plenty more money could be won.

"You get to Vegas and the NFR, you have the best 15 guys at the best place," Benton said. "You can't count anybody out. The guy in 15th can storm through and win the title. It's anybody's ballgame here."

It would be normal to worry about his healing femur, or at least be a little nervous about the setting in front of 17,000-plus fans a night at the Thomas & Mack Center. But bull riders

TREY BENTON III

Event: Bull riding
2013 world standing/earnings: 13th, \$73,329
Residence: Rock Island, Texas
National Finals Rodeo qualifications: Two (2012-13)
Noteworthy: Benton suffered a broken leg at the beginning of September, but healed up well enough to ride during the 10-day National Finals Rodeo. In fact, he won the fifth round with a score of 90.5 points, the first NFR round win of his career.



aren't quite normal, and Benton fosters little concern.

"I'm a good kind of nervous," he said, noting he's drawing on his 2012 experience. "This year, it's just another rodeo to me. A backyard rodeo, with just a few more people."

Still, he realizes that the NFR is the top of the rodeo mountain.

"Just being out there, to make the National Finals Rodeo, is every cowboy's dream. And to make it twice, I'm just proud of that."

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