

NATIONAL FINALS RODEO

Bareback competition tight

No. 1 Bobby Mote not worried about having target on his back

By PATRICK EVERSON

LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL

The race for the bareback riding gold buckle is the tightest of all the events for this year's National Finals Rodeo. One look at the standings before the 10-day rodeo started at the Thomas & Mack Center clearly showed why. Bobby Mote, Kaycee Feild and Will Lowe have a combined nine bareback world championships among them. And the trio was 1-2-3 heading into the NFR. Mote racked up \$126,187 in 2013, followed by Feild at \$120,375 and Lowe at \$115,045.

As it turns out, Mote also leads those two in world titles, with four. Lowe has three and Feild two. One of those three riders has won the crown all but three years since 2002, and Feild is the two-time defending champion.

Mote has the target on his back, having entered the NFR in first, but that doesn't bother a cowboy who has been there, done that and won that as often as he has.

"I don't feel like it adds any pressure," said Mote, who lives in Stephenville, Texas. "I want to be in that position. That's why I'm there. It's not a bad thing. Nothing adds any more pressure, and even if it does, it seems like I do better the more pressure there is."

After going on a run of three titles in four years (2007, 2009, 2010), Mote still had strong seasons in 2011 and '12, finishing third both years and adding a second-place finish in the all-around standings last year. A relatively injury-free 2013 has him ready to regain that world title.

"Being healthy most of the year has been a big asset, for sure. And just being consistent," Mote said. "I capitalized every time I had an opportunity, which is the same thing I plan on doing while I'm at the NFR." Mote said spending more time in the gym has made a big difference, especially in the past two months. The rodeo regular season wraps up at the end of September.

"I've been working extra hard on my conditioning," he said. "During the year, I worked out harder than I used to, and with some downtime, I made it a point to get in the gym four to five days a week and spend one to two hours a day in there. And I've had a trainer."

"Conditioning has been one of my priorities. I feel like I'll benefit from that quite a bit."

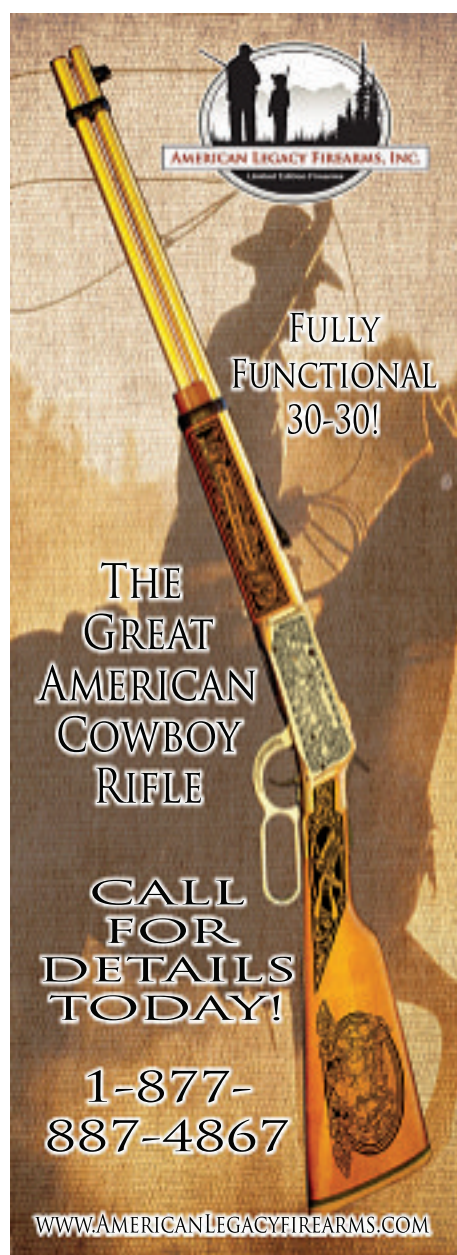


JOHN LOCHER/LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL FILE PHOTO

Bobby Mote competes in the bareback riding event during the ninth performance at the National Finals Rodeo at the Thomas & Mack Center last December. Mote is looking for his fifth gold buckle in bareback riding, but says it depends on the horses he draws.

► SEE BAREBACK PAGE 2

Mote no stranger to tough competition



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NFR Fun Facts & Figures

BOBBY MOTE



Event: Bareback riding
2013 world standing/earnings:
 First, \$126,187
Residence: Culver, Ore.
National Finals Rodeo qualifications: 13
Noteworthy: Mote has won four world titles in bareback riding, in 2002, 2007, 2009 and 2010. Last year, he cashed in seven rounds at the NFR, earning \$89,519 over the 10-day stretch, while finishing third in the bareback final standings (\$200,289) and second in the all-around standings (\$210,506).

► BAREBACK: Mote no stranger to tough competition

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

The 10-day event certainly demands being in shape and being able to recover from the inevitable bumps and bruises. And you've got to focus on yourself, even with top-flight talent right on your heels.

"I can't really worry about what anybody else is gonna do," said Mote, adding that horses are a key element to success, as well. "I can't control the draw, and that will dictate a lot. I just have to get every available point every time I nod my head."

There's more to be concerned about than just Feild and Lowe, too. Before the first night, fourth-place Ryan Gray was just a go-round win away from potentially leap-frogging all three of those world champion riders, and with all the money on the line at the NFR, Mote said he wouldn't put it past anybody to make a big move.

"I want to compete against the best, and all these names speak for themselves," he said.

"I can't really worry about what anybody else is gonna do. I can't control the draw, and that will dictate a lot. I just have to get every available point every time I nod my head."

BOBBY MOTE
BAREBACK RIDER

"There are 15 guys in that field, and 15 guys (who) can come and get the money every day. They are the best in the business."

NFR contestants have varying opinions about what they enjoy most during the 10-day showdown. Mote most likes being alone atop the mountain when it's all over.

"After the 10th round, when you walk out there and they hand you a gold buckle, and you're standing there all by yourself," he said. "I enjoy that."



K.M. CANNON/LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL FILE PHOTO
 Ten-time world all-around champion cowboy Trevor Brazile has 54 go-round wins in National Finals Rodeo competition, a PRCA record. Brazile has won seven consecutive all-around titles heading into the 2013 NFR.

Who will play their way to Las Vegas this year?



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Trio of Wright brothers battling for gold buckle

Wilbur and Orville aren't the only Wright brothers well-known for catching big air.

One of the worst-kept secrets at this year's Wrangler National Finals Rodeo is that a fifth of the saddle bronc riding field is made up of a trio of Utah cowboys who share the same last name.

Cody, Jesse and Jake Wright aren't just taking up spots in the field, they're battling each other for the coveted gold



Neal Reid
IN THE ARENA



Jake, Cody and Jesse Wright, from left to right, are battling each other for the saddle bronc riding world title this season.

buckle that goes to the world champ. Cody, the eldest of the seven Wright brothers, is a two-time world champion (2008 and 2010) and led the PRCA World Standings heading into Friday's Round 2. Jesse, the reigning world champion, was second, and Jake, Jesse's twin brother, was third after pocketing \$18,630 for winning Round 1.

The Wrights are no strangers to big-time publicity. A documentary crew followed Cody during his world championship season in 2008 and produced an award-winning film called "Born to Ride," and the New York Times is sending a reporter to cover the gold-buckle race this year.

The famed Etbauer brothers (Robert, Billy and Dan) finished in the top five in the world standings in 1991 when Robert won the world, Billy was second and Dan fifth, and the Wright brothers have a chance to better that lofty achievement.

"It's pretty awesome to be in the same category of the Etbauers," Jake said. "They were great bronc riders and great people, and we try real hard and all want to be No. 1."

Their competition is not exactly a heated sibling rivalry, but they each love to get one up on the others.

"Trying to beat them — I love it," said Jake, who is riding in his second consecutive Wrangler NFR. "It's way better than trying to beat somebody else, and they feel the same way."

The brothers enjoy watching each other ride and pull for one another every time out.

"It's a sweet and sour combination," said Jesse, a four-time Finals qualifier. "If you don't ride well, you're kind of upset that you should have done some things different, but all in all, it's all going to go well."

Cody set the bar high before the twins broke out on the scene, and they feed off each other when competing at the same rodeo.

"The energy is way high, and it's always higher when everybody's doing great," Jesse said.

"You're just that much more jacked, and it makes it more fun each night when you're all doing great."

His twin brother agrees. "Oh yeah," Jake said when asked if his brothers' exploits get him charged up. "They show you the potential you've got when you see them jump out and are 90 or 91. You know you can do that."

Thanks to Jake's exploits in the opening round — which came via an 85.5-point ride on Carr Pro Rodeo's Wise

Guy — the Wrights are in the mix at the top of the world standings. They were all bucked off their horses in Round 2's "eliminator pen," but Cody retained the No. 1 spot in the standings.

Jesse is fourth, while Jake is sixth heading into today's third round.

The impressive nature of their ascension to the top is not lost on the brothers.

"I knew we were stacked in there pretty close, but to be 1, 2, 3 is awesome," Jake said.

"I'm just excited and hope I'll keep doing well and the week goes well. If we finished 1, 2, 3, that'd be even better."

Cody is thrilled to share the limelight with his siblings.

"It's exciting when you can all be on top, especially when it's your brothers," he said. "I try to help them when I can, and seeing them ride well definitely helps me ride better."

If one of the Wrights is able to triumph this year, it would mark four gold buckles in the past six years for the friendly Utah family. That would be just fine for Cody, who helped Jesse

and Jake along the way during their careers.

"I definitely want to win, but if I can't, it's awesome to see family win," said Cody, an 11-time Wrangler NFR saddle bronc rider. "I want to see them do well even when I have a good night. Hopefully, I'm just a little better."

"If I don't, there's nobody I'd rather see win than Jake and Jesse. As long as (the world title) goes home to Utah, I'll be happy."

Regardless of how things play out next Saturday, the family will be happy with what transpires.

"It doesn't matter, we always have a good night when one of us is winning," Jake said.

There have been many good nights for the Wright family in recent years, and there are no signs that will change anytime soon.

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.

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Trevor Knowles
Craig Campbell

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NFR



Today's Wrangler National Finals Rodeo events

SATURDAY, DEC. 7

Tip of the Day — The South Point hosts the Wrangler NFR Go-Round Buckle Presentations each night at 11 p.m. in the South Point Dance Hall.

NFR 9 - 5

9 a.m. — 2013 Benny Binion's World Famous Wrangler NFR Bucking Horse Sale, South Point

10 a.m. — 5 p.m. — Cowboy FanFest, Las Vegas Convention Center

10 a.m. — 5 p.m. — Cowboy Christmas, Las Vegas Convention Center

11 a.m. — 2 p.m. — Bob Tallman Charity Bowling Tournament, Gold Coast

11:30 a.m. — 2:30 p.m. — Miss Rodeo America Pageant Scholarship Foundation Auction, Las Vegas Convention Center, North Halls

12 p.m. — 1 p.m. — Outside the Barrel with Flint Rasmussen

12 p.m. — 2 p.m. — Wrangler NFR Autograph Session (Tie-Down Ropers), Las Vegas Convention Center, North Halls

NFR IN ARENA

6:45 p.m. National anthem singer — Rylee Werth, Jayhawk Roundup Rodeo

7 p.m. — Third Go-Round NFR Performance, T&M

NFR AFTER DARK

5 p.m. & 8:30 p.m. — Mechanical Bull Riding Contest, Sam's Town

6:30 p.m. — 9:30 p.m. — Miss Rodeo America Pageant - Hall of Fame Gala

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

9:30 p.m. — 10:30 p.m. — Miss Rodeo America Pageant Autograph Session

10:30 p.m. — 11:30 p.m. — National Finals Tonight Show, Gold Coast

11 p.m. — Go-Round Buckle Presentations, South Point

ENTERTAINMENT

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

8 p.m. — Craig Campbell, Gold Coast



Wynonna



National Finals Show at the Gold Coast



Ron White

8 p.m. — Wynonna, The Orleans

8 p.m. — Andrea Bocelli, MGM Grand

9 p.m. — Damsel and LoCash Cowboys, MGM Grand

9:30 p.m. — Billy Childers, South Point

10 p.m. —

10 p.m. — Gretchen Wilson, Golden Nugget

10 p.m. — Casey Donahew Band, The Mirage

10 p.m. — Ron White, The Mirage

10 p.m. — Rodney Carrington, MGM Grand

Highlight of the Day — Bob Tallman's charity bowling tournament will be held at Gold Coast. Proceeds benefit Justin Cowboy Crisis Fund and Speedway Children's Charities.

For a complete listing of events, go to www.NFRexperience.com or follow us on Facebook or Twitter at /LasVegasNFR #WranglerNFR.

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