

Guest columnist Neal Reid returns

PAGE



LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL • THURSDAY, DECEMBER 5, 2013

**RODEO ROYALTY** 

# Novice no stranger to NFR

Barrel racer digs in to follow men in family to Vegas

By PATRICK EVERSON

LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL

he National Finals Rodeo has been a way of life for Shari Rivera and Shada Brazile. The mother and daughter have been coming to Las Vegas for years.

In fact, Rivera has been at every NFR since the event moved to the Thomas & Mack Center in 1985.

"I've never missed one. Someone in the family has always been competing there," said Rivera, whose trips to the NFR actually began long before the event came to Las Vegas. Her father, Clifton Smith, 80, was a two-time NFR qualifier in tie-down roping in the 1960s.

Rivera went on to support her former husband, superstar roper Roy Cooper, who won seven world titles in tie-down roping and the 1983 all-around crown, and her brother, Stran Smith, who won the tie-down world title in 2008. Then it was to root on her son-in-law, Trevor Brazile — Shada's husband, who owns 18 world titles, including 10 all-around crowns. He'll begin pursuit of his 11th all-around championship starting tonight.

Then it was to cheer on her two sons, Clif Cooper (a four-time NFR qualifier) and Tuf Cooper (the two-time reigning world tie-down champ and six-time NFR qualifier), both competing in tie-down roping at this year's NFR. Those two will be joined this year by Rivera's nephew, Stetson Vest — if that name doesn't just drip rodeo, then what does? — who just qualified for his first NFR.

Shada, meanwhile, has been the rock behind Trevor's rodeo dominance over the past decade or so, and of course she's supported brothers Clif and Tuf, and cousin Stetson, and all the other family connections over the years.

But there's something different this year. Something new. Rather than rooting from the stands, Shada will be atop a horse and in the throes of competition herself. And a proud mother will have her cowgirl joining all those cowboys vying for more than \$6 million in prize money over the course of the 10-day event.

Before 2013, Shada had never spent a season rodeoing. But the stars aligned this year, and she decided to make a go of it in barrel racing. It's paid off, as she finished 13th in season money winnings



PHOTO BY GREG WESTFALL/SPECIAL TO THE LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL
Shada Brazile rides Dial It in the San Antonio Stock Show and Rodeo in February. The wife of Trevor Brazile, who owns 18 world titles
and 10 all-around crowns, Shada is competing in her first National Finals Rodeo after winning \$68,379 in her first year of barrel racing.

to qualify for the NFR, which takes the top 15 in earnings in each of seven events.

"For her to get this opportunity, to find a horse that had the potential, then pursue and achieve it, it's indescribable," Rivera said. "To go from where she started and make it to the NFR in one year is amazing. It's just incredible. Sort of like 'Mission Impossible.' "

It certainly seemed impossible after a five-week stretch from early June to mid-July. Some of the season's biggest events occur during that time, capped by the Cheyenne Frontier Days. It's

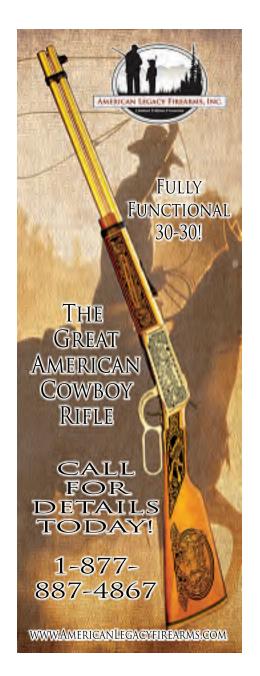
► SEE **SHADA BRAZILE** PAGE 4
Barrel racer designs children's clothing

## SHADA BRAZILE



**Event:** Barrel racing **2013 world standing/earnings:** 13th, \$68,379 **Residence:** Decatur, Texas **National Finals Rodeo qualifications:** 1 (2013) **Noteworthy:** This is the first year the 34-year-old has truly competed, allowing her to ride in end

Noteworthy: This is the first year the 34-year-old has truly competed, allowing her to ride in enough events to qualify for the NFR. She's the wife of 10-time all-around champion cowboy Trevor Brazile. And she also designs her own line of infant/toddler clothing for Wrangler, appropriately called All-Around Baby.









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Coupons cannot be combined with any other offers.



# Today's Wrangler National Finals Rodeo schedule of events



Singer Clay Walker will be on hand to open the national anthem at 6:45 p.m. today in the arena at the Thomas & Mack Center.

## **THURSDAY, DEC. 5**

Tip of the Day — Cowboy FanFest and Cowboy Christmas Gift Show open today and run through Dec. 14, from 10 a.m. - 5 p.m. daily, Las Vegas Convention Center. Admission is free.

### 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

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

#### **NFR IN ARENA**

6:45 p.m. National anthem singer — Clay Walker

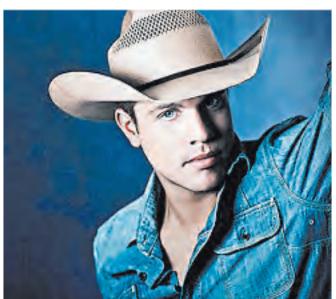
7 p.m. — First NFR Round Performance, Thomas & Mack Center

#### **NFR AFTER DARK**

6:30 p.m. - 4 a.m. — RodeVegas 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,



As part of the ongoing entertainment offerings, Dustin Lynch will be performing tonight at 10 o'clock at The Mirage.

MGM Grand

10:30 p.m. – 11:30 p.m. — National Finals Tonight Show, Gold Coast 11 p.m. — Go-Round Buckle PresentaNFR Event Celebration at 11 p.m. Party starts at 9 p.m.



The Cowboy Christmas at the Las Vegas Convention Center, above and below right, features items for the western wear and country enthusiasts no matter where they live or how young they are.

tions, South Point

#### **ENTERTAINMENT**

9 p.m. — Damsel and LoCash Cowboys, MGM Grand 9:30 p.m. — Susie Dobbs, South

10 p.m. — Rodney Carrington,

MGM Grand 10 p.m. — Dustin Lynch, The Mirage

#### Highlight of the Day — The LoCash

Cowboys Headline the MGM Grand Gold Buckle Zone



and goes until 3 a.m. Admission is free. For a complete listing of events, gtwww.NFRexperience.com or follow us on Facebook or Twitter at /LasVegasN-FR #WranglerNFR.



Cowboy FanFest and Outside the Barrel with Flint Rasmussen are also on the agenda of the 10-day event that is the Wrangler National Finals Rodeo.







## Guest columnist back in saddle to give R-J readers behind scenes view

't's that time of year again! Las Vegas residents no doubt have noticed the influx of thousands of visitors clad in cowboy hats and boots and Wrangler jeans this week. There's a good reason for that, as the Wrangler National Finals Rodeo is back yet again.

Starting today and for the next nine days, the Thomas & Mack Center will be flooded with rodeo fans from around the globe as the \$6.25 million rodeo takes place in "Sin City" for the 29th installment of the prestigious seasonending rodeo, an event without parallel in the Western world.

I'm happy to be back for my 10th Wrangler National Finals Rodeo and with the Las Vegas Review-Journal for the second consecutive year as a guest columnist. Last year, I did my best to give R-J readers an inside look at the monumental rodeo, and it was a heap of fun writing about everything from first-time contestants and the Justin SportsMedicine Team to the Wrangler NFR Exceptional Rodeo and Military

I'll be doing the same this year, although with varying and different topics and stories than what I covered last year. There are so many aspects to this event that the storylines are seemingly endless, so I'll have no trouble finding interesting things to write about.

More than 170,000 fans file into the Thomas & Mack Center every year, and the rodeo has been sold out for 270 consecutive performances. Las Vegas becomes "Cowboy Town" while the rodeo is taking place, and it's entertaining to see how far the casinos go to roll out the red carpet for Wrangler NFR contestants and fans each year.

As usual, there are dozens of great stories to look for at this year's rodeo. Chief among those involves Trevor Brazile, the reigning "Top Dog" of rodeo and face of the sport.

The 10-time world champion allaround cowboy once again has a healthy lead in the all-around standings, and he is a virtual lock to win his record 19th championship this year. That would put him No. 1 on the sport's all-time list for most gold buckles, one ahead of 18-time World Champion Steer Roper and Hall of Famer Guy Allen.



and so there are always family ties to talk about at the Wrangler NFR every year. For instance, Brazile's wife, Shada, qualified for her first Finals in the barrel racing, so there will be two Braziles competing at the Thomas & Mack Center.

World champion brothers Cody and Jesse Wright are one-two in the saddle bronc riding world standings and will duke it out over 10 nights to see who adds another consecutive year. It's the 55th Wrangler NFR and am thrilled to be a part of the gold buckle to their trophy case. Another Wright brother there are seven total — Jake, also is competing in the saddle bronc riding and came in ranked seventh in the world, so he has a chance to win it all as

In the bareback riding, Bobby Mote, Kaycee Feild and Will Lowe have combined to win nine of the last 12 world titles, and they are first through third, respectively, in the world standings heading into tonight. It will be some shootout among the trio of champs, as well as a host of other challengers in that event.

With six of the top seven-ranked steer wrestlers coming into this year's rodeo without world titles, it is likely that event could see a first-time winner. Casey Martin leads the way, but bulldoggers Trevor Knowles, Matt Reeves, Jule Hazen, K.C. Jones and Hunter Cure also are itching for their first world titles.

Team roping will be a nail-biting battle yet again, and the champions in the heading and heeling could come from different teams. Clay Tryan leads the headers, with Jade Corkill ranked No. 1 among heelers, but it could be anyone's title to take.

Tuf Cooper — the son of Hall of Famer Roy Cooper — isn't exactly a "lock" to win his third straight tie-down roping gold buckle, but he's in great shape to do just that. He leads second-



NEAL REID/SPECIAL TO THE LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL

The Thomas & Mack Center once again plays host to the Wrangler National Finals Rodeo.

Mack Center since first qualifying as an 18-year-old in 2008.

Barrel racer Mary Walker was the darling of the Wrangler NFR last year, winning the world title on her first try as a 54-year-old first-time qualifier just more than a year after losing her son in an auto accident and breaking her pelvis and hip in a nasty fall with her horse. She'll be back to defend her title this year and enters tonight's action in second place, just more than \$10,000 behind three-time World Champion Sherry Cervi.

No bull rider could touch J.W. Harris from 2008-10, when he won three straight gold buckles in emphatic style. After finishing second to Cody Teel by a mere \$1,056 last year and second in 2011 as well, Harris enters tonight's opening round with a \$31,298 lead over secondplace Tyler Smith and a burning hunger to continue building his legacy after back-to-back near-misses.

One of the coolest things about the Wrangler NFR is how accessible the contestants are during their time in Las

Unlike the NFL's or Major League Baseball's championship events, rodeo contestants can be found at events around town every day during

the rodeo's run, and fans have great chances to meet them and get up close and personal.

The first big example of that happens at 10 a.m. today at the Las Vegas Convention Center. Fans can go to Cowboy FanFest, located adjacent to the Cowboy Christmas Gift Show in the North Hall, and get autographs from world champions Cody Teel, Brazile, Feild and Walker as they help kick off the second annual FanFest.

Cowboy Christmas and FanFest which offer free admission — are a barrel of fun and provide everything from great shopping, live music and autograph sessions to tasty food, stage shows and even a bull riding competition. They are must-sees for rodeo fans and Vegas residents alike.

These next 10 days are going to be a whirlwind, and Las Vegas will be rocking with excitement, and I can't wait to help bring it to you every day in the R-J's pages.

Buckle up folks, because it's going to be a great ride!

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



Today's Sponsor Highlight - Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation





# ► SHADA BRAZILE: Barrel racer designs children's clothing for Wrangler

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often called Cowboy Christmas, because that stretch is what sets riders and ropers up for a chance to qualify for the NFR.

Shada entered that period having already won about \$30,000 and was seventh in the world standings. Then the wheels came off.

"I won like \$100 in the biggest month of rodeo. So I had a decision to make," said Shada, who dropped to 21st during the cold streak. "It was either take that as a learning experience, take the horse back home, and kick back and go on the road with Trevor, or dig in my heels and say, 'I've got \$30,000, and I'm gonna go get about \$40,000 more.'

"I dug my heels in, that's for sure." Indeed. Since Shada fell short at the big-money rodeos, making the NFR meant she'd have to ride like crazy in smaller events and gather up as many small paychecks as possible to get back into NFR contention. With her mom and two kids — 5-year-old son Treston and 3-year-old daughter Style — along for the ride, she nearly got that \$40,000, finishing the regular season with \$68,379, about \$2,000 above the cutoff to qualify.

"I didn't know I could rodeo that hard in September. I got a lot of firsts, seconds and thirds, but the checks weren't as big at those rodeos." "I won like \$100 in the biggest month of rodeo. So I had a decision to make. It was either take that as a learning experience, take the horse back home, and kick back and go on the road with Trevor, or dig in my heels and say, 'I've got \$30,000, and I'm gonna go get about \$40,000 more.' I dug my heels in, that's for sure."

SHADA BRAZILE 34-YEAR-OLD BARREL RACER, MOTHER OF TWO

Months later, mom was still beaming at daughter's true grit.

"We went on this journey and learned so much from somebody who had such desire to accomplish that goal," Rivera said. "After five weeks making just \$100, she really hit rock bottom, and most people would've given up. Shada dug deep inside, regrouped, started winning and just wouldn't give up. She's as tough or tougher than the boys."

Shada did all that with a full plate all year long — constantly on the road, raising two kids, handling her horse, helping care for Trevor's two horses, since the couple competed in many of the same rodeos. And just for good measure, continuing work on the line of infant and kids clothing she created

Baby.

It's a balancing act few, if any, NFR participants could rival.

"I don't know if I do it very well or not, but I get it done," Shada humbly said.
"Every day is madness, and no two days are the same. Sometimes it does get hard, but I know I'll miss all this when it's over. So you've gotta ride the wave. I see how hard Trevor works at it, and the whole family works hard. It's the most humbling sport out there. Nothing is given to you."

Least of all an NFR berth, to which great credit goes to her 7-year-old horse, Dial It.

"I guess it all boils down to horsepower," said Shada, who has trained horses but never gone out and competed until this year. "I've had about eight horses throughout the last 10 years that were good horses. But there's a difference between a good horse and a great horse. The horse I'm on now has just got a lot of speed, and he's a great one. When you get a horse like that, you've got to go for it."

Now it's on to the Super Bowl of rodeo. Rivera can hardly contain her motherly joy, but the whole family has a competitive streak a mile wide and wants the same kind of success for Shada that's been enjoyed by all the cowboys in the clan.

"We're so excited she's even there, and of course so completely not satisfied with her just being there. We want her to win," Rivera said before turning a little softer. "It absolutely has been just crazy, unbelievable. It's kind of surreal. I'm not sure how I'm gonna react at the Finals with Shada. I'm just gonna enjoy living this blessing. I probably will tear up just a touch."

Shada, like her husband and brothers and cousin and more, is eager to compete. But that's not even what she's looking forward to most come tonight.

"For some reason, I'm looking most forward to the Grand Entry," she said. "I'm excited for that, riding behind Trevor and the Texas flag, that will be a lot of fun. Up until that point, the NFR is just talk and just imagination. For everybody who competes in rodeo, the Grand Entry is when imagination meets reality."











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