



Indian National Finals Rodeo 2015 READY FOR RELEASE #5

RANCHING, ROPING, RODEO

by Lee Allen

Rodeo --- to the cowboys and cowgirls who compete, it's more than a sport, it's a lifestyle, and participants don't compete at rodeo as much as they live it.

The sport of rodeo evolved out of the working practices of cattle herding and even the word itself is taken directly from the Spanish rodeo, translated to mean "round up" as in the vaqueros job of gathering cattle for pasture or corral. In Indian Country, skills learned in ranching and roping axiomatically lead to rodeoing.

"Most Indian kids grew up riding horses," says bareback rider Buck Lunak, a 2014 INFR world champion. "We've always been great horsemen who grew up with a cowboy way of life." Another champion Native cowboy and one of the original founders of Indian National Finals Rodeo, Pete "Charging Eagle" Fredericks (Mandan/Hidatsa/Akira) grew up on a North Dakota Indian reservation ranch. "I've spent my life around horses and rodeos," he says.

"It's just something we do," says Carole Jackson-Holyan, many-time world champion ladies barrel racer and the only female INFR commissioner. "Animals are a part of the lifestyle growing up in a native culture, and on the Navajo Nation, rodeo is huge --- a way of life for a lot of people. My dad competed in rodeo and because it was something he did, it was something we did."

Professional rodeo is truly an American sport that has evolved from the skills required in work situations. When you grow up surrounded by sheep, cattle, and horses, it's pretty much a guarantee that ranching will lead to rodeo whose appeal continues to spread and grow in popularity and prize money. Most participants will acknowledge: "If you grow up Native, it's a part of life."

That's why, nearly 40 years ago, several regional Indian Rodeo Associations from the United States and Canada united to form INFR where Native American cowboys and cowgirls could compete against each other in pro rodeo fashion. The INFR Mission Statement reads: "To provide, promote, and preserve the advancement of professional Indian rodeo through positive role modeling, educational opportunities, competition, culture, and tradition."

An ambitious undertaking, but a successful one with over 100 sanctioned rodeos nationwide that offer annual payouts well in excess of a million dollars. INFR is now the largest American Indian rodeo association in the world.

Payouts, participation, and attendance at the annual finals [this year, November 3-7 in Las Vegas] continue to grow. And as more and more fans continue to fill arena seats to enjoy one of the most popular sports in the world, more companies, tribes, and individuals are offering their support to advance the cause. A filled-up arena is one indication of the attractiveness of the sport as are sponsor banners around the contest floor --- another visible show of solidarity by those who believe in Indian Country rodeo and cough up cash for the cause.

The Classic Rope Division of Equibrand Products, providers of team roping lariat supplies, is one such sponsor, a long-time proponent of the sport as well as a sponsor of the Junior Looper Roping championships for kids that take place during INFR arena events.

“From the start, we wanted to do more than just write a check. Beyond the dollars, we wanted to make a lasting difference in helping Indian rodeo grow, especially as a part of a kids future,” says Billie Bray. “We wanted our support to have a long-term impact as sponsors of the Junior Looper Rodeo, making endorsements of several key cowboys, and as a provider of all the saddles and buckles in the winner’s circle.”

