



Indian National Finals Rodeo 2015 READY FOR RELEASE #6

## INDIAN RODEO CELEBRATES A MILESTONE

by Lee Allen

Its party time as Indian National Finals Rodeo marks its 40<sup>th</sup> year of existence by extending an invite to their big get-together, the 2015 Finals, November 3-7, at South Point Arena in Las Vegas.

As might be expected in an oval where participants often get bucked off their mounts and bite some dust, there have been a few bumps along the path of INFR's development. In 1975, a small group of believers (5 to be precise) began to move from concept to reality by melding several regional Indian Rodeo Associations in the U.S. and Canada into today's INFR. The growth was slow, setbacks occurred. Venues were tried and changed. New ideas either caught on or were dropped. The game plan took time to catch on.

In the early days, "INFR was a tough place," admits Commissioner Bo Vocu. "Sponsor, contractor, and member interest ebbed and flowed, but that core group worked hard to take us to the next level and since we moved to Vegas in 2007, the growth curve has been steadily upward. It's amazing to look back and see how things have improved."

Team Roper Sam Bird has been looking both backward and forward since he became the 1<sup>st</sup> INFR world champion 40 years ago at the age of 18. Not only is Bird now INFR president, he is an inducted member of the Montana Pro Rodeo Hall of Fame, and will be riding and roping again this year in the Senior team roping and breakaway categories. When he's not competing, he's teaching younger cowboys and cowgirls the secrets of good roping and riding.

"There have been lots of road bumps and lots of changes over the years, but the INFR today is bigger and better than ever --- it's stood the test of time and the future looks bright," he says. "One thing that sets us apart is we're more of a family-type affair where grandpa and grandma get to compete in the same arena as their grandkids. We have Senior and Junior events where whole families travel together and compete in the same arena and that sets us apart from other rodeos."

Just like it takes a village to raise a child, it also takes a lot of hands pulling in sync to build a successful entity like Indian National Finals Rodeo. "It's a team effort --- a large team effort --- where everyone

pulls in the same direction,” says General Manager Donna Hoyt. “It took a while, but we’ve shown we can move INFR in a positive direction.”

Now billed as the biggest and longest-running rodeo organization in the world, the mission remains the same --- “to provide, promote, and preserve the advancement of professional Indian rodeo.”

Nolan Conway of Cutback, Montana (like Sam Bird, both members of the Blackfeet tribe) has been around INFR for the last decade as a calf roper, team roper, and steer wrestler. “I’ve been riding and roping every day to get ready for the Finals,” says the 30-year-old who has been in a saddle since age 7.

Conway travels with his wife, a breakaway competitor, and their 3-year-old daughter --- “who is already more in love with rodeo than we are.

“To see where INFR has come from, where it’s at now, and where it’s headed in the future is unbelievable, and I’ll be a part of where it’s headed, that’s for sure. I’ve rodeoed all summer long and am currently at a break-even point. To win at INFR this year would be a year-end bonus for me.”

“Our celebration of 40 years of tradition will start with a back number ceremony with entertainment provided by Armond Duck Chief, this year’s Canadian Entertainer of the Year,” said Hoyt. “We will also be hosting 40 years of champions where past INFR winners will be invited back into the arena by 8-time world champion Joe Beaver.”

In addition to the pageantry, more than 450 Native American cowboys and cowgirls will be vying to be the next INFR World Champion.

///STORY ART ATTACHED BELOW///



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