

Sisters rider headed to rodeo finals

By **Jim Cornelius**
Editor in Chief

Sisters Rodeo is rolling into town, but for one rodeo athlete, the big action next month is in South Dakota, where she'll be among 1,000 contestants from all over the U.S., Canada, Australia and Mexico in the National Junior High Finals Rodeo.

Twelve-year-old Gabby Bartolotta, a sixth-grader at Sisters Christian Academy, will travel to Huron, South Dakota at the end of June to compete in pole bending. Pole bending is a timed event in youth rodeo where a rider runs a weaving slalom between six poles set in a line. It's a lightning-quick, high-stakes event.

As Bartolotta notes, "Messing up on one run can mess up everything. It's a really big mental thing."

Bartolotta feels well-prepared. She's been competing weekly, under the expert tutelage of trainer Alicia Lettenmaier, whom she credits with introducing her to rodeo and sparking a real passion.

"I actually didn't know that I would do that good in my first year of junior rodeo," she said.

Bartolotta says that, "it's probably the relationship with the horse that keeps me doing it. My horse has everything to do with it."

Jessie is a five-year-old golden buckskin quarter horse mare.

"She's patterned on all gaming events," Bartolotta said. "She is very mature for her age. She's an old soul and I love her to death. She's drop-dead gorgeous. She's an awesome horse."

"They take care of each

other, that's for sure," said Gabby's mother, Julie.

That's an important thing to know for a mom watching her daughter blaze across an arena, weaving among poles at top speed.

The horse isn't the only one who's mature for her age. Rodeo and the responsibilities of caring for a horse fosters a culture of grace under pressure, humility, and mutual encouragement.

"Good run/bad run — (the competitors) always cheer each other on," Julie said. "They know how hard a sport



PHOTO PROVIDED

Gabby Bartolotta and her horse Jessie will compete in Pole Bending at the National Junior High Finals Rodeo in South Dakota next month.

it is, so there's that encouragement behind it."

The Bartolottas know that the long trip to South Dakota is leading to competition that can end in seconds. As always in rodeo, contestants come a long way for a short ride — and there are no quarters or innings to make a late-game comeback.

Gabby is ready for all that. She's focused, has faith in her horse and her trainer and herself. She's ready to join the best in her age group in the sport to chase \$80,000 in prizes; \$200,000 in scholarships; and the chance to be a National Junior High Finals Rodeo winner.

It all lies just beyond those six poles lined up in the arena.

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Hardtails Bar & Grill After Rodeo Party Live Music with Thrillbilly Deluxe 8:30 p.m. For additional information call 541-549-6114 or go to hardtailsoregon.com.

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Sisters Rodeo Grounds Sisters Rodeo 7 p.m. Tickets at 541-549-0121 or 800-827-7522. For details go online to sistersrodeo.com.

Sisters Saloon Rodeo After Party with Joe Slick Band and Dry Canyon Stampede 9 p.m. to 1 a.m. \$10 cover. For additional information call 541-549-7427 or go to sistersssaloon.net.

Hardtails Bar & Grill After Rodeo Party Live Music with Thrillbilly Deluxe 9:30 p.m. For additional information call 541-549-6114 or go to hardtailsoregon.com.

The Suttle Lodge & Boathouse Live Music with MAITA 6 to 8 p.m. Big Lawn Music series with food & beverages for purchase. Free and open to all ages. For additional info call 541-638-7001 or go to thesuttlelodge.com.

Paulina Springs Books Author Presentation with John Dodge 6:30 p.m. The author will present his non-fiction account, "A Deadly Wind: The 1962 Columbus Day Storm." For more info call 541-549-0866 or go to paulinasprings.com.

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