

Rodeo bullfighting — a game of inches

By **BILL BRADSHAW**
Wallowa County Chieftain

JOSEPH — Everyone loves the thrill of watching or participating in rodeo, but not everyone realizes the value of the unsung heroes of the most dangerous event — bull riding. Chuck Swisher and Nathan Harp, both from Oklahoma, were the bullfighters for this year’s Chief Joseph Days Rodeo, and they take their job seriously.

“The contestants see themselves as the regular people in the world and they probably see us as the firefighters,” Swisher said before opening night Wednesday, July 28. “When they’re running from the fire, we’re running toward it.”

Harp agreed, but hesitantly. “It’s hard to judge our own value, but for me it’s just the love of the sport. I enjoy it,” he said. “I understand that it can be life or death at times. I enjoy it just as somebody who every day goes to their 9-to-5. I get to do it for 15 minutes a night and if there happens to be an angry bull, it’s something I’ve been very passionate about and thankful I get to do.”

This is only the second rodeo the pair have worked together on, but both of the 30-somethings have long experience fighting bulls. Harp started at age 16.

“I didn’t grow up in a rodeo family, but at a young age I loved watching the bullfighters and barrel men,” he said.

“I started fighting bulls when I was 15 years old,” Swisher said. “It’s funny, my mom wouldn’t let me play football or ride motorcycles because it was too dangerous, but at 15 she let me fight bulls.”

Bullfighters and barrel men

At one time, they all were rodeo “clowns.” Now, there’s a strict division. The barrel men are the ones



Bullfighters Chuck Swisher, left, and Nathan Harp await the start of this year’s Chief Joseph Days Rodeo on Wednesday, July 28, 2021, near the arena in Joseph.

who are usually the more entertaining ones, cracking jokes for the crowd — the traditional rodeo “clowns.” But the bullfighters stick to primarily keeping thrown contestants safe. Barrel men are usually older former bullfighters who tell the jokes, get in a padded 50-gallon drum that’s the last line of safety for a bull rider.

This year’s CJD barrel man was Ronald Burton, of Philadelphia, Mississippi, and a bit older than they are, Swisher said.

He said he used to dislike the term “clown” for what he does.

“I used to hate it because I don’t tell jokes,” he said. “But people recognize us as that — we wear the face paint and distract the bull and at times it can look funny, but about 40 years ago, a guy was the first to say, ‘I’m not telling the jokes ... I’m just going to fight bulls.’ And he created this path where rodeo clowns split and they went to be barrel men or bullfighters.”

Harp saw that division and chose his path.

“I saw there was a split — one’s more funny and entertaining and one’s more a thrill and the protection side of it,” he said. “I fell in love with the bullfighter side and started going to the practice pen and met the right people and the Lord just opened the right doors for me.”

A bullfighter’s job is essentially to distract the bull after he’s thrown a rider so the rider can get to safety without being gored or trampled.

“Our job is to go into the storm and distract the large farm animal from tearing somebody up,” Swisher said. “It’s pretty much our job to get the bull to redirect its attention from the fallen rider toward us, so our objective is to go out there and make the bulls chase us.”

A game of inches

Jace Catlin, of Toledo, Washington, said bullfighters have saved him “many times” in his 12 years of bull riding.

Ruger Piva, of Challis, Idaho, is now 26 and has

been riding since age 13, professionally for the last five years.

“They’re there as soon as we hit the dirt and put themselves in danger just to help us out,” Piva said. “I think it’s a lot easier to ride (bulls) than to fight them.”

Wyatt Covington, 22, of Omak, Washington, who has been riding since he was a child, agreed.

“They save our lives. They’re the ones who keep us going down the road,” he said. “My dad fought bulls, as well, so I’ve always had a great appreciation for it.”

Swisher said a bullfighter can’t allow fear to get in the way.

“I’ve always felt any rodeo event is a game of inches. You could be 1 inch from losing your life or 1 inch from breaking a bone,” he said. “When you add fear into the equation in a very dangerous or serious job, then it might deter you or distract you enough so you make the wrong step out of fear instead of making the step to do your job correctly.”

OBITUARY

Beverly I. (Grossnickle) Bibler

1935-2021

Wallowa

Beverly Irene Bibler, 86, of Wallowa, died Aug. 27, 2021. A memorial service will be held Sept. 18 at 11 a.m. at the Wallowa Christian Church.

Beverly was born July 23, 1935, in Salem, to Victor F. Grossnickle and Thelma Marie Grossnickle. She attended school in Silverton, graduating in 1953.

Surviving relatives include her husband of 52 years, Bruce Bibler; children and their spouses, Glenda Scott, Rodney and Tracy Poyner, Rox-Anne and Sam Baker, Johnnie Bibler, and Paul and Linda Bibler; 17 grandchildren and 15 great-grandchildren; and sister, Gayle Stark.

DEATH/SERVICE NOTICES

Glen Henry

La Grande

Glen Henry, 101, of La Grande, died Sept. 5, 2021, at his home. A graveside service will be held Sept. 18 at noon at the Island City Cemetery. Arrangements are by Daniels-Knopp Funeral, Cremation & Life Celebration Center, La Grande.

Thomas W. Johnson

La Grande

Thomas W. Johnson, 67, of La Grande, died Sept. 11, 2021. Arrangements are by Loveland Funeral Chapel & Crematory, La Grande.

James Yost

Enterprise

James Yost, 77, of Enterprise, died July 6, 2021, at his home. A celebration of his life will be held Sept. 18 at 2 p.m. at Cloverleaf Hall in Enterprise. Arrangements are by Bollman Funeral Home, Enterprise.

Loma L. Wagoner

Cove

Loma L. Wagoner, 68, of Cove, died Sept. 10, 2021, at Grande Ronde Hospital. Arrangements are by Loveland Funeral Chapel & Crematory, La Grande.

Frank H. Stephens

La Grande

Frank Hugh Stephens, 63, of La Grande, died Sept. 11, 2021, at Grande Ronde Hospital. Arrangements are by Loveland Funeral Chapel & Crematory, La Grande.

Lawrence ‘Larry’ D. Sauer

Union

Lawrence “Larry” D. Sauer, 82, of Union, died Sept. 11, 2021, at his home. Arrangements are by Loveland Funeral Chapel & Crematory, La Grande.

Alvy Robb Jr.

Lostine

Alvy Robb Jr., 74, of Lostine, died Sept. 8, 2021, at Wallowa Memorial Hospital. A graveside service will be held Sept. 18 at 2 p.m. at the Lostine Cemetery. Arrangements are by Bollman Funeral Home, Enterprise.

Charles (Chuck) Edgar Anderson

June 13, 1944 - September 1, 2021

Charles (Chuck) Edgar Anderson, Sr. died 09/01/2021 at the age of 77 in La Grande, Oregon, at Grande Ronde Hospital. Charles was born 06/13/1944, in La Grande, Oregon, and considered Elgin his hometown.

Chuck was the eldest of four children and spent his childhood in Summerville, Oregon, where he attended Imbler School District through middle school. Later, when he and his family moved to La Grande, Oregon, Chuck attended and graduated from La Grande High School.

Chuck met the love of his life, Sandra (Suzie) Bowen in 1962. They were married for 57 years. Together they had many adventures; one of those, in particular, was raising three beautiful children: Chuck Jr., Dawnita, and Jamie. Chuck had many passions in his life, but the greatest was operating heavy equipment and elk hunting. He often enjoyed a good rodeo, fishing trip, and ice cream cone. He was active in the Freemasons, Scottish Rites, and Shriners.

Chuck Sr., is survived by his wife Suzie Anderson of Elgin, OR; children, Chuck Jr. and Sheri Anderson of Elgin, OR., Dawnita and Jerod Anderson-Edmondson of Nyssa, OR., and Jamie and Curtis Anderson-Stoaks, of Meridian, ID; grandchildren, Nicolina Anderson, Danielle, Tymra, Dakota Anderson, Lance and McKenzie Stoaks, Jenny Whiteley, Carl Ray, Dakota, Natalie, Ashley Edmondson; great-grandchildren, Kaden Anderson, Taylor Hood, Chalet Nanthanong, and Claude Alexander, and numerous nieces and nephews.

Chuck was preceded in death by his mother Wanda Sanderson Pointer; brothers, Melvin Pointer and Adrin Pointer, and sister Beverly Delashmutt.

A celebration of life potluck will be held on September 26th at Noon at the Summerville Hall, Summerville, OR. Meat, rolls, and drinks will be provided.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Shriners Children Hospital.

Online condolences may be made to the family at www.lovelandfuneralchapel.com.



PUBLIC SAFETY REPORT

FRIDAY, SEPT. 10

6:08 a.m. — A caller reported a female was sleeping on the sidewalk on the 200 block of Fourth Street, La Grande. An officer responded and talked with the woman.

8:16 a.m. — The Union County Sheriff’s Office received a report of gunshots in the area of 73200 Kingsbury Lane, Elgin. A deputy made contact with the caller.

11:02 a.m. — La Grande police received a report of a restraining order violation on the 1000 block of Jackson Avenue. An officer made contact.

1:26 p.m. — A caller reported animal neglect on the 500 block of Fifth Street, North Powder. An animal enforcement officer made contact.

2:18 p.m. — La Grande police responded to Hillcrest Drive and Jupiter Way on a

report of a car prowler. Officers counseled a person at the scene.

8:48 p.m. — A caller reported a barking dog at West Harrison and South Main streets, La Grande.

SATURDAY, SEPT. 11

5:41 a.m. — Local law enforcement responded to the 2000 block of Island Avenue, La Grande, for report of a disturbance and resolved the situation.

11:12 a.m. — A caller reported animal cruelty on the 500 block of Second Street, Cove. An animal enforcement officer contacted the caller and took information.

4:15 p.m. — La Grande police received a report of a sex crime. An officer made contact and took information.

5:46 p.m. — A caller at a residence on the 2300 block of Q Avenue, La Grande, requested assistance with a mentally ill subject. An officer made contact and took information.

8:53 p.m. — La Grande police responded to the 1300 block of Cherry Street on a report of a disturbance and separated the people involved.

8:54 p.m. — A caller reported a domestic disturbance at a residence on the 800 block of North 15th Avenue, Elgin. Law enforcement responded and resolved the situation.

10:50 p.m. — A caller reported gunshots at the La Grande Town Center, 2212 Island Ave. An Oregon State Police trooper responded and determined the sound came from a backfiring vehicle.

COMMUNITY BULLETIN BOARD

Youth shoot planned for Sept. 18

ENTERPRISE — The Eagle Cap Shooters Association Youth Shoot is set for Saturday, Sept. 18, at the Eagle Cap Shooters Range, 7 miles north of Enterprise (turn right on Ant Flat Road, then go a mile to the gate). Sign-up begins at 9 a.m. and the event follows at 10 a.m. There will be firearms to borrow and free ammo, plus food and prizes, including a new rifle for each first place

winner. There is no fee to participate.

A parent or guardian must sign in each shooter, be present during the event and be able to sign for prizes. For full details visit www.eaglecapshooters.com or call Kim at 541-263-2077.

Eastern Oregon Film Festival Sneak Peek is Sept. 15

LA GRANDE — The 2021 Eastern Oregon Film Festival is just around the corner. Full program details,

the schedule of in-person and virtual events, and ticket sales for the Oct. 21-23 event will be available Friday, Sept. 17, following a special virtual Sneak Peek fundraising event on Wednesday, Sept. 15. The sneak peek will be streamed at 7 p.m. Learn about festival memberships at www.eofilmfest.com.

Volunteers sought for East Moraine fence removal

ENTERPRISE — The

Wallowa Land Trust is organizing a work day, Friday, Sept. 17, to remove the wire fencing on the crest of the East Moraine above Wallowa Lake. The fence is no longer in use and is a hazard to both people and wildlife. The work will run from 9 a.m. to noon.

For more information, directions to the site and to sign up (by Sept. 15), email sarah@wallowalandtrust.org or call 541-426-2042.

— The Observer

UPCOMING LOCAL SERVICES

Sept. 18 — **GLEN HENRY:** noon graveside service, Island City Cemetery.

Sept. 18 — **DEBRA DAVIS:** 2 p.m. celebration of life, Riverside Park Pavilion, La Grande.

Sept. 18 — **ALVY ROBB JR.:** 2 p.m.

graveside service, Lostine Cemetery.

Sept. 18 — **JAMES YOST:** 2 p.m. celebration of life, Cloverleaf Hall, Enterprise.

Sept. 26 — **CHARLES “CHUCK” ANDERSON:** noon celebration of life potluck, Summerville Hall.

Sept. 26 — **DEBBIE RACHAU:** 2 p.m. celebration of life, Elgin Community Center.

Oct. 2 — **LARRY CHRISTMAN:** 2 p.m. celebration of life, Cloverleaf Hall, Enterprise.

— calendar courtesy of Loveland Funeral Chapel, La Grande



Please follow guidelines regarding face coverings and social distancing at all gatherings.

Sept. 18 — **BEVERLY BIBLER:** 11 a.m. memorial service, Wallowa Christian Church.