

# Heppner native has deep roots at Farm-City

**F**or Blake Knowles, rodeo runs in the family. Knowles was raised around the rodeo, and more specifically, Hermiston's own Farm-City; his father Butch is one of its co-founders.

Most of Knowles' earliest memories are of the rodeos his father worked. Butch was both a broadcaster, and was also declared the 1987 National Finals Rodeo saddle bronc champion. It was a no-brainer when Blake made the decision to join.

"It was something I was always interested in," said Knowles, 35. "I've always enjoyed sports, and I have a very competitive personality. It was all I knew."

Thanks to his experience riding horses on his family's Heppner ranch when he was a kid, Knowles took quickly to every event the rodeo had to offer. Knowles competed in Heppner's county rodeo until he was in eighth grade, when he traveled down to central Oregon to participate in the Junior Rodeo. And as he grew, so did his ambitions. He competed in college rodeos at the University of Montana, Montana State, and Walla Walla Community College, where he qualified for the College National Finals Rodeo.

"The rodeo is kind of like high school track and field," he said. "You start out trying your

hand at everything until you find where your strengths lie and starting focusing in on that."

Knowles found that he excelled at steer wrestling and began focusing his career on that.

"It fit my talents. I'm a big guy, so I'm built for it, and I love the adrenaline rush it gives you every time," he said. "It's rough, fast-paced, and scary."



**Blake Knowles**

Nowadays, Knowles is an accomplished steer wrestler. This year alone, he's won the Oakdale Saddle Club Rodeo, the La Fiesta de los Vaqueros, the Central Point Wild Rogue Pro Rodeo, and the Crooked River Roundup in Prineville. He was No. 3 in steer wrestling on the Wrangler Tour as of July 20.

Most of his summers are spent on the road, traveling from competition to competition.

"I'm probably home a day or two out of the week," he said. "It gets pretty heavy."

During the offseason, he still manages to stay busy, working on his ranch, training new horses for the rodeo, and spending time with his wife Whitney and his three-year-old daughter Lydia.

Despite all of the different rodeos he's performed at, big or small, nothing is quite like competing at Farm-City.

"It's home," he said. "It's an awesome experience.

It has an amazing production and atmosphere. You always want to perform your best in front of the people who support you the most."

Knowles has performed at Farm-City over a dozen times so far, and every time is special.

"Hermiston is a smaller town, so the rodeo week is one of the biggest events of the year," he said. "I give it my all every time."

And after all these years, Knowles and his father still talk rodeo almost every day.

"He gives me advice and new strategies," he said. "Whenever I'm in a slump, it's nice to have that kind of help and support from him."

Now, after everything he's accomplished as a rodeo performer, Knowles is starting to set his sights on a new horizon — one that isn't as high-energy as wrestling a steer.

"I'm getting towards the end of my career," he said. "I'd like to take a step back and look at where I am in my life."

One day, Knowles would like to slow things down and spend more time at home with his wife and daughter. But for now, with the Farm-City Pro Rodeo approaching, he hopes to deliver another top-notch performance for his home turf.

"I'm focused on this season, and after that, who knows?" he said. "I'm looking forward to doing what I love in front of so many people."

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