



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Stetson Wright, of Milford, Utah, rides Rock Salt and Na on Monday, Sept. 13, 2021, for 84 points during the PRCA Xtreme Bulls Tour Finale at Happy Canyon Arena in Pendleton.

## Rodeo:

Continued from Page A1

In a perfect world, they'd rope and ride every night because horses need to be ridden nearly every day. But, there has been an evolution for training opportunities as technology has advanced.

"We've got some real neat tools that you can learn a whole lot faster these days than ever before," Sorey said.

For roping, teams can pull dummies behind four-wheelers that the aspiring pro can chase down and rope. Or, there are newer mechanical dummies that let you work on your horse and yourself at slower speeds. But even with these advances, it doesn't quite compare to live animals, which might cut in surprising directions or do the exact opposite of what is expected.

"You learn to read cattle as they move, and the horse does to some extent, but you help them make those decisions from above," Sorey said. "And that's just part of the challenge."

There's a lot of stuff that happens in roping that you won't understand until you get into it, he said.

"I guess that's what makes

it fun," he said. "It's just you're always learning something, always trying to find a better way; different ways and better ways and different ideas. You know, there's not a real handbook."

### Beating the bulls

Bull riding doesn't have much of a handbook either. Just give a little prayer before heading out into the packed arena, hold on as best you can for the necessary eight seconds and hope that you're not one of the unlucky ones to walk away with a blown-out shoulder, shattered bones or permanent brain damage

For many professionals, it's difficult to describe the feeling of riding a bull, much less how to successfully ride one. Riders can't have a trace of fear as they climb onto a 1,500-pound bull, feeling its muscles flex and shiver in the chute, already trying to buck them off before the gate opens.

Fear has no place as they try to conquer the rocketing whip-saw under them, tendrils of bull spittle flying out in spirals and heavy hooves churning the dirt below. Stetson Wright, who placed second at the 2021 Xtreme Bulls finale in Pendle-

ton on Tuesday, Sept. 14, and is the current world all-around leader, said some riders thought of it almost like a drug.

"Once you start," he said, "you can't stop."

"We don't get paid to think," said Matt Palmer, who won the Tuesday finale. "We get paid to ride."

Palmer said there's not much strategy that goes into riding a bull. Everything happens so fast that there's no time to think. It's just split-second reactions.

"A lot of the time it's just muscle memory," Wright said.

For those trying to break into the sport, however, starting small is the way to go. Starting with riding barrels or mechanical bulls can help with timing and act as tune-ups for professionals, before moving onto smaller, easier bulls at jackpot rodeos, then working your way through the ranks.

For professionals such as Sage Kimzey, who won his fifth Xtreme Bulls Tour Championship on Sept. 14 and spends between two to six hours on the road every day, there isn't an effective way or need to train for the event during the season — especially when he rides around 150 to 175 bulls a year.

"Whenever we were younger we'd practice a lot," Kimzey said, "but once you kind of hit the pro rank it's a little built-in."

Kimzey, who still has a fitness coach and works on mobility and conditioning, doesn't have much time for outside training aside from eating and staying healthy. This can be enough of a challenge for some, however, with the lack of healthy food on the road. Palmer basically relies on a diet of fast food and Red Bull while on the circuit.

For professionals, "If you're not winning out on the road, then you go broke and have to go home and that's where the practice comes back," Kimzey said.

Riding bulls is dangerous. It's a sport that leaves a trail of broken bones, torn muscles, gauged stomachs and crushed chest cavities. Despite the possible bodily harm, however, the key to riding is not physical. It's not all about having the best arm strength or core workout. Instead, it is almost entirely a psychological sport.

"If you're thinking about (it) before you get on, you're already messing your head up, and bull riding is 90% mental," Palmer said. "It's all in your head."

## Pink:

Continued from Page A1

The money, she said, goes to local cancer survivors and patients. Beneficiaries include the St. Anthony Hospital Cancer Clinic, supporting local cancer patients with travel costs, wigs, mastectomy bras and more. Money also goes to Kick'n Cancer New Beginnings, a group for cancer survivors who are less than 10 years in remission. Kick'n tries to keep cancer survivors healthy by offering them yoga, massage, nutrition assistance and more.

A third beneficiary, The Round Up for TETWP, is new this year. From August to October, people will be able to "round up" their purchases to the nearest dollar at area merchants. The balance is directed to the East Oregon Cancer Network, which supports patients who are visiting from out of town. A patient house is available to visiting patients, but there is need for a second house.

White-Zollman is glad for all of the support. Tough Enough sets up two booths at Round-Up, and people flock to those booths to buy T-shirts and other merchandise. The commemorative pins are especially hot, as people collect them.

The organization also holds a raffle. This year, Pendleton Hat Co. will make a custom hat and case for the winner of the raffle. Montana Silversmiths is donating a one-of-a-kind, custom belt buckle for the winner of another raffle. The drawing will be held at the arena, after the Indian dancing, and the winner will be announced.

And then there is the "big, pink boot," which people can use for their donations.

"People are very generous," White-Zollman said. "It's amazing. When they see our booths,



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

Volunteers staff a Tough Enough to Wear Pink booth at the Pendleton Round-Up on Sept. 12, 2019.

they come rushing over to show their support and tell their stories."

This is a learning opportunity, as well as a giving opportunity, she said. Around 1:45 p.m., cancer patients and survivors line up with their families and walk through the arena. Seeing this walk, and being part of this walk, people recognize the large number of individuals who have endured cancer.

Like other charities that rely on Round-Up week, the 2020 cancellation of Pendleton's showcase even meant Tough Enough could not fundraise as in previous years. The Round-Up's Let'er Buck Cares fund, however, gave \$10,000 to TETWP for its beneficiaries.

Deb Shampine, volunteer for both Kick'n Cancer and Tough Enough to Wear Pink, said her groups make a difference for people. She has seen both the groups grow since she started working with them.

Shampine regularly encounters people who have benefited from Kick'n Cancer and Tough

Enough, and they are inevitably grateful. This makes Shampine's work very satisfying, she said.

Lisa Hummell is a certified fitter for mastectomy prosthetics and a TETWP volunteer. As such, she has known many people who have benefited from the group. Thanks to TETWP funds, patients have received prosthetics, emergency funding and travel expenses.

She said she is grateful for the opportunity to help others. Seeing people helped at Round-Up makes her emotional.

"It's pretty powerful," she said. "I'm just glad I can be part of it."

Kathryn Youngman, Tough Enough to Wear Pink volunteer, said not only does she help this cause, she has received help from it. Youngman, a Pendleton High School teacher, has had cancer multiple times, and she has received funds from the organization.

She first had cancer in 1991, Hodgkin's disease. Following

this, she had a neuroendocrine sinus tumor in 2013 and breast cancer in 2016. Her students that year began a Twitter campaign so she could appear on "The Ellen DeGeneres Show."

"I've had extraordinary things happen to me," she said.

Youngman, however, does not accept people calling her exceptional; it's just the events around her that have been special. Also, she said, the people in her life have been outstanding.

Donations helped when she needed to drive to the Tri-Cities every day for chemotherapy and radiation treatments. Loved ones, including her mother, were very helpful, but she also credited strangers for helping her to be a survivor. Anonymous donations helped make it possible for her to survive.

She wants people to know TETWP exists, and they help people — not just women, but also men.

"It's so nice that there is an organization like Tough Enough to Wear Pink," she said.

## Crisis:

Continued from Page A1

### Infection rate remains high, vaccination rate low

"I'm obviously nervous," said Umatilla County Commissioner George Murdock. "We had a minor spike after the county fair. I'm just hoping that people are careful and that we can get through the week. I know everybody's excited to have (Round-Up). Let's hope that it goes off fine."

Umatilla County's infection rate remain stubbornly high and would have placed the county in either the high or extreme coronavirus risk category months ago. And its vaccination rate remains among the lowest in the state. Roughly two out of every five Umatilla County residents have been vaccinated against COVID-19, according to the Oregon Health Authority.

The region's health care system over the past month has been rocked by the delta variant, staffing shortages and minimal facilities to care for critically ill patients as hospitals across the Northwest have filled to the brim.

Fiumara said the Round-Up officials have been in conversation with the health department and have told him they will not allow people into the Round-Up Grounds without a mask on. Once inside the event, however, attendees eating or drinking do not have to don face coverings, per state guidance.

Signs showing a masked person in a cowboy hat were posted on the walls of Happy Canyon at the kickoff concert Sept. 11. It said: "Y'all wear a mask please: On with the show!"

The signs remind attendees there's "an inherent risk of exposure to COVID-19" when gathering in public places and asked attendees to "follow all posted and verbal instructions" at the Happy Canyon grounds.

"COVID-19 is a contagious virus that can lead to severe illness and potential death," the sign said, noting senior citizens and people with underlying health conditions are especially vulnerable. "By your participation in the event, you are accepting the potential risk of COVID-19 exposure."

### Tribes urge precautions

Umatilla County reported 20 COVID-19 deaths in August, one shy of its all-time pandemic record for deaths reported in a single month, which was set in July 2020. And it is likely there are more COVID-19 deaths that occurred in August that have yet to be reported, Fiumara said.

Officials over the past few months have voiced concerns about Round-Up being a potential source of COVID-19 spread. Some have pointed to a large surge in cases and hospitalizations that followed the Pendleton Whisky Music Fest, which drew upward of 12,000 people and saw at least 68 people fall ill, according to OHA. Those cases spread across Eastern Oregon and into Washington state and were almost surely an undercount, health officials have said.

But county officials have said they have no interest in barring the Round-Up because of the economic benefit it brings to the region, hauling in millions of dollars to local businesses that rely on large events and have struggled amid pandemic shutdowns over the past year.

The Board of Trustees for the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation said in a statement on Friday, Sept. 10, it discussed measures with the Round-Up and Happy Canyon boards for curbing the spread of the virus amid tribal activities this week.

The trustees noted the "Pendleton Round-Up and Happy Canyon are not events the CTUIR has the responsibility to produce nor the authority to cancel" and added that attending the Round-Up is a personal choice.

"However, personal choices have the potential to cause repercussions for entire communities," the Tribes' board stated, "so we again ask everyone to take safety precautions this year during Round-Up and please take into consideration the health and safety of your friends, families, and loved ones and be respectful for fellow community members as you decide whether or how to participate this year."

If a spike follows Round-Up, Fiumara said he was worried that already-exhausted hospitals could once again be overwhelmed. Despite the surge that followed Whisky Fest, however, Fiumara said there did not appear to be a large outbreak that resulted from the Umatilla County Fair, a good sign that being outdoors can mitigate COVID-19 spread even during mass gatherings.

### New safety measures in place

"We know that (the delta variant) makes outdoor events less safe than they were, but we still think they are much safer than indoor events," Fiumara said. "And most of Round-Up is an outdoor event."

To be sure, events have occurred statewide in recent weeks bringing thousands of people together, including fairs and football games. Masks have been few and far between at several of those events, according to news reports.

Fiumara said state agencies have made it clear they will be keeping an especially close eye on the Round-Up, with the Oregon Occupational Health and Safety Division and Oregon Liquor Control Commission in charge of enforcing some of the state mandates.

"All it takes is a complaint for them to need to follow up," he said. "I'm under no illusion that these agencies aren't aware of Round-Up happening this week. Not saying they're out to get us, but we don't want to give them a reason."

The Pendleton Round-Up and Happy Canyon said in a Facebook post that it has taken "a range of new measures to increase the safety during our events."

Those measures are hand sanitizer and hand washing stations, signs encouraging masking and distancing, medical personnel and ambulance coverage, and "increased" medical room size and coverage.

Murdock added the county has supplied more than 26,000 masks and two pallets of hand sanitizer for the event.