

# Wright:

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He's also the first all-round winner since Lewis Field in 1990 to earn all of his all-round money in the rough stock events, and the first bull rider since Kenny Stanton (bulls, bareback) in 1970.

Wright already has punched his ticket to the National Finals Rodeo in December in both of his events.

## A sterling season

Wright has won the all-around title at 24 rodeos this season, including the Caldwell Night Rodeo, the Washington State Fair Pro Rodeo in Puyallup, the St. Paul Rodeo and now Pendleton. He's also won 10 bull riding and five saddle bronc titles.

He couldn't tell you half of what he's won, nor does he care to.

"My goal is to stay on every bull and every horse," he said. "I never think about the all-around."

Wright started his week in Pendleton with two days at the Xtreme Bulls Tour Final, at which he finished second.

"It was good fun," he said. "I got on good stuff and got to hang around there for a couple of days."

The Pendleton Round-Up featured the best of the best Sept. 17-18. There were no easy days.

"The broncs and the bulls are harder to do because they are so stacked right now," Wright said. "I like them both equally the same. There's nothing more rewarding than making a good ride on something no one else has. If I do well, the all-round comes with it."



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

**Stetson Wright, of Milford, Utah, tips his hat to the crowd while riding a victory lap around the Pendleton Round-Up Arena on Saturday, Sept. 18, 2021 after winning All-Around Cowboy at the Pendleton Round-Up.**

In the midst of the competition, Wright finds himself up against some of the most elite saddle bronc riders in the PRCA — his brothers and uncles.

His older brothers Rusty and Ryder competed at Pendleton, as did his uncles Jesse and Spencer. Ryder led the saddle bronc world

standings until Stetson won the title Sept. 18. Rusty finished third, while Ryder did not make two qualifying rides.

In the bulls, he was one of just two men to ride two bulls.

No matter what event he's in, his brothers have his back. They help him get ready in the chute,

and their voices are the only ones he hears during his 8-second rides.

It's their support, and the healthy competition they have with one another that make the Wrights so dominant.

"The big thing is traveling with winners," Stetson said. "I'm always in a truck no matter where I go, with Rusty, Ryder, Jesse, Spencer and Ky Hamilton. I don't get in a truck with losers."

The Wright boys got their start at home, learning from their dad, Cody, who won the Pendleton saddle bronc title in 2010.

"We want to match our dad," Stetson Wright said. "If we are doing good, it's because he has something to do with it. If you are coming out of a slump, he has something to do with it. He is the backbone of our bronc riding careers."

Cody Wright, who hasn't competed in a couple years, typically watches his boys and brothers compete on the Cowboy Channel. He also coordinates their schedules.

"We don't talk bronc riding too much at home," Wright said. "He's always proud and he's good about telling us. There will never be another like him."

Unlike most guys who have punched their ticket to the NFR and are headed home until December, the Wright boys competed Sept. 19 at Marysville, California. They will go home for a couple of days, then head back out to hit as many rodeos as they can by Sept. 30.

"None of us have to go anywhere," Wright said. "We want to go."

That's how champions are made.

# Pinky:

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"I rode him to the whistle, and then I went sky and up in the air and 40 feet forwards," Christopher said. "And I think I won all of \$25."

Christopher said he did bareback and saddle bronc and a few bulls before deciding to become a clown "to be in front of them instead of on top of them."

It was the early 1950s when Christopher started his clowning career in the small town of Yoncalla in Douglas County. When the rodeo had no bulls, he asked the organizer if he needed any help with entertainment and in return got his entrance fees covered.

There was one lady, he said, who owned about two-thirds of the businesses in Yoncalla and had brought her grandson to the rodeo who was crying and whining and bawling.

"I started going by and I'd get up on a fencepost and sit there and he'd shoot me with his cap gun and I'd fall off and stuff," Christopher said, "and pretty soon, before the second day was over with, why he was a-laughing and having a good time and his grandmother was enjoying the show."

Christopher would spend the next 30 some odd years traveling around Oregon to rodeos, working as a bullfighter and rodeo clown, ingraining himself into Oregon rodeo life. It made him happy to help others have a good time, forget their troubles and enjoy the show, he said.

"If you just make them laugh for 10 minutes and forget their troubles," he said, "why it was well worth it."

Christopher said it was different then versus nowadays, where rodeo clowns, bullfighters and



Kellie Ridenour/Contributed Photo

**Retired rodeo clown Gerald "Pinky" Christopher faces a bull in 1954 at the Sisters Rodeo in Sisters.**

entertainment are separate. Back then, "you were the rodeo clown, you were the bullfighter and you were part of the entertainment, too."

"He was a prankster, oh my god I could tell you a million stories," said Robert Cosner, a retired member of the Deschutes County Sheriff's Office who has known Christopher for more than 40 years.

One of these included building a washtub on a saddle and adding a sack of flour to the bottom. They'd sprinkle flour on Christopher, and he'd hop in the tub on top of a bucking horse with his legs poking out. He'd get bucked out and flour would go everywhere, Cosner said. He strapped heavy thick sponges to his back and the back of his legs to help avoid getting too banged up.

"Sometimes you get the wrong way, you know, eating a little dirt," Christopher said, "but usually you tried to land on your feet."

Christopher did anything he



Kellie Ridenour/Contributed Photo

**Retired rodeo clown Gerald "Pinky" Christopher poses in full clown attire with a group of children in 1973 at the Deschutes County Fair Rodeo in Redmond.**

could think of to get people hooting and hollering and enjoying the show.

"Whatever you can come up with to keep the people entertained," he said.

Even now, at 87-years-old,

Christopher never misses a rodeo, according to his daughter, Kellie Ridenour. He still loves making others laugh.

"I enjoyed it, the people enjoyed it," he said. "If they were happy, I was happy."

# Case:

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There were public events, movies and football games he attended. Still, he said he was careful.

He does not know where he got sick, but he does remember the first days of the illness. COVID-19 began gently for him. At first, he thought it was allergies.

But then, his symptoms strengthened. He decided to take an at-home COVID-19 test, just as a precaution. He was stunned when his test results were positive.

"I was blown away. I thought it was wrong at first," he said.

Sure, he had a fever, runny nose and sore throat, but he could still smell and taste. The test must be wrong, he thought. How could he have

the disease after taken many precautions to avoid it? He had never had it before.

The day after the test, his condition worsened. His senses of taste and smell began failing, and other symptoms grew worse.

He finally had to admit he had COVID-19, and he called his doctor. Morris explained his symptoms to his doctor, which convinced him he had the disease. The best thing he could do would be rest and monitor his own health, and visit the hospital if his condition became much worse.

So that is what he did. He stayed in bed, and he began taking over-the-counter medication and vitamins — NyQuil, zinc, vitamins C, D and B. He recently started taking dexamethasone and it has helped quite a bit, he said. Still, his illness continues.

## Vaccinations remain key

Fiumara explained that breakthrough cases for any disease "occur for a variety of reasons." Waning immunity is one cause for disease, which may be a contributing factor to COVID-19 breakthroughs. This may necessitate booster doses, as is done with tetanus, or a series of vaccinations, as is done for measles and rubella.

"Other reasons that immunity could wane include age and medical conditions or medications that suppress the effectiveness of the immune system," Fiumara said.

While researchers continue to study the disease, Fiumara recommended vaccinations. Breakthrough illnesses, if they occur, are generally less severe than are regular cases.

"Breakthrough cases tend

to have much less severe symptoms, or no symptoms at all," he said. "While preventing all illness is always a goal, the main function of vaccinations is to prevent severe illness and death."

The Oregon Health Authority report from Sept. 16 showed from Sept. 5 to 11 there were 14,046 cases of COVID-19 in the state. Unvaccinated cases accounted for 81.3% of that total.

In addition to getting a vaccine, Fiumara recommended wearing masks in crowds. People should be especially careful if they are older or immunocompromised. They should stay home if they have even minor symptoms, and people should wash hands often.

At some point, he said, we will be free from restrictions and masking, though this

depends on how the virus adapts and if a more deadly variant shows up.

"Our chance at eradicating this was in the early days and we have missed that," Fiumara said. "Most likely this will become like the flu,

where it cycles in and out of susceptible populations and others are left mostly untouched."

And the best hope, he said, to "achieve decreased impacts" from COVID-19 is to increase vaccinations.

# Police:

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Jackson proposed the idea for the e-teams several years ago. Back then, police were swamped during Round-Up, at times trying to break up 20-person bar fights by themselves.

Since creating the units, adding as many as 30 law enforcement officers from surrounding agencies to patrol the town, crime has taken a noticeable downturn, multiple law enforcement officials said. The goal of the e-teams, the officials said, is to de-escalate situations and prevent arrests.

"Round-Up's different now," said Howard Bowen, a Pendleton police detective. "And I think part of that is how it's been policed over the years."

Howard's team calmed disputes, helped intoxicated people who had hurt themselves, gave out stickers to children and chatted with locals. The East Oregonian tagged along with them to see what a Friday night at the Pendleton Round-Up is like for police now.

## There to help

The night kicked off quickly. Police wandered through the crowds outside of Hamley Steakhouse & Saloon and found a clearly intoxicated man who appeared to have fallen and hit his head.

Officers stood with him for several minutes as people nearby danced to "Great Balls of Fire" and nearby drunkards shouted obscenities toward the collapsed man. An ambulance arrived and medics and e-team members moved the man several feet before he fell back in a foldable chair and received medical attention. Eventually, they got him into the ambulance.

The team hustled about a block toward a nearby bench and checked on a woman who also had been drinking and fell and hurt her nose. She didn't require medical attention and left.

A woman who appeared to be working crowd management near Hamley later approached police alongside a much taller man. She reported the man, who appeared to be intoxicated, had been harassing women inside. Police separated the two.

The man proceeded to make a lengthy attempt to describe why he was in the right. Police did not cite or arrest him, but throughout the evening, the clearly frustrated man would run into police several times at multiple bars and attempt to make his case clear each time. Bowen appeared tired of it, tilting his head up toward the sky. The team moved away.

## Keeping problems in check

Police proceeded to patrol Pendleton's nightlife. They wandered through crowded bars, including Crabby's and the Rainbow Cafe, saying hello to locals and cracking jokes. They walked through the carnival, giving stickers to children along the way. Many patrons thanked the officers for being there; others looked toward them nervously and rushed by.

At one point, police came upon a man who was urinating on a downtown building in front of his friends. Bowen shined a flashlight on him and asked him to turn around. The man appeared scared. But Bowen said he didn't plan to arrest him. He simply asked the man to go to the public restroom a few blocks away.

"I want them to have a good time," said Bowen. "I just don't want them to have too good of a time."

In their idle time, the four law enforcement officials stood on sidewalks, talking among themselves about hiking trips, concerts and their favorite meat in town. They stopped for a snack and water break after long hours on their feet. At least two of them commented at one point about how slow the night had been and how few people were at some of the bars.

In addition to from Bowen, there was Calvin Meade, a Umatilla County Sheriff's Office detective; Joshua Paullus, a Umatilla County Corrections parole and probation officer; and Riley Studebaker, a Hermiston police patrol corporal.

Bowen and Paullus said they have seen problems decrease during Round-Up nightlife in recent years. Bowen attributed that to the emphasis patrol units, saying he has responded to fewer fights and drunk driving incidents. At the end of the night, they helped close out the bars.

"You see the good and the bad," said Paullus, "rather than all the bad."

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