

# Rawlins loops in fans with fiery performance

Trick roper wows fans at Chief Joseph Days

By RONALD BOND  
Wallowa County Chieftain

JOSEPH — The best athletes often have the implement of their respective sports in their hands from a very young age.

That adage rings true for trick ropers, too.

Loop Rawlins, who wowed the thousands of fans who attended Chief Joseph Days late last month with his rope-spinning, whip-cracking, and gun-twirling routine, had a rope in hand while he was still in elementary school.

“I’ve been performing for about 21 years, since I was about 14. I started trick roping, spinning my first rope when I was about 8,” he said.

The 35-year-old Rawlins said a love of the Western culture and cowboys kicked off what has become a career entertaining fans across the country. The Tucson, Arizona, native and resident is often performing at rodeos, fairs or halftime of NBA games, to name a few.

His, he said, is more of a “surprise act” rather than the headline performance — a facet he enjoys.

“(S)o if I do a thing at a country music festival, I’ll (go) right before a big act, even though nobody knows my name like (they do) Toby Keith or whatever,” he said. “They’ll throw me in an event, corporate events, NBA halftime shows. It’s kind of unexpected, and I kind of like being like that, like a dark horse.”

**Starting off**

Rawlins said he had to try trick roping when he saw it done as a side gig for members of the Tucson, Arizona, Boys Chorus. He joined the chorus for the ropes, but ditched within a year and continued practicing rope spinning.

“It was kind of like a fun hobby. I remember taking the rope to school and trying to spin it to impress people, and no one was impressed,” he said. “They were like, ‘Yeah, whatever dude.’ I just kept going with it.”

What pushed Rawlins to go further was seeing performers at a Wild West arts club in Las Vegas while he was part of a trick-roping group that formed from the boys chorus.

“I was really inspired when I saw some of the pros do it. It was crazy,” he said.

He worked and out-paced everyone in the group, and by 14 was performing on stage solo in front of an audience.

“I don’t remember the first show exactly, but I remember everyone staring at me, bleachers full of people, just in front of me, maybe 200 people,” he said. “I had my little routine, but everything was just foreign to me. I sort of grew there as a performer.”

The teenager grew into the role, and more elements were added as he



Ronald Bond/Wallowa County Chieftain  
**Loop Rawlins puts his own spin on the phrase “hot foot” during the Chief Joseph Days Rodeo.**



Ronald Bond/Wallowa County Chieftain  
**Loop Rawlins twirls a flaming lariat around himself at the Chief Joseph Days Rodeo on Thursday, July 29, 2021.**



Ronald Bond/Wallowa County Chieftain  
**Loop Rawlins performs with a flaming lariat during Chief Joseph Day on Thursday, July 29, 2021.**



Ronald Bond/Wallowa County Chieftain  
**Loop Rawlins balances a gun during a performance at the Chief Joseph Days Rodeo.**

went along: ropes, whips, firearms, even flaming lariats.

“That came when I was about 19,” he said. “Nobody really made it famous, but I thought it was cool because it adds that danger element and a visual element, which roping doesn’t really have a danger element.”

**On stage**

His show done during the four nights of the Chief Joseph Days Rodeo was about 8-9 minutes in length. But he does do longer shows up to about 30 minutes that

have additional elements, audience participation and more.

“There’s more parts, there’s a couple audience interactions,” he said. “I teach someone how to crack a whip, so there are some humorous moments, and I have a little bit of banter I do with the gun spinning, and like 3 minutes of showing different holstering techniques, different kinds of tricks, inject a little comedy there — stuff like that for certain shows.”

The Chief Joseph Days routine featured him spinning, tossing and balanc-

ing a pair of real revolvers; demonstrating process with a lariat as he twirled it at high speed, jumped through it, rolled it over his cowboy hat and more; cracking one, then two whips repeatedly — which, done fast enough, resembled the sound of a locomotive; whipping a flower in half as he held it in his mouth; lighting a lariat on fire, dancing around it while he twirled it just above the deck, then laying down while spinning it just inches above him; and finishing with the “cowboy wedding ring” with him standing 10 feet up on a ladder, spinning a lariat that featured 70 feet of rope.

Rawlins, who is married and has a daughter and son, said his family members are fans of the performance.

“They think it’s cool. When my wife first saw my show she thought it was unique,” he said. “She’s really supportive. My

daughter really loves the creative (element).”

In the two decades of performing, he has done thousands of shows. He spent time performing with Cirque du Soleil from 2009-12, and was on America’s Got Talent in 2014, reaching the quarterfinals that season.

He spoke highly of his time in Joseph, saying he and his son, who made the trip with him, were frequent visitors at Wallowa Lake.

“Everyone’s been awesome. There hasn’t been a mean person out there,” he said. “Everyone’s been super nice and accommodating. The lake’s very beautiful. Everyone seems relaxed here — doesn’t seem uptight. We were on the lake hanging out, it felt nice and free.”

He said fans have come to him inspired by the act and wanting to pursue it. His message to them?

“It’s basically if it gets hard, don’t give up. That’s the main thing,” he said. “I’ve had a couple kids that got into it. It doesn’t take months, it takes years. It’s a difficult skill. A lot of instant gratification these days with people. It takes a lot of work, a lot of repetition. It gets frustrating, even out there. I’ve been doing this long, there are still things that are hard to do.”

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