

FORT WORTH STOCK SHOW & RODEO

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Fort Worth's Texas Champions Challenge Pays \$114,000 to Winners

FORT WORTH, Texas (Jan. 18, 2024) The 2024 edition of the Texas Champions Challenge Rodeo presented by Holt Cat paid \$10,000 to six winners Thursday night at the Fort Worth Stock Show & Rodeo (FWSSR.) The event featured winners from five iconic Texas rodeos – Fort Worth, Houston, San Antonio, San Angelo and Austin - competing in six events. The night also featured four contestants vying for a \$6,000 first-place paycheck in freestyle bullfighting.

Winnings at the invitational rodeo do not count toward world championships, but the \$114,000 awarded to 34 competitors in bareback riding, steer wrestling, saddle bronc riding, breakaway roping, barrel racing, freestyle bullfighting and bull riding can help pay the expenses of a professional rodeo athlete.

The rodeo format began with an elimination round of five contestants in each event. The top two returned almost immediately for a head-to-head round with the winner taking home \$10,000 and a bottle of Fort Worth-based TX Whiskey. The runner-up received \$4,000 and the three other contestants from the elimination round each received \$1,000. In the bullfighting, second place received \$4,000 and the two individuals who did not make the head-to-head round each received \$1,500.

Leighton Berry of Weatherford, Texas, and Jacob Lees of Caldwell, Idaho, scored 88 and 86 points respectively to advance to the head-to-head round in bareback riding – edging out reigning world champion Keenan Hayes, last year's Fort Worth champion Rocker Steiner and South Dakotan Andy Gingerich.

Lees dominated the head-to-head round, scoring 87.5 on Macza Pro Rodeo's bucking horse named Mary Jane to win the first \$10,000 of the night.

The steer wrestling competition was tight with a pair of Oregonians – Jesse Brown of Baker City and Dalton Massey of Hermiston advancing to the head-to-head round. On his second steer Brown stopped the clock in 4.18 seconds. Massey caught his steer quickly but missed the nose on his first attempt. His time of 7.6 meant Brown took home the winner's \$10,000.

Dawson Hay of Wildwood, Alberta, was the first saddle bronc rider and he tallied 85.5 points on Macza's horse named Pearl Harbour. Wyatt Casper of Miami, Texas, scored 85 on another Macza horse – Texas Tough and looked good for the head-to-

head round until reigning world champion Zeke Thurston nodded his head. Thurston, who lives in Big Valley, Alberta, showed the skills that have earned him four world championships with a 90-point ride on Macza's horse Squash Blossom Steely Dan.

In the head-to-head match Hay scored 87.5 points on Korkow Rodeos' bucking horse named Joker Poker. Thurston countered with 90.5 points on Brookman Rodeo's bronc called Ragin' Lunatic. The horse was featured at the National Finals Rodeo in December and bucked off two of the top 15 riders in the world standings.

The barrel racing featured five NFR qualifiers in the elimination round. Amanda Welsh of Stephenville, Texas, and Emily Beisel of Weatherford, Texas, advanced to the head-to-head matchup with times in the 16.6-second range. Because of the short time between rounds, Beisel chose to change horses for her second run while Welsh stayed on Frenchman Fire Fly, a horse raised and trained by her father. That proved to be a good decision for Welsh. The mother of two won the match and \$10,000 with a time of 17.560.

For the second consecutive year the breakaway roping winner at the Texas Champions Challenge was an Angelone from nearby Stephenville. Sarah Angelone, a former National High School champ, won the event this year with a time of 1.91 seconds to advance to the head-to-head round, followed by a 1.86 to win the title and \$10,000. Her sister Martha won the event here last year.

Freestyle bullfighting was back at Texas Champions Challenge for the third year. Tyler Mansell of Caldwell, Idaho, and four-time Bullfighters Only World Champion Weston Rutkowski of Haskell, Texas fought the first match. The two cowboys faced off at last year's event with Rutkowski advancing to the finals. This year was Mansell's turn to advance to the final match.

The second match featured Californian Cole Bates and Kansan Luke Ballard. Bates advanced to the finals where Mansell was victorious.

In the elimination round of bull riding, all five of the riders bucked off with Florida's Ernie Courson Jr. and Louisiana's Jace Trosclair advancing to the head-to-head match by virtue of staying on their bulls the longest.

In the final matchup Courson lasted 4.97 seconds on Macza Pro Rodeo's bull Little Bill. Trosclair brought the crowd to their feet when he rode Brookman Rodeos' bull High Maintenance to the whistle and scored 88 points.

The event was also part of Texas A & M University system day at the FWSSR and featured some of the 90-member Texas A & M Cavalry and members of the university's rodeo team in the grand entry and an appearance by the school's yell leaders to start the competition. Representatives from Tarleton State University, part of the A & M system in nearby Stephenville, also participated with members of the cheer squad and rodeo team featured on the arena floor.

The 2024 FWSSR Pro Rodeo Tournament rides into Dickies Arena Friday night at 7:30 p.m. for the first of 16 performances. The event culminates with the Championship Finals on February 3.

FORT WORTH, Texas --- The following are winners from the Texas Champions Challenge rodeo at the Fort Worth Stock Show and Rodeo, January 18, 2024.

Bareback Riding-Elimination Round: 1, Leighton Berry, Weatherford, Texas, 88 points on Korkow Rodeos' Wiggle Worm. 2, Jacob Lees, Caldwell, Idaho, 86. 3, Keenan Hayes, Hayden, Colo., 85.5. 4, Andy Gingerich, Aberdeen, S.D., 81.5. 5. Rocker Steiner, Weatherford, Texas, 79. **Head to Head Round:** 1, Lees, 87.5 points on Macza Pro Rodeo's Mary Jane, \$10,000. 2, Berry, 78, \$4,000.

Steer Wrestling-Elimination Round: 1, Dalton Massey, Hermiston, Ore., 4.25 seconds. 2, Jesse Brown, Baker City, Oregon, 4.72. 3, Eli Lord, Sturgis, S.D., 4.90. 4, Will Lummus, Byhalia, Miss., 4.92. 5, Stan Branco, Chowchilla, Calif., 5.59. **Head to Head Round:** 1, Brown, 4.18 seconds, \$10,000. 2, Massey, 7.61, \$4,000.

Saddle Bronc Riding-Elimination Round: 1, Zeke Thurston, Big Valley, Alberta, Canada, 90 points on Macza Pro Rodeo's Squash Blossom Steely Dan. 2, Dawson Hay, Wildwood, Alberta, Canada, 85.5. 3, Wyatt Casper, Miami, Texas, 85. 4, (tie) Cash Wilson, Wall, S.D., and Ben Anderson, Eckville, Alberta, Canada, 82. **Head to Head Round:** 1, Thurston, 90.5 points on Brookman Rodeo's Ragin' Lunatic, \$10,000. 2, Hay, 87.5, \$4,000.

Barrel Racing-Elimination Round: 1, Emily Beisel, Weatherford, Texas, 16.616 seconds. 2, Amanda Welsh, Stephenville, Texas, 16.801. 3, Jackie Ganter, Abilene, Texas, 16.901. 4, Kassie Mowry, Dublin, Texas, 17.52. 5, Sissy Winn, Chapman Ranch, Texas, 22.040. **Head to Head Round:** 1, Welsh, 17.560 seconds, \$10,000. 2, Beisel, 17.890, \$4,000.

Breakaway Roping-Elimination Round: 1, Shelby Boisjoli, Miles City, Mont., 1.89 seconds. 2, Sarah Angelone, Lipan, Texas, 1.91. 3, Martha Angelone, Stephenville, Texas, 2.30. 4, Hali Williams, Comanche, Texas, 2.34. 5, Kelsie Domer, Dublin, Texas, 3.72. **Head to Head Round:** 1, Sarah Angelone, 1.86 seconds, \$10,000. 2, Boisjoli, NT, \$4,000.

Freestyle Bullfighting: Match 1 - 1, Tyler Mansell, Caldwell, Idaho, 81. 2, Weston Rutkowski, Haskell, Texas, 78.5. **Match 2** - 1, Cole Bates, Sky Valley, Calif., 81.5. 2, Luke Ballard, Haviland, Kan., 80 points. **Finals** - 1, Mansell, \$10,000. 2, Ballard, \$4,000.

Bull Riding-Elimination Round: (no qualified rides) **Head to Head Round:** 1, Jace Troclair, Chauvin, La., on Brookman Rodeo's High Maintenance, 88, \$10,000. 2, Ernie Courson Jr., Okeechobee, Fla., 0, \$4,000.