

The Team Roping Journal's

# EXTRA

JULY/2020

*Luke Brown*

2020 RFD-TV'S  
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# ONE ON ONE With Luke Brown

**Luke Brown** has roped at 12 consecutive Wrangler National Finals Rodeos—the longest current streak in team roping. This year, he secured the biggest win of his career at RFD-TV's The American with Joseph Harrison, and he now has over \$2.2 million in PRCA earnings. Roping in 2020 with long-time friend, neighbor and two-time World Champ Patrick Smith, Brown is leading the PRCA's world standings mid-summer, and he's as entered-up as a roper can be in the current rodeo climate. **By Chelsea Shaffer**

**CS: What ropes are in your bag right now?**

**LB:** Classic's Spyder and NXT5, all in extra soft.

**CS: What horse are you riding most of the time?**

**LB:** Bob—that's the new yellow I bought from Kaleb Driggers. I was struggling to figure out his scoring, but I think we're getting it now.

**CS: With the abbreviated rodeo schedule in 2020, how are you staying sharp in your roping?**

**LB:** It's been kind of a struggle. I've been home for a couple days, and I had to do what I usually have to do a couple times a year—slow down, go back to the basics, fix my swing and fix my riding. The rodeos have been super fast and super tough and I'm getting carried away with trying to win first instead of roping sharp and roping like I've been doing my whole life. I've been slowing my swing down, backing it up and opening it.

**CS: So what are you doing to fix that?**

**LB:** I pull my shoulder back a little more and open my swing up. I'm trying to be more hard-headed about where my tip is. If I get to being too fast, everything gets tight and in front of me too much. I've been trying to get them roped before I'm ready. My swing will get tight, and I won't have much power and much coverage, and the wheels will fall off the wagon. I need to use my horse more, keep everything square and keep my shoulders back.



JAMIE ARVISO PHOTO

**CS: Where do you want your tip?**

**LB:** Well, I get to leaning and my tip gets down below the steer's horns or pointing toward his back, and then I have to change my delivery up to catch him. If I put my tip above the right horn, I can come straight out of my swing with some power on it.

**CS: And when you say you want to use your horse more, what do you mean?**

**LB:** When I leave the box, I don't ride and I get to leaning. The more I lean, the less I use my legs to have power on the delivery. If I concentrate on kicking my horse and using my legs as much as my upper body, everything has the same feel to it working together.

**CS: Has working on all of this helped you feel sharper lately?**

**LB:** Yes. It's coming back to me and feeling a lot easier.

**CS: With all of the cancelations, have rodeos felt harder than usual?**

**LB:** It's hard—the hardest I've ever seen it for myself. Rodeos are tough. The barriers are longer and they're fast. Everyone ropes so good and is pretty aggressive. It makes you appreciate the two- and three-headers we used to have, where you could make better runs and get paid. It's tough out there, and the rodeos are a long way apart and getting farther as the year goes on. It's a lot of driving and flying and sending horses. ■

# Knowing You Belong

*Luke Brown on earning his spot among the best.*

I moved to Texas from South Carolina in 2007. My swing was too tight, my delivery was terrible, and my riding was terrible. I never thought I belonged with the best guys in the world. I'd pull up at the rodeo and there's Tee Woolman and Speed Williams, and here I am trying to compete. I never figured I was capable of roping with them, by any means. Just to be a part of it was good enough for me. At least I was there trying. That was the most important thing to me.

I moved in with Chad Masters, who had just won the World, but who I knew from back in the Southeast. I got a job with Allen Bach, and I worked hard. Between the two of them and me, I put together a blueprint for my heading, and that helped get me to where I am today—to where I've got confidence to compete with anybody. If I didn't make it, I didn't have anyone to blame but myself because I was surrounded by the best.

I needed to either change my fundamentals and my horses and everything I was doing, or I needed to figure out something else to do. What I had been doing wasn't good enough. But I was in the right place, with the right people. I just needed to put in the work. And I liked to work. I saddled their horses, I roped whenever I could, and when I wasn't doing anything, I was roping the dummy. I thought if I made it to the NFR one time, that would be more than I could ever ask for.

The more I worked, the more my confidence came from roping with great heelers. For 12 years now, I've had the best you can get. I'm not afraid to take chances and reach, and I probably do it too much, but I know if I turn the steers, I'll get paid. Martin (Lucero) never would say very much to me, but I'd ask him all the time to please help me. I wanted the magic words, but he'd say little things like 'Man, you can't win if you don't get a



OLIE'S IMAGES

time.' And that would be all he'd say, and I could take it any way I wanted to. That meant slow down and turn the cow most of the time, and let him take the chances. I know that if I slowed down and rode my horse better and threw a better loop, we'd get paid. If it was good, we'd win a lot; if it wasn't good—if I caught the steer—at least we'd win a little something. Going a whole week and getting your fees back means as much as winning \$10,000 out

here. Not losing money is huge. It comes from slowing down and getting back in the rhythm of turning steers and getting some checks. ■

# Riding Your Horse Out of the Box

HOW TO RIDE YOUR HEAD HORSE, STRIDE-FOR-STRIDE.

IMPULSE PHOTOGRAPHY



**1** No matter where I plan to throw my rope, I need to ride my horse to the end of the box and let him catch up to the steer without reading my throw. That means I need to stay aggressive out of the box while still staying out of my horse's way—a balance that isn't always easy to strike. I've got to stay off my horse's face while using my body to drive my horse to the steer, and I've got to get my rope up and moving. This allows my horse to run for a few strides to help us catch up and set up my throw before I rope.

**2** This is on my horse's second stride. I'm out of my saddle and ahead of my horse. My rope is turning over to the right of the steer, and I'm ready to start roping. I'm hustling my horse with my feet by kicking, and my left shoulder is pointed toward the steer's left horn, which makes my horse go to the steer without my having to rein him to the right. My body position makes my horse hustle to the cow. Sitting too straight up will force me to rein him over there. My left hand is down on his neck and my reins are loose, but my body position is riding toward the cow. That lets him find the steer and work on his own.



**3** By not pulling on his head and letting him leave flat with my left shoulder to the left horn and my right hand high, it's completely up to him and I'm out of his way. That lets him stay flat and catch the cow just as if you're running him out in the pasture. I'm not in his way. There's nothing keeping him from going to the cow. He's got his ears pinned and he looks like he's trying to catch up on his own.

## STEP BY STEP with Luke Brown



**4** With my left hand down letting my horse go to the steer, I can focus on my loop and keeping my tip to the right of the steer and above the right horn. By being ahead of my horse and my horse working on his own, I can focus on my roping. My hand is a little above my head so I can reach. My tip is above the right horn, so I'm waiting to get close enough to reach a little bit.



**5** Everything is exactly the same as my first stride out of the box. I'm a little ahead of my horse and down in my saddle. I'm using my legs and my whole body to get ready to deliver the rope. If I were square and behind my horse, I'd only be able to use my arm. In this position, I can use my body to help deliver my rope. My left hand will stay right where it is. I don't raise it up because it's too much of a cue. I want my horse to still be on his own. If I try to use my left hand too much, he'll read my throw too early. All that's left to do is deliver my rope. ■



DAN HUBBELL PHOTO

## Cowboy Comes Back Strong for Brown

*Luke Brown's sorrel gelding, Cowboy, stepped up at the 2019 Wrangler NFR after a fluke accident with Brown's newest horse, Rebel.*

Luke Brown had his horse plan in ship-shape order when he set sail for the 2019 Wrangler National Finals Rodeo. He would take two horses: Rebel—the 16-year-old palomino horse he bought from Cory Kidd V in September—and Cowboy, who is Luke's 14-year-old sorrel horse that's historically sort of been a jackpot and long-score specialist. Brown planned to ride both horses at the Top-15 "running of the steers" at the Thomas & Mack two days before opening night, then make an executive decision about which one to start on and take it from there. Then fate stepped in, when Rebel snapped his leg while running a steer at a roping en route to Vegas.

"I was heading a steer for Paul (Eaves)

at an open roping in Wickenburg (Arizona, on Sunday, Dec. 1; the NFR started on Thursday, Dec. 5), and the big bone above Rebel's hock on his left hind leg broke in two the third or fourth stride out of the box," said Brown, who roped at his 12<sup>th</sup> straight NFR in December and, with Eaves on the back side, placed in five rounds and third in the average for \$43,154/man. "Nothing looks odd on the video. There was no rhyme or reason to why it happened. It was just a freak deal.

"I was really excited about riding Rebel there. I kind of bought him because I thought he'd be really easy to rope on at the Thomas & Mack. I'd seen that horse around for a long time, and really liked

him. He kind of reminded me of Slim [Shady] (Brown's iconic, game-changing sorrel). Rebel could run, and was just super easy. That was the first time I've ever had a horse break a leg like that. I was sad, and my wife (Lacy) was upset."

In Rebel's absence, Cowboy got the call in all 10 NFR rounds.

"I haven't rodeoed on Cowboy a whole lot over the years," Brown said. "I've ridden him at Reno, Salinas and Cheyenne quite a bit. But Cowboy leaves there so hard and really runs, so everything happens fast, and there's not much room for error. For the normal rodeo, a more mediocre horse can be easier to ride. It's harder to reach on a horse like Cowboy, because he runs so hard.

“There’s basically no score at the Finals, so it’s a little different than your average rodeo. Cowboy didn’t have time to get to full speed, as fast as you rope there. It was definitely different roping on him in that building, because he does fire so hard and is so strong. But I geared myself up differently to ride him. I was just excited to get to ride him again. He’d been hurt.”

In 2013, Cowboy tore his right-hind deep flexor tendon.

“It wasn’t torn in two, but it was torn deep enough that healing it was pretty iffy,” said Brown, who’s heading for two-time Champ of the World Patrick Smith in 2020. “Recovery from that was a longshot, but my vet in Weatherford (Texas), Dr. Reese Hand, did six rounds of stem-cell therapy throughout a whole year, and we kept Cowboy in a big stall for a solid year before getting him out and hand-walking him.

“At that same time, Turtle’s (Powell) horse, Vegas, was having issues, and I got to talking to Turtle one day about how Blane Chapman from Lubbock was shoeing Vegas trying to get him sound again. I got to talking to Blane about it, and he came and shod Cowboy. After several months, I shod him every other time myself, but always staying in close contact with Blane about everything we both did. We kept that tendon as relaxed as we could, and got it healed up to where Cowboy got super sound. He was pretty sound after about six months, but we took a year to make sure.”

Cowboy got hurt in 2013, and was off in 2014. Brown went back to riding him in 2015, and won Cheyenne riding Cowboy that summer with Kollin (VonAhn). Brown won the 2017 BFI with Jake Long and the Windy Ryon that same year with Junior (Nogueira) riding Cowboy, then he tore that same deep flexor tendon in his right hind in May 2018.

“I had just roped a steer, and felt him stumble a little,” Brown said. “Another MRI showed that, this time, it didn’t just tear the tendon, it shredded it. I thought Cowboy was done, and Dr. Hand thought so, too, because it was so damaged. But we

did stem-cell therapy again, and put him back in a big stall. Our goal was to get Cowboy well enough just to live the rest of his life out in our pasture at the house.

“I wasn’t thinking about roping on Cowboy ever again being even possible, I just wanted him to be comfortable. He didn’t stay sore as long that second time, so after about 10 months I started saddling him again, just to see how he felt. I got to where I could lope him lightly, and he just kept getting sounder. By March 2019, Dr. Hand was telling me to push Cowboy a little harder each day. The MRI came back better than after he healed up the first time, which was a true act of God.”

Cowboy rehabbed slowly, including time spent on an AquaTred to build strength without stress.

“When I got home from the Northwest last fall, I started getting Cowboy in shape again,” Brown said. “I took him the week of the USTRC Finals in October and rode him at some jackpots. He felt good. And he’s been good ever since.

“A month before the Finals, when we were practicing at Chad’s (Masters) one day, Chad kept on me that Cowboy’s the horse I needed to ride in Vegas. Chad said Cowboy reminded him of his old black, Wart(hog), who was so easy to ride in that building. Between Chad encouraging me, and me getting a feel for Cowboy again, I got kind of excited about trying to ride him at the Finals.

“When I left home, I had two horses I was really excited about riding at the NFR. Paul and I had a good feeling about the yellow horse, too. I hated what happened to Rebel, and the timing was terrible. Our team had chemistry with Rebel. Losing him was heartbreaking. But I loved how Cowboy worked at the Finals, and it was especially cool after all he’s been through to get to ride him again at all. Whether we did good or bad, I was excited to get to ride him every single night in Vegas. And Cowboy did everything he was supposed to do, so whether I won \$200,000 or \$2,000, I was so proud of him.” ■



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