

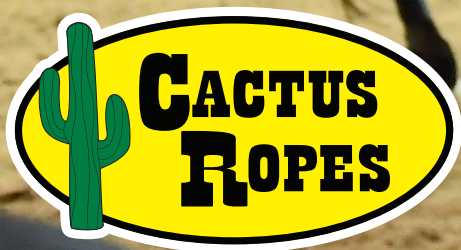
The Team Roping Journal's

EXTRA

SEPTEMBER/2020

Chad Masters

2-TIME WORLD
CHAMPION HEADER



ONE ON ONE with Chad Masters



Chad Masters One on One

Chad Masters is a two-time PRCA World Champion Header with multiple PRCA/AQHA Head Horse of the Year titles to his name. One of roping's most consistent forces, Masters has over \$2.2 million in career earnings as well as wins at the USTRC's Cinch National Finals of Team Roping and George Strait Team Roping Classic. Masters has 13 NFR qualifications to his name and is eyeing a 14th in 2020. By Chelsea Shaffer

CS: You grew up in Tennessee. Who was the team roper in your family who got you involved?

CM: My dad roped calves, and then a man named Harold Travis moved from Arkansas to Tennessee, and he got our surrounding area team roping.

CS: So what were the ropings like back then?

CM: They were still an A and B roping when I started. Shortly after that, when I was about 13, they started having numbered ropings.

CS: When did you make the move to Texas and why?

CM: I moved to Texas to start roping with Michael Jones in 2002. I'd rodeoed in 2001, and I'd seen him around that year. We planned on roping starting in 2002. Michael and his dad helped me a lot. They taught me a lot about team roping. I'd roped a lot, but not really learned how special the handling is and all that. Michael got us entered there for a couple years, and Kinney Harrell was our buddy team, so he did most of the entering.

CS: From your first World Title to your second, how did your roping change?

CM: It changed because of the horses I had. I rode Cody and Stranger my first World Title, and I rode Warthog in 2012. That was quite a different style of horse, so they changed my roping style more than I did.

CS: How has your roping changed in the last eight years?

CM: It's gotten so much faster. Clint is quite a bit tighter and a little bit quicker. He makes things happen faster than the other horses did. But it's sure headed in fast speed.

CS: Clint is amazing. Is he the kind of horse you want to ride going forward?

CM: There are some things he does that are maybe too quick. I've rode him a long time now—almost four years. He's been hurt all this year, and that's been a major setback for me not having a good No. 1 horse.

CS: Your old horse, Cody, on whom you won your first gold buckle, has really helped you out this year.

CM: Cody definitely helped me out. He finds a way every year to find a spot where he comes in handy. He's really good at his good spots, but lately the one-headers haven't been just great for him or me.

CS: You're 15th in the PRCA's world standings as we're sending this TRJ Extra out the door. What horse are you planning to ride for your final push?

CM: I'm leasing Dale Benevides' little grey horse. He's done good. He's a sweet little horse. Hopefully we can finish the year out on him and get it made.

CS: What head rope are you finishing the season with?

CM: I've been using the Cactus Future the last month, and I used either a Future or Xplosion most of the summer. I think the weather has a lot to do with it. The great thing about the Future is that it takes the cold weather really good, and Barry has figured out how to get them right in the summer.

CS: Do you want to think about the NFR and its move to Texas right now?

CM: I won't think about it a lot, but I'd love to go. It won't be that much fun it being that close to my house and me not going. ■



SCORING: Two Very Different Types

I've ridden a lot of different horses, and I've ridden a lot of different horses in a lot of different boxes. Because of that, I divide head horses into two categories when it comes to their temperament in the box—some that can wait for the “launch off” and some that can't. I don't have a preference on which type of horse I ride, but most good horses fit somewhere on the spectrum between those two generalities.

TAKING A HOLT

• *The Perks*

These head horses score flat-footed, looking down the rein at the steer in the chute, just waiting patiently for their header to say launch off like that lady at the water park. When a header pulls on that horse's bridle reins, he stays. When the header loosens the reins, he goes. Some horses will score like that forever, especially when you just need to see a little bit, and that fits with their natural timing. Those horses are ideal because we all have a tendency to pull when we nod, especially when the steer doesn't go anywhere. They stand in the corner when you pull, and they go when you drop your hand, and they can do that every day for the rest of their lives.

• *Example*

My black horse, Stranger, who I rode from 2006 to 2011, really fit that mold. He's probably the only one of my horses that was ever this type of horse. He locked onto the cow the second I rode in, and all I had to wait on was the steer to get right. My job was to just go rope, which made heading pretty easy.

• *Challenge*

If you're wanting to pull on your horse



TRJ FILE PHOTO/KAITLIN GUSTAVE

or hold them, you'll be more successful at shorter scores. The trouble I've had is trying to make every horse work like this. I can teach a horse to let me pull on them, but then get to the roping where they'll either let you score or they won't. But what do you do if you get there and they won't?

ON THE MUSCLE

• *The Perks*

Some horses take forever to get right, and then score every time. There are horses I've had that won't look at the cow, have their head to the right, and you trick-score them. You figure out how to pull on him, how much you need to turn his head. But just because he might not be easy to get in the box and easy to look toward the cow, that doesn't mean you still can't score him. Trick-scoring has helped me get my horses to last longer. If you don't want to buy horse after horse, figuring out

your horse will help you get along with the one you have. It might take scoring on a loose rein or trick-scoring him, but in the end, if you can figure out your timing, these types of horse can be extremely successful.

• *Example*

Clint (Madison Oak) is the best horse I've got right now. But it took until he was 10 to really figure out how to score on him, which I'll explain in the next few pages.

• *Challenge*

These kinds of horses aren't for everyone. They require you to control your body and definitely your nerves and attitude. When you're mad on one of these horses, they feel it. They're not for everybody, and they're not the kind of horse everyone thinks of when they think of one that scores good. They are often on the muscle and require a more nuanced timing. ■

NEVER STOP BEING RELENTLESS



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SOLVING SCORING STRUGGLES

I've spent my career troubleshooting the score on horses from one end of the spectrum to the other. Figuring out how to best score your horse is a matter of time in the saddle and patience in the box.

• Cool It

When you are running into box problems, the worst thing you can do is get mad. The energy on the inside of you is bad for them. So with all of these tips, the first thing I want to emphasize is that for me, everything works better when I'm relaxed and not mad, no matter how frustrating figuring out how to score can be.

• Ride Time

In general, I think we all put too much emphasis on working and scoring our horses. I know they need scored, and I'm not against working on scoring in the box by any means. But I really do think we can over-do it on both seasoned and young horses.

I didn't score many steers at all while we were in California rodeoing. We just roped fresh cattle, sorted steers, roped at the rodeos, and rode our horses. I can't believe how good my horses were in the box. I wasn't picking on them. They weren't perfect in the box, but they were standing still, looking at the cow. Doing something different every day—instead of just the regular grind of the practice pen or the constant go-go-go of the rodeos—kept it fun for my horses, and they felt better as a result.

• Get Moving

When I am working on scoring in the box, no matter what kind of horse I'm on, it's my opinion that I'm better off if I don't force them into the corner. The more I have tried to make my horses stay, the harder it is on them. The more I pull on my horses or jerk on the bridle reins, the more scared they get. The more I threaten my horses, the worse they get.



Instead, I opt to keep my horses' feet moving if we're running into a problem. If they're wanting out of the box, I usually let them out. I get out of the box and move their feet and let them get themselves calm by loping circles in

front of the box. I'm not talking bolting out and whipping them in circles. And I don't agree with walking out and letting them stand, because that's creating a monster that wants out of the box to do nothing. It's as simple as moving

TREVOR BRAZILE,
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STEP BY STEP with Chad Masters



their feet around, doing drills to get them listening to me, and putting them back in the box. So, when you do get to a pressure situation, and your horse doesn't want to stand still in the corner, you can move his feet in the box and he'll remember back to when you did that at home, and how much harder work it was to not stand still.

• *Heel Box Help*

Clint is 12 now, and he's pretty good. But prior to him being 10 years old, I wouldn't haul him because I could not get him to sit still for the gates. He wanted to jump and not watch the cow. But he was always good in the heel box, because he got to leave when the steer left. Clint spent a lot of time coming out of the heel box, without a lot of pressure or stress. Eventually, he figured it out that he could be as comfortable in the head box as the heel box, because he stopped worrying about me pulling on him and forcing him to stand.

• *Don't Over-Score*

Some people want to get into the box and score 10 in a row. Maybe some green horses need that, but if your horse is needing scored that much, he needs to work harder outside of the box. That's when I want to lope circles and keep his feet moving.

• *Look for the Reward*

Any horse I'm riding—whether I can hold him or not, or I have to let him turn his head—every day I'm at home, I'm looking to figure out how to reward him. Any time my horse doesn't want to look at the cow, I tighten my bridle reins and try to gently pull him straight. I want to reward him and loosen when he looks at the cow. At the same time, though, you have horses who get anxiety because they know the second they look at the cow, something is going to happen. So I try to be sure to reward him by relaxing when he looks at the cow, but that doesn't mean I score or go rope. I might just sit there and pet him.

• *Stop the Spin*

Spinning out in the box can be so frustrating. I see people really want to get after one for that. But this goes back to moving their feet. If I have a horse who wants to spin out in the box, I like to go the way he wants to spin in 20 or 30 circles. Again, I do not do this mad. I stay calm and just keep his feet moving, so the next time he thinks about spinning out, he might think about how much work it was the last time he tried it.

• *Pattern Work*

I want my horses to work the same, no matter which direction I ride into the

box or which way I turn. Especially on a young horse, if I do the same thing every time and turn him the same way every time, and I get to a big roping and the music is going and he's never been there, if I ride up and do the same pattern I've always done, the pattern brings him back to being used to something. If I always go in the front of the box and turn to the left just like I do at home, that's a comfort for him. You horse can be comfortable with you but not comfortable with the situation.

• *Paying Attention*

There are absolutely horses you've got to stay really quiet on, but sometimes, trying to stay too quiet to keep your head horse calm can backfire. An old horse, the more still and relaxed you are, sometimes as soon as the gate bangs they're looking for something—a noise or a movement of any kind. They know it's coming. It's almost better to move them around a little more aggressively and, as soon as you sit still right before you nod, they're relaxing down to that. You see some guys who move and swing and jump and cowboy around, but their horses don't run through the bit because they're paying attention to him and what they're doing, instead of what's happening in the gates. ■



MASTERS CRACKS OUT 22-YEAR-OLD WORLD CHAMPION MOUNT, CODY, FOR 2020 CAMPAIGN

Chad Masters is relying on the horse he won the 2007 PRCA Heading World Title aboard as rodeo hits crunch time in 2020. —By Kendra Santos

At 22, Chad Masters' Pitzer Ranch-bred Ima Two Eyed Con—affectionately known as Cody—hadn't really seen a rodeo since the 2011 Wrangler National Finals Rodeo.

Masters and his dad bought him as a yearling and put the first rides on the horse as a 2-year-old. Cody had long-since proven himself by the time Masters stopped riding him under the bright lights that year, carrying his owner to the 2006 NFR Average title and the 2007 PRCA World Champion Header gold buckle. Cody won Masters three USTRC NFTR Open titles, including one in 2015 after Masters legged him up

and cracked him out just for the event. But aside from a few places here and there, that US Finals in Oklahoma City five years ago was his last outing.

"When we built my place, we built a pasture behind the house that's Cody's," Masters said. "He's been in that pasture for the last three or four years. He trots up and down the fence row, and kids and women ride him when they come by. But if he gets loose, he'll come and sit by the boxes and watch us rope or go stand at the horse trailer."

And that's the way Masters was content to let Cody live out the rest of his life, until Spencer Mitchell called looking for

something to ride at the RodeoHouston Super Series make-up rodeo in Fort Worth at the end of May.

"Spencer called, and I told him I didn't have anything that went through the barrier except the horse I was riding," Masters laughed. "And he said, 'I sure wish Cody was sound.' And I said, 'Hey! He is!'"

"I was giving Chad heck because he let Dakota Kirchenschlager ride him at the American Semis one year," Mitchell added. "And sure enough, he said, 'Shoot I'll bring him for you.'"

Mitchell didn't have any luck at Fort Worth, but Cody took no blame.

"I wouldn't turn down an opportunity to ride Cody anywhere," Mitchell said. "He's been so good for so long. He was exactly how I thought he'd be, and he gave me a chance to win every time. I've seen that horse from Cheyenne to the NFR over the years, and I can't believe he's never won Horse of the Year. He's deserved it."

Watching Mitchell on Cody lit a fire in Masters, who was practically afoot with his AQHA/PRCA Horse of the Year, Clint, out with injury.

"I took him to a little rodeo after that, and he was perfect," Masters remembered. "And I just kept taking him and taking him. And pretty soon, I've got \$20,000 won on him this year."

At the time of this writing in mid-September 2020, Masters is 15th in the world with \$37,577.91, roping with the reigning World Champion Wesley Thorp (who has the identical amount won and also sits 15th).

"The first time I saw him ride Cody was Wichita Falls," said Thorp, who was a 14-year-old kid doing his homework on the couch in Throckmorton, Texas, the last time he saw Masters ride Cody at the NFR. "He turned a really good steer, and I could tell Chad was confident on him. That horse is really easy to heel behind. Probably one of the easiest horses I've ever heeled behind, really. When he gets ahold of the head, he opens them up fast and really smooth. He gives you a good place to throw, and it's the same every time."

The old horse is enjoying life on the rodeo road, Masters said, as long as Masters doesn't get too greedy about

riding him too often.

"He enjoys the one-a-days," Masters said. "Really, he tolerates the one-a-days. These old horses have ran so many steers, under so much pressure, that they know it's coming. He steps to the pin, you have to wait him out sometimes and it's really just a feel. It's trick-scoring him. He scored so good for so long, but for three years, the only steers he ran were 30 at the NFR, all nod and go. He's very funny if you're not breathing. If you're breathing and calm when you're scoring, he'll score good."

Cody showed his one-a-day preference at Deadwood, South Dakota, this July.

"Our first steer fell down, and we got a rerun," Masters said. "I backed in the corner on the second one, and he just went—I didn't nod, the gates didn't bang or anything. I got him pulled up before the barrier, got reset, and he was good. He just doesn't like it. He's just a funny horse."

Irritated or not, Cody worked good enough for Masters and Thorp to place fifth in the two-head average with a time of 12.8 seconds on two head, worth a critical \$1,919 a man.

Despite being in his twilight years, Cody doesn't take too much maintenance, even when traveling.

"He's torn his deep flexor twice, and he's got some soreness in it still. Shawn Melton put the Freedom Plate shoes on him just to keep him sound in retirement and now, Cory Smothers puts them on him, and I haven't injected him in six years. He looks great. We keep him on Previcox and those shoes, and that's it." ■