

The Team Roping Journal's

EXTRA

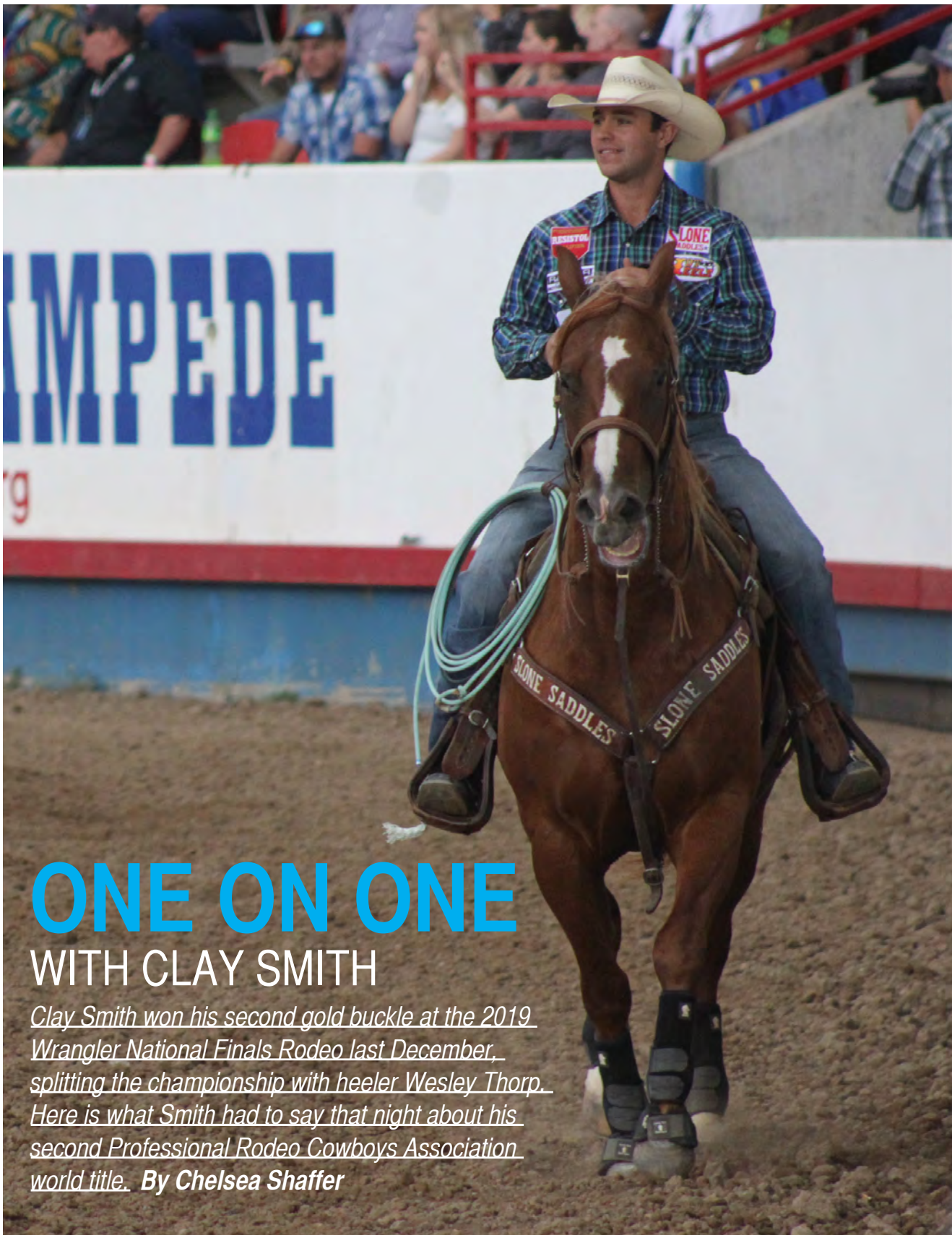
MARCH/2020

**CLAY
SMITH**

**TWO-TIME WORLD
CHAMPION HEADER**



ONE ON ONE with Clay Smith



ONE ON ONE

WITH CLAY SMITH

Clay Smith won his second gold buckle at the 2019 Wrangler National Finals Rodeo last December, splitting the championship with heeler Wesley Thorp. Here is what Smith had to say that night about his second Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association world title. By Chelsea Shaffer

Chelsea Shaffer: World title number two. How does that feel Clay?

CS: It's bitter-sweet not winning the world with Jade Corkill. I didn't do a good enough job, or he would be up here with me. He roped great for me all year. But I'm extremely blessed to be in this spot.

Did you do many calculations before the Final round to know what needed to happen?

CS: Our plan was the same all week—if we won the round, great. If not, that's OK, as long as we were still getting checks. I knew if some guys did good in Round 10, that I'd have to place in the round to hold my spot. You could watch on the TV what was happening ahead of us. I was really wanting to try to win the round. I kind of missed my dally, didn't give Jade a good handle—only Jade could have caught some of the steers I turned. There was no way he was going to miss. He was truly happy for me, and I'm truly sick that he didn't win it with me. But there's nobody in the world I'd have rather had there with me. He's the best. I'm glad to have him as a partner and a friend.

Jade has been your dream partner forever.

CS: He's been the best I've ever seen, all growing up and starting rodeoing. His mental game—that dude wants to win more than anybody. Well, I want to win that much too, but he's more aggressive than anybody and his mind is so good as far as not letting things get in the way. I know how some people think they'll mess up, but I knew for a fact Jade Corkill wasn't going to mess up. I had messed up earlier in the week. It shouldn't have come down to the last steer, but it's crazy how it is out here. It doesn't matter what you come in with, what lead. But for that one steer, I had the best guy in the world.



JAMIE ARVISO PHOTO

How special is this win with the whole family watching?

CS: My dad always had horses, and we've been going to Las Vegas for the dummy roping since I was 5 years old. It's something we've always wanted to do. It's crazy how time works. I remember coming out here and getting chill bumps to Viva Las Vegas, and this being the second time truly is a blessing.

You and your brother were the child prodigies. How much pressure was that?

CS: This is everything other than our faith. Rodeo has always been what we wanted to do. I enjoy the sport of team roping. When we get home, I enjoy practicing. I enjoy roping, in general. But the NFR, it's the ultimate goal. And I've got two brothers who are chasing it too, and I'll be dodging them out here next year.

How many years does your great horse Marty have left in him?

CS: I hope 20. That horse is so smart. He knows what I'm going to do before I do it. That horse has been amazing. I'm hoping I have something else that will take his spot when he goes down. I've got several other horses coming up that I hope will be as good, but in all reality, I don't know that there will ever

be another Marty. I can ride him at Pendleton and turn around and ride him at the NFR.

Does it bug you that, because he's grade, he's never gotten the AQHA/PRCA Horse of the Year title?

CS: To be honest, a little bit. For his sake, it's nothing to do with me. That horse will die on my place, and when he gets too old to do it, he'll have a big green pasture. He's been special to me. ■

{ Vital Stats }

AGE: 28

ROPE:
Triton, Soft by Rattler

NFR QUALIFICATIONS:
5

PARTNER:
Jade Corkill

HOME:
Broken Bow, Oklahoma

CAREER EARNINGS:
\$1,242,612

No Backing Off



JAMIE ARVISO PHOTO

There's not much room for doubt headed into Round 10 at the 2019 Wrangler National Finals Rodeo for Clay Smith.

In 2019, heading into Round 10, we were last out and I knew what everyone else had done. I had to rope one steer out of the hundreds of thousands of steers I've run in my life—but that one steer was the most important of my entire life.

That's the thing, though. I couldn't let that thought creep into my mind. It was tempting, it really was, but I had to make myself believe it was just another run in the practice pen.

Luckily, I like to be aggressive—it's in my nature and how I'm wired. So my mindset was that, if I messed up, I wanted it to be because I was trying to win, not because I was trying to be safe or I

was backing off. A guy can't get mad going out trying to win. If I mess myself up, it's because I'm trying to win first, not because I'm just trying not to lose.

That's cost me, for sure. I broke a barrier to win the Cinch Timed Event Championship my first time there. I broke a barrier to be high team back at the Bob Feist Invitational and to win the George Strait. But I'd rather be going for it than be afraid in those situations.

I always like to win first. In jackpots, people wait for the short round to make good runs, but if you start out making good runs, you might just have to go catch in the short round. I go at every one, and try to be in a good spot by the

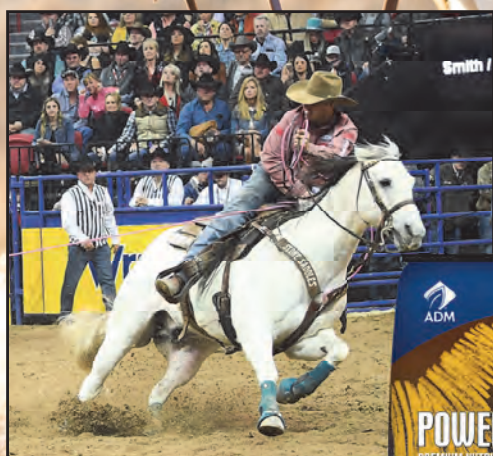
time the short round rolls around. And even then, I don't want to back off.

Growing up, I was always really competitive with my brothers Jake and Britt. We wanted to win at pretty much everything. But it was an evolution because, if I didn't catch all of my steers, especially at the jackpots, we were going to be eating bologna sandwiches. Going fast and catching one out of 10 wasn't going to cut it. But when you get to a certain level, you can figure out how to be more aggressive as far as riding your horse. That's what I figured out how to do now, to allow me to be aggressive and still take a high-percentage shot. ■

Congratulations Clay Smith

2019 PRCA World Champion Header


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Jackpot Sense

The sun wasn't the only thing hot in Arizona in the winter of 2017—Clay Smith won three of the biggest jackpots during the Arizona run, including the Mike Cervi Jr. Memorial in Marana, worth \$18,500 a man. He talks about what it took to rope smart over five head.

PEGGY GANDER PHOTOS



1 We saw that steer come in, and he was small and light. I wanted to run pretty close and try to handle him for Will (Woodfin). These steers were smaller than normal, so the trick was to try to get out of the barrier good and keep them on their feet around the corner. Some would wipe out, so I really wanted to try to not hit them too hard. My horse, Marty, did a pretty good job, and he made it a lot easier. He stayed pretty free, which let me get the steer's head and shoulders to come around for Will. Marty wouldn't be everyone's favorite, but he's the best horse I've ever had. He lets me just go do my job, and in a jackpot situation like this, that's critical.



2 All of my jackpot partners know that if I draw one without much horn, I go for the neck. I like roping bigger horns. Especially at a five-head jackpot, I won't risk it and I'll go for the neck every time. I'll run closer to him, take an extra swing and take a little bit longer. I'll try to handle him a little bit better when I have a neck. Will knows I'm going to do that, so he's ready. In a five-head roping you can make up the time, though, when you want to be sure to get him caught.

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STEP BY STEP with Clay Smith



3 This steer turned his head to the right just after I roped him. He wanted to handle funny. He stepped left and Will really heeled him well. He wanted to be phony with his head, so I tried to guide him around there. If I had just turned him when he was looking to the right, he could have wiped out. I wanted to guide his head around and keep his shoulders square and coming around to be sure to keep him on his feet.

4 By now, it was a really tight roping. There were quite a few teams right in the mix. We didn't know anything about that steer, but he looked good. He was really straight and just real honest. I got a really good start and threw from a coil back. Will heeled him really fast. He was a little bit bigger, and I could rope him and step out a little bit. I didn't have to help him around the corner and he had just enough frame to make a normal run and not have to worry about him washing out. I could make a good, aggressive run heading into the short round. This is really the steer that won us the roping.



5 We were high team back. Luke (Brown) and Jade (Corkill) were third call back and were fast, but we had a second on them, so we had to be about 7.0. That was the best start I got all day, but not on purpose. I was trying to give him more, but he ended up better than I expected him to be. He had pretty small horns, but I had enough time to get close enough and make sure I could keep it on him. I eased him around there, and Will always catches when they pay big money. ■



JAMIE ARVISO PHOTO

THE GREY BOMBER: CLAY SMITH'S MARTY

Clay Smith spun six out of seven steers heading into Round 8 of the 2018 Wrangler National Finals Rodeo, in serious contention for a gold buckle. And he did it aboard his great, grey, grade gelding, Marty.

Smith, his dad, and his brothers ride a lot of horses, including outside horses, and are always looking for the next one. When a friend of his, Marty Caudle, showed up with a sorrel horse for Smith to try, he instead liked the grey tied to the trailer.

"We get to do what we love—ride horses and rope," Smith said. "We get to look at a bunch of them, but he caught

my eye—he was really pretty and about the right size."

Although Marty didn't want to sell the grey, he told Smith he could get on him. Caudle's son, Tanner, had heeled on him a little, but he hadn't been headed on. Smith roped some slow steers on him and liked him, but didn't realize just how good he was going to be.

A couple months later, Caudle told Smith that he was thinking about selling the grey. He brought him back over on a rainy day, and as Smith was roping the first steer, the gelding bucked.

"I said, 'Dang Marty, I didn't know he bucked,'" Smith explained. "He said,

'No, he's not a bronc, he's just fresh.'"

They negotiated on a price, and got within \$500 of the amount Caudle was willing to take and what Smith was willing to pay.

That night, Smith was thinking about it and his dad offered him some advice, "My dad said, 'If you like that horse, what's \$500 matter? You better buy him.'" Smith decided he would call Caudle the next morning and buy the horse.

"I've never been an early riser," Smith said with a laugh. "That morning, my dad yells at me. Marty called my dad at 7 a.m. and said he'd take what I offered. It really was like it was meant to be."

Smith appropriately named the gelding "Marty" and, after only having him a few months and going to five or six jackpots, he took the 4-year-old to the Cinch USTRC Open where he and his brother placed. Smith started circuit roping on him the next year.

"The fact is, that horse wanted to be good," Smith said. "I didn't have to train him. I don't ever remember having to get on him about anything. He's a winner. He's always put me in the spot to win. That horse has been a huge blessing and made my job really, really easy for the last [few] years. He's been an amazing horse. Number one, that horse can really run—he's fast. He's really cowy—he watches a cow really good. He never gets in your way."

Ironically, Marty isn't registered. Smith found out who bred and raised him, and has since bred some mares to Marty's sire, Royal Dept, who goes back to Hollywood Dun It and Smart Little Lena. Marty's dam had already been sold and they were unsure if she has papers, but said that she's by The Big Fix.

"He was traded around on, and I think he was an outlaw as a younger horse," Smith said about Marty. "It's kind of a shame he don't have papers, but at the same time, it don't really matter because I'm not going to ever sell him—he'll die on my place." ■