

The Team Roping Journal's **EXTRA**

MARCH/2020

Jake Long

NINE-TIME NFR
HEELER



ONE ON ONE

WITH Jake Long



JAMIE ARVISO PHOTO

Kansas native **Jake Long** has built a career throwing fast, and it's paid off. He's a Bob Feist Invitational Champ, a George Strait Team Roping Classic champ, a husband, father and friend. Long has ridden three-time PRCA/AQHA Horse of the Year Zans Colonel Shine for the better part of a decade, and the horse has helped shape his legacy in the sport of team roping. **By Chelsea Shaffer**

Chelsea Shaffer: How did team roping become such a part of your life early on?

JL: I started off going to junior rodeos, breakaway and the other events. I didn't really start team roping until I was probably 13 or 14 years old, as far as trying to get good at it. I had always roped goats and dummies and all that. I just kind of progressed on, and I team roped for my first time at a birthday party. I was a header, and I headed a lot more when I was younger. But I always kind of liked heeling. Then when I got closer to high school, that became my main focus. I headed for Coleman my junior year, and my senior year I started heeling full-time.

CS: Did you buy your permit as soon as you turned 18?

JL: Yes. I was staying at Justin Turner's house, and I was just starting my freshman year of college. I turned 18 in March. I didn't have any plans on ProRodeoing. That was a pipe dream at that point of time. One day I was sitting at Justin's, and Justin told his brother we were going to go circuit rodeoing. I thought that was the coolest thing in the world. I went to my first rodeo in Inola, Kansas, and we got the win and filled my permit. I thought there would never be another poor day.

CS: And how did your career evolve from that first win?

JL: That was 2003, and pretty much from there I circuit rodeoed the rest of the year. I bought my card, and I went to college rodeos with Ty Thomas. I didn't know him before then and we had good luck at the college rodeos. He asked me if I wanted to go to Reno, St. Paul and Greeley, and he and his girlfriend at the time were living in Idaho. My wife and I spent the summer out there with him, and for the rest of the time we hung out up there until August

just amateur rodeoing and circuit rodeoing. Well, from then on, I spent a few years just hanging out. In 2007, me and Coleman tried to go full-time and that was my first full year of rodeo.

CS: Did you get a college degree?

JL: I did. I have an ag-business degree. I went two years at NEO, and two years at Northwestern Oklahoma State.

CS: What would you say was your big break?

JL: The easiest thing to say would be winning the George Strait in 2010 with Coleman. I started in 2010, and I couldn't find a partner to go to Denver with. Kaleb Driggers told me about Cory Kidd, who didn't even have a head horse at the time. Driggers let Cory borrow a horse that winter. I roped with him until Tucson, and we won here and there. Travis Graves was roping with Clay Tryan at the time, and that got me and Brady Tryan hooked up at Tucson. We decided we'd go to California. I went to the George Strait in March and won that, and that was the first time I ever got to rodeo where money wasn't so tight. So I think that break, and just going with Brady, and buddying with Travis Tryan and Travis entering us and getting us around. It was being in the rig with the Tryans. For them, making the NFR isn't a pipe dream. It's what they do. So getting that mentality from them was really big.

CS: How long have you been with Cactus Ropes?

JL: I think 2007 was when I became an official endorsee. I've always used Cactus, honestly. I'd used off-brand ropes when I was really young because they were cheaper, but once I felt a Cactus Rope, I started using them. Coleman and I were second callback at San Antonio, and I talked to Barry Berg there. From day one, he treated me way better

than I deserved. I stayed with him and his wife and kids, and we've been family.

CS: How has Colonel changed your career?

JL: I was really blessed to have a little horse named Mikey before Colonel. I named Mikey after a cousin of mine who passed away in an ATV accident. Mikey wasn't as fundamentally correct as Colonel, but for as little as he was, he could really run and had a lot of cow to him and a lot of try. I got Colonel during the US Finals in October from Dixon Flowers, and it took a couple years to get with him. Once he came around, he gave me a horse that was built for every set up. Colonel got good right when Mikey started getting hurt. He became a horse I could ride in any set up, and he's never had any soundness issues. The longevity and the consistency he's given me for 10 years now is a quality that can be overlooked. He just truly was good at everything. He was good to be around and big enough to take it.

CS: What are the remaining goals in your career?

JL: I want to come into the Finals number one. And obviously the big one is winning the gold buckle. Nowadays it's a different way to win it these days. You can get one without being the best roper from start to finish of the year. I want to win one, but it would almost win as much to me to come in at number one. You have to win all year long and that's almost a harder feat to do than just have a good week in Vegas. I've been fortunate enough to win most of the big jackpots, so really that gold buckle and going in number one.

Hazing Tips with Jake Long



OLIE'S IMAGES

How to determine your haze.

PARTNER PREFERENCE

When Luke Brown was riding Rockstar, he really wanted to break more toward the pin. That required me to score more and leave the steer straighter and have enough trust that he'd take care of me as far as not moving the steer too fast. With other horses, Luke has wanted them leaning left more.

ROOM TO THE RIGHT

Lovington, New Mexico, is a big arena with a lot of room to the right. You know there's no possible way the steer can go right, and it's your responsibility to be the wall. You have no chance of winning if that run goes to the right.

NO ROOM

Rodeos like Sikeston, Missouri, are famous for the boxes being set down into a triangle. If the steer even looks left, you can't make a run on him because there's zero room for the head horse to go anywhere. You have to be a step later than you're even comfortable with.

JACKPOT SCENARIO

At a jackpot—like the USTRC or World Series—headers get a more consistent start on the steer and scoring isn't as big of a factor. As a heeler, you can feel late. The head horses can really run, so you can feel panicked. Even if you get a decent start, the boxes are longer. By the time you're catching up, the header has

it on them. But that means you're really only one or two swings away from being in the right spot. Hazing isn't as big a factor there because there's not much you can dictate. If you had a smaller jackpot, without a heel barrier—those are the ropings where arena conditions and the kind of steer you rope have a lot to do with it. The more patterned jackpot steers are going to want to step to the right more. You can be a little more aggressive with the steer and try to hold them up. If they feel a heeler, it will slow them up just a bit. You can really pick them up and slow them down to help the header catch up. ■



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Heelers' Patience in the Corner with Jake Long

NFR-qualifier Jake Long talks about common problems novice ropers face.

Something that I try to work on—and a problem I see in novice ropers—is not getting in a hurry when the head rope goes on. Novice ropers tend to panic and think: I need to get in there and get to the cow now. There's actually a lot more time because of the steps that have to happen. The steer's head has to turn, his shoulders have to come around and then his whole body has to make that turn. After all that happens, there's still a hesitation once the steer hits to make the corner. There are five steps there that have to happen before that steer actually leaves the corner and the roper needs to be in pursuit of him.



JAMES PHIFER PHOTOS

1 My header already has the steer's head and shoulder started into the turn, and I'm still holding my horse's shoulders with my reins and trying to stay on the outside of that turn. If I try to cut the corner right there, I spend the whole run chasing the steer and trying to get back into position. By staying on the outside of the turn, it's like me taking a shortcut to where I know that steer is going to be; where his feet are going to be—which is my target. I just ride around there and I'm able to keep my horse more controlled and meet the steer at the destination. They almost come to me that way.



2 In the practice pen, you can play with how late you can be and still be on time. People get a fear that everything is going to get away from them, so as soon as the head rope goes on they think they need to get in there. In all actuality, by narrowing that distance running down the arena, it makes everything that much harder. By staying in your lane around the turn, you can keep your horse more controlled and at a slower pace. In the process of turning, the steer has to slow down a little bit. As he makes the corner, you can fold around him and as he leaves the corner, you already have the speed matched up. If you're behind him and chasing him, you're constantly trying to work to that outside position.



the FUTURE



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STEP BY STEP with Jake Long



3 You're seeing the steer take a hard left on this run. I've been talking about keeping my width—but where the steer goes, I need to go. That's the first time this steer has made a hard step to the left and you can see that I'm starting to go that way. To stay in the proper lane, I need to go left there and stay with him.

4 By me moving over—and keeping my width wherever he goes—I can ride the same corner here as I did in the previous pictures. That steer is almost three-quarters of the way turned, but the angle of my horse's body and the angle of the steer's body are almost identical. That's an important thing: staying with the steer, but staying out around the corner. I might be a half a stride further back than I'd like to be, but usually a roper is only one swing away from where he needs to be. I might not heel that steer as fast as I would need to at a rodeo, but with one more swing, I'll heel him on the third hop—which is a great jackpot run. If I keep riding, and I keep calm through all this, I might cost myself a half a second. Rodeoing, that's huge, but jackpotting, that's not that big of a thing.



5 If you're chasing the steer when you set your heel loop down, a lot of times your horse isn't collected and ready to stop. When you practice a patient position, you're always collected and always ready to stop. I'm able to keep momentum with my horse and keep driving him around the corner and keep my swing going and then when I throw, I'm not putting my horse in a bind. The amount of momentum I gave my horse to get into his stop in this picture is why he can stop like this. When you set your horse up to stop, you're allowing him to help you place your rope on the ground. As I'm setting my bottom strand down, my horse is starting to slide, allowing me an extra split second to stay with my loop and finish the run better. ■



JAMIE ARVISO PHOTO

TAKE THE SHOT

Refuse to rope scared.

When do you safety up, and when do you take the shot? My theory on it is that I never want to rope scared. If I ride a proper corner and the shot presents itself, I don't want to be afraid to take it. If the shot is there on the first or second hop, I want to heel the steer if I've set the shot up. I don't want to become one dimensional to have to throw fast, but riding a good corner will allow me to take my first good shot.

At the 2018 Wildfire, on my fifth steer with Luke Brown, I was a little later at the barrier than I intended—so I had to push my horse with my legs through the corner to get to the steer, and it took me a few swings over his back to get to where that steer was heelable.

That situation is one thing—because I wasn't in position to rope him on the first hop. But I don't want to ride a great corner and be scared to throw. It just

gets harder to catch the steer the farther across the arena I track, so when I ride a great corner, I want the confidence to take my first shot.

My dad told me the first shot is your best one. When I was a kid, I took that to mean I needed to turn and throw. I don't want ever to be scared to take a throw, but I want to be aware when I'm not in the right spot. I want to take the smart shot—sometimes that's the first shot, but when I'm not in the right spot in the corner, that's not the case.

What I mean by riding a good corner is this: to be patient in the corner and let the steer start to turn before I go to follow him. I think of it just like driving. If you're driving down the highway, and there's a sharp curve, if you anticipate the turn, you're trying to stay in your lane the whole way around the turn, having to keep correcting the

wheel. But if you drive into the turn then come around, you'll stay in your lane the whole time. I want to let that steer start to turn before I let my horse follow him. When I turn too early, it makes it feel like the steer is hopping faster because I'm trying to fight my horse and my rope to get back to where I want to be.

I had to be 9 to win the Bob Feist Invitational in 2017, but I came around and heeled him on the second or third hop because my shot was set up. If he's good to heel, I'm going to go ahead and heel him. It's got to be so much about reactions and the thousands of steers in the practice pen and on the Heel-O-Matic. All of that muscle memory is what we use when we're competing. I don't want to take my muscle memory out of it by allowing my head to get in the way. ■