

The Team Roping Journal's

EXTRA

MAY/2020

Cesar de la Cruz

NINE-TIME NFR QUALIFIER

Fast Back



KATLIN GUSTAVE PHOTO

ONE ON ONE

WITH Cesar de la Cruz

Cesar de la Cruz is a nine-time National Finals Rodeo heeler who's now a father of three living outside Casa Grande, Arizona with his wife Arena. — By Chelsea Shaffer

When rodeos open back up, what are your plans for the year?

CD: I'm roping with Spencer Mitchell, and I'm really excited about having him as a partner. Our styles should really fit.

What horses are in your trailer this year?

CD: Now that I've had time to work with all of my horses, I've got more ready to go than I've had in a long time. Lucky Bucky, he's been my good rodeo horse for a few years now. Muddy Waters is back from injury after getting hurt in Salinas, and I have a horse by the name of Cuatro that's really cool. I'm partners with a gentleman from North Dakota named Shane Johnson. And I have a 4-year-old filly Neal Wanless owns that Dakota Kirchschrager and I picked up last year. She's a Smoking Whiz out of a Paddys Irish Whiskey mare, and she'll be in the 4-year-old incentive at the Rope Horse Futurity this year. She's beautiful. Those four are the coolest I've had in a long time, and I've got a few young ones coming up. I have one young one Dakota gave me, and she's really good. I call her Sandy, and she's just a baby. She's slowly but surely figuring it out. I have Annie Oakley, too, and I can't haul her, but I have her in shape and can ship her whenever I need to. But she's not in the trailer full time. I have five or six cool ones right now.

What Fast Back Rope is your jam right now?

CD: I've been going back and forth between two. The Excalibur is lighter but the crown is bigger so I can lock it off faster especially at the rodeos. "It's got enough poly in it that it takes the heat really, really well." I use the Excaliburs at the rodeos because they lock off quicker for me. I've been using the Colbalt to jackpot with.

Tell me about life in South Tucson for you.

CD: This feels like home to me. I get up first thing as early as I can at 4:30 in the morning, and it's nice until lunch time. The rest of the day you run your errands

and take care of stuff in town with air conditioning, and as soon as the sun goes down you can turn on the lights and go back to riding again. If it's the middle of summer and 115 degrees outside, you figure out a place to rope with lights at night. You can rope year-round here, though.

At the jackpots, they'll start at 7 o'clock and go all night. The #9 roping won't get done until 1 or 2 in the morning. That's what I grew up doing. I talked about it before that it kept me out of a lot of trouble, hanging out with like-minded ropers like the Calmelats. We grew up going at cattle. We're working-class people. We're out for blood, and we're buddies and friends, but we're trying to win. Growing up with Colter Todd and Anthony Calmelat, I'd try to go for the first day money then run off with the roping so I could rope for the rest of the day. These guys were so good, I had to figure out a way to be faster than them, and that's how my style and personality came about.

What have you been working on with your roping lately?

CD: I've been working on my horsemanship and spending more time with Dakota. I'm nowhere near where I want to be, but it's a start. I'm trying to ride horses like the reined cow horse guys. Brad Lund has been spending the most time helping me. I don't talk on the phone riding a colt. I don't answer the phone calls when I'm riding—I'm in the zone trying to figure this out. The best horseman can make things feel similar on everything from colts to finished horses. I'm working on trying to get all of my horses more broke, more supple and sliding a little more—especially my heel horses. If I can get my heel horses to slide more, it helps with their jerk. It really helps if the heel horse can finish the run.

What's one thing that you see yourself do in videos that really bugs you?

CD: It really bugs me when I try to heel a steer when I shouldn't have thrown. If I stay hooked and stay swinging, I can

catch by two feet. I'm really working on trying not to take a dumb shot. I need to let the steer be heelable. I'll watch a video of myself trying to pull off a shot when he's shuffling and the next hop he takes a jump that would have been easy to heel. That's really frustrating. Two heroes of all time—Clay O'Brien Cooper and Leo Camarillo—they were known for having a lot of patience and catching the steer by two feet. I've been working on that. Me and Derrick Begay talked about that a lot. We had so much success when we were younger because we had the perfect mix of controlled aggression. If he needed to run the steer farther down there, I'd tee off and throw as fast as I could. I'm trying to work on my controlled aggression.

Are your boys getting into it yet?

CD: Gio, 7, my middle boy, he and I finally made our first father-son run in the practice pen. It was awesome, and he was so pumped. To see the love he has for it reminds me of the love I had for it. I remember how much I love this game, especially now that we can't do it. He's in shorts and barefoot and ropes the dummy because he craves it. That reminds me of the love I have for the game. Camillo likes to hunt and fish and ride. Zorro, he goes fast. He rides Johnny Ringo as fast as he will go, and we're working on his riding more than anything. He can run as fast as we can and we've got to slow him down. I've been home now, and they get to see me every day. They understand I'm still gone a lot of the day, but they know I'm out riding and roping and I make it a point every week to take them to go spend time with my Uncle George (Aros). We go rope at his house and it's a cool deal. My grandfather was the biggest influence in my career, but Uncle George helped me get to the final level. He is my biggest fan but he keeps me level. That arena has a lot of sentimental value for me, so I take the boys over there to visit their uncle and rope with him.

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Third question "What Fast Back Rope is

Heel Rope Game Plan



Nine-time WNFR heeler Cesar de la Cruz evaluates the steer size and ground conditions before he decides which weapon he'll pull out of his rope bag.

GROUND CONDITIONS

When I show up somewhere, I look at the ground. That's got a lot to do with rope selection. If it's deep, that can change how your loop hits. I'm going to try to use as stiff of a rope as I possibly can. The stiffer, the better. If the ground is hard, I'll use a softer rope because it's going to want to bounce when it hits the ground. A stiffer rope will bounce if you get aggressive with your delivery. At Cheyenne—the ground is deep there in the middle, so I'll get the stiffest rope I can find with those big huge steers.

CATTLE SIZE

If the cattle are bigger and stronger, I'll get the stiffest, biggest-feeling rope I can find in my rope bag. If they're smaller, little native steers like we rope in Texas a lot, I'll get a softer, lighter rope. That way I can swing a little faster and keep up with their feet. Bigger cattle don't move as fast, so that's why I try to get a bigger, stiffer rope for a bigger, stronger steer.

RODEO

If I go to a rodeo versus a jackpot, especially a situation like Fort Worth that will be faster, I'll use a stiffer rope because it's just a one-head, and I need my loop to stay open because I'll take a faster, more aggressive shot.

JACKPOT

If I'm at a jackpot and I'm going to rope 20 steers all day, I want a softer rope that's really easy to swing. I'm not going to throw on the first hop every single time, so I want a rope that will help me be consistent all day. ■

COBAUT

WITHSTAND THE ELEMENTS

Cesar de la Cruz
9-Time NFR Qualifier

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CORE
CONSTRUCTION
by Fast Back

Riding the Slide

HOW TO HEEL ON A BIG STOPPER.

HUBBELL RODEO PHOTOS



1 Right here, I try to sit up, but I have to stay very balanced. If I go forward even just a little bit I could get out of position. My horse's hit with their hind end and pulls with his front end, so it's important to stay balanced.

I'm just barely starting to pick him up to let him know I'm wanting to throw. In my delivery, I'll give my horse back his head so he can get collected on his own, so when I pull my slack he'll be squared up to dally.

2 I'm starting to give him back his head and place my loop on the ground. You'll notice how this horse is really starting to pick his front end up while his hind end is completely on the ground, but he's still keeping his front end moving. This is important because it allows me to place my bottom strand on the ground. If a horse hits on his front end, the loop will just crumble. So he needs to stay free in his front end and get down with his hind end. Balance is still very important for the horse to stay under me. If I get too far forward, that's when his front end will start to lock up. You've got to stay out of a horse's way that stops like that.



3 I'm really trying to get that bottom strand on the ground and my horse is really getting underneath himself and getting prepared for the stop. You'll notice I'm trying to give him back his head so he can get square for the jerk. You don't always want to be pulling on the horse. Especially a horse that stops like that, you want to squeeze with your legs. Right here, I'm squeezing him just a little, because I need just a little more out of him to finish my delivery.



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"I use a variety of ropes, but mainly the Cobalt and Excalibur. I love the consistency and durability of these ropes. After using a rope at a jackpot, it goes in my rodeo bag and is still good for a long time. The folks at Fast Back are great to work with. It's obvious the common goal is quality and building the best ropes possible. I appreciate that because it gives me an advantage in my job."

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STEP BY STEP with Cesar de la Cruz



4 This is ideal. Now, I want him to lock up with the front end and prepare for the jerk. I'm getting all my slack out of the rope and you'll notice that I'm getting him prepared for the jerk with my left hand by picking him up. That picks the saddle horn up and makes it easier to dally. If a horse stops with his head down, that horn disappears.



5 I'm getting ready to dally and I feel sorry for this steer. His hind end is still on the ground. It makes getting your loop on the ground, getting the slack and getting to the horn way easier if your horse will slide.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW? Johnny Ringo



For 16 years—or Cesar de la Cruz’s entire career—one outlaw gelding has been the elite heeler’s best friend.

Johnny Ringo helped de la Cruz earn \$1.3 million dollars and go to nine straight NFRs. The whole time, fans couldn’t get enough of the fire-breathing little bay with smarts and a mile-wide proud streak.

“He was the best horse I’ve ever had,” said de la Cruz, who got Johnny from his uncle George Aros as a 5-year-old. “He took me to the final level in my roping. He loved to rope more than me. He’s why I got there.”

Johnny, who sports Doc O’Lena and Two Eyed Jack blood, is 21 now and has an even more important job.

“Now he’s teaching my boys—they are 7, 5, and 2—how to ride and rope,” said de la Cruz. “He’s by far the best horse I ever owned!”

It’s true. Check out de la Cruz’s Facebook page to watch his 2-year-old, Zorro, actually roping aboard Johnny Ringo. The great gelding also does some swimming and stays kid-sound thanks to Tucson Equestrian Center and AquaStride Equine Hydrotherapy.

“The boys love him, and he’s loving retirement as a babysitter and a swimmer,” de la Cruz added. ■