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Cowboy accomplishes dream

By SHANNON HEFFELFINGER
Senior Reporter

For the last year, Kyle Whitaker has chased a dream realized four times by his father.

The cowboy has competed in nearly 60 rodeos over the last 12 months and has traveled over 40,000 miles to do it. And this Saturday at the World's Toughest Rodeo at Pershing Auditorium, he will be rewarded for his perseverance.

Whitaker, a junior at UNL, will accept the Linderman Award, an honor bestowed upon his father four different times. The award is presented each year to the cowboy who earns \$1,000 or more in at least three events, including at least one rough stock event and at least one timed event. Whitaker earned this money competing in Professional Rodeo Cowboy Association rodeos.

Whitaker is both proud of and thankful for the accomplishment.

He has chased the dream long enough. "It means quite a lot to me to win this," Whitaker said. "When I first started, I was always announced as 'Chip Whitaker's son.' It didn't really matter how good I was.

"I guess with this, I am kind of stepping out of the shadow."

The spotlight will indeed shine on Whitaker, who represents a slowly dying breed in the rodeo world. Many cowboys shy away from competing in three events, instead specializing in either a timed event or a rough stock event.

The trend of specialization elevates the competition level in every event.

As a result, the Linderman Award went unclaimed for the second time in three years in 1996. And Whitaker had no intention of proclaiming himself the next winner at the start of the 1997 competition.

"I wasn't a good enough saddle bronc rider at the beginning of the year," Whitaker said. "But the one thing that helped more than anything was that I placed in Kansas City. Some of the world's most famous cowboys are at that rodeo.

"Plus, I got a new bronc saddle and I spent so much money on it I figured I better improve."

As Whitaker began to improve half way through the rodeo season, he began entertaining thoughts of following in his father's footsteps and capturing the title.

Drawing upon his improvement in saddle bronc riding, Whitaker totaled earnings of \$18,977 - \$13,015 in steer wrestling, \$3,813 in saddle bronc riding and \$2,149 in calf roping.

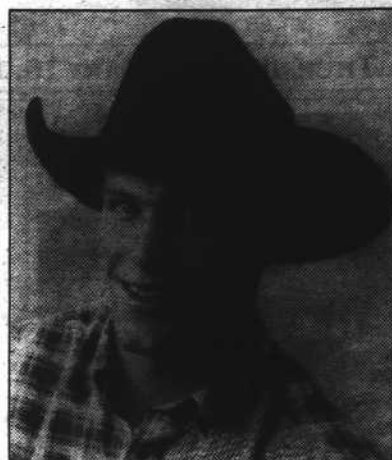
Chip Whitaker never doubted his son's ability to qualify for the specially designed buckle.

"He's a pretty intense competitor, and he works really hard," he said.

Chip, who won the Linderman Award in 1975 and then the three years from 1977-1979, exposed his son to the rodeo at an early age.

The family often traveled to watch aunts and uncles compete, and Kyle Whitaker first entered the mix competitively around age 10.

Whitaker said the memories he has



COURTESY PHOTO
UNL COWBOY Kyle Whitaker will be given the Linderman Award Saturday.

of attending rodeos with his father add a special element to earning the award.

"I think we were the first father-son combination to do this and that means a lot to me and to him," he said.

He isn't ruling out future multiple runs at the Linderman award. Whitaker currently studies agricultural economics and will continue to balance school and rodeo until he graduates next year.

Whitaker competes on the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Rodeo Team in four events and is ranked nationally in saddle bronc, calf roping and steer wrestling.

"I've had to set my priorities, and I know what's important to me," Whitaker said. "I want to compete after I graduate full time. I'd really kind of like to see what I can do with that."

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NU sneaks past Tigers in overtime

WIN from page 7

while Belcher had 19 points along with a team-high four steals.

Belcher said he had his best game of the season against Missouri.

"I haven't played so well lately," Belcher said. "I'm just glad I stepped it up at a time when we really needed it."

MU, which lost its 22nd straight game on the road, was led by center Monte Hargde and guard John Woods who scored 14 points each.

With losses from Kansas State, Texas Tech, and Baylor Wednesday, NU now ranks fourth in the Big 12.

And now, with a road game at Colorado on Saturday, Lue said NU is right where it wants to be.

"We all said we needed to win six in a row," Lue said. "We got three now and three more to go. It's one game at a time."

3 misses in final seconds kill Missouri

BRICKS from page 7

As NU continued to help keep Missouri in the ballgame with turnovers and missed free throws, the Tigers were unwilling recipients as they shot a mere 27 percent from the field in the second half.

However, it was the last possession of the game that summed up Missouri's night. Trailing the Huskers 67-66, with 28 seconds to go, the Tigers were planning to foul Nebraska immediately.

But NU point guard Tyrone Lue brought the ball across mid-court and turned the ball over to Missouri.

"Once we got that unexpected turnover by Lue, I thought for sure we were going to win the game," Stewart said.

After missed shots by Albert White and Kelly Thames, guard Dibi Ray fired a 3-point shot with two seconds left, but his shot was long.

"(The shot) felt so good," Ray said. "I guess it wasn't meant to be."