



Annual college rodeo stars local, national greats

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stock came from a pro contractor. I drew a young bull (Saturday) night, and I had never had one that jumped that high."

But Darling said his performance didn't stand out as one of his best, and he regretted not doing better in his final college rodeo.

"I was upset with myself, and I am still kind of down," he said. "(Rodeo) gives me the chance to travel and lot, and I'm going to miss it."

Kyle Whitaker, a senior agricultural science major, said he'd been involved with rodeos his whole life.

"My dad and grandpa did it, and I just grew up around it," he said.

Whitaker ranks No. 1 in the nation in saddle-bronc riding, and regionally he ranks 13th in calf roping and sixth in steer wrestling.

His cowboy wrangling also has won him an all-around award, as well as steer and roping awards, at the collegiate level.

"After I rode my last bronc, I knew it was my last time, and I was sorry that I didn't do better," Whitaker said. "It was my last hometown rodeo, my last college rodeo."

Darling didn't get involved in bull riding until college, but once he learned more about it, he said, he was hooked, despite injuries such as broken shoulders, bruised lungs and a 2,000-pound bull stepping on his ankle.

"It's an adrenaline rush," he said. "It's a lot more graceful than it looks. You can get a rhythm with the bull."

Darling said he wanted to continue with rodeos as long as he could.

"It was a disappointment that I never won, but I'm close," he said.

Whitaker agreed. "I plan to make this my career," he said. "I am going to compete professionally as long as I can."

Darling said though his performance wasn't what he had hoped it would be for his final rodeo, but that the atmosphere itself made up for part of his disappointment.

"The people you meet at rodeos are really polite," he said. "You won't meet a better bunch of people anywhere."



PHOTOS BY MATT MILLER/DN

(clockwise from top) **BULLFIGHTER STEVE "SNORKLE" FROM** tries to relax in the changing room before the bull-riding starts on Saturday at the UNL College Rodeo in Wahoo. From, who has been a bullfighter for 11 years, said he always got nervous before stepping into the ring.

DAVE SCHROTH PRAYS in the tight quarters behind the chutes before he rides bareback.

A FAN AND A RODEO PARTICIPANT reads the first-day results before the rodeo continues on Saturday. The rodeo drew 165 competitors for the two-day event.

A COWBOY GETS his rope ready for the calf-roping competition at the rodeo on Saturday.