

Area competitors headed to nationals

Nebraska High School Rodeo champions crowned



Anna Clark, Thedford, champion barrel racer.



Whitney Jennings, Seneca, girls cutting champion.

Ruth Nicolaus

The Nebraska High School Rodeo season wrapped up with the high school finals in Hastings at the Adams County Fairgrounds. Rodeo athletes from across the Cornhusker State competed in two go-rounds on June 10-11 and the short go-round on June 12. The top four contestants in each of fifteen events were determined, and they will go on to compete at the National High School Finals Rodeo (NHSFR) in Gillette, Wyoming July 17-23, 2022.

The 2021-2022 champions are:

- Spencer DeNaeyer, Seneca (bareback riding)
- Makayla Wray, Ord (pole bending and breakaway roping)
- Coy Johnston, Stapleton (steer wrestling)
- Monte Bailey, Lakeside (saddle bronc riding)
- Sid Miller, Merna (tie-down roping)
- Libby Hegeman, Arlington (goat tying)
- Brent Charlton, North Platte and Jate Saults, Big Springs (team roping, header and heeler)
- Anna Clark, Thedford (barrel racing)
- Cooper Kursave, Arcadia (bull riding)
- Tatum Olson, Bloom-

field (reined cow horse)

- Bo Bushhousen, St. Libory (boys cutting)
- Whitney Jennings, Seneca (girls cutting)
- Cale Buss, Atkinson (light rifle)
- Tanner Ellis, Minden (trap shooting)

Boys rookie of the year went to Koltdyn Heath, Minden, and girls rookie of the year was Reagan McIntyre, Grand Island.

McIntyre also won the girls' all-around title; and Cooper Bass, Brewster, was the year-end boys all-around champion.

Kylie Lancaster, Hastings, was crowned as the 2022-2023 Miss Nebraska High School Rodeo queen.

The following are synopses of some of the champions.

Pole Bending and Breakaway champion: Makayla Wray, Ord

Makayla Wray came into her junior year of state finals in second and third place in her three events, and left a state champion in two of them.

The seventeen-year-old cowgirl, a soon-to-be senior at Ord High School this fall, called her three days at state finals, "amazing." She was cheering for her friend Gracey Taylor in the poles, but when Gracey knocked over a pole to get a five-second

penalty in the short round, it opened the door for Wray.

"My heart broke for her, but I thought, 'there's a chance (for Wray to win the year-end title.) Then I went and knocked down a pole.'" But there was no time for reflection; she had to compete in the breakaway roping next. "You have to have a short memory in rodeo," she said.

The daughter of Mark and Denise Wray, Makayla will be vice-president of her school's FFA chapter this fall, is a member of the National Honor Society, was just elected student president of the Nebraska State High School Rodeo Association, and plays basketball. She has a 4.0 GPA.

She has also qualified for the NHSFR in the team roping; this is her first trip to Nationals.

Bareback riding champion - Spencer DeNaeyer, Seneca

For the second year in a row, Spencer DeNaeyer took home the state saddle bronc riding title.

The eighteen-year-old, a 2022 graduate of Mullen High School, didn't do well at the 2021 NHSFR.

"Last year, I went in hot-headed, thinking I was the state champ. I was going to (Nationals), and



Spencer DeNaeyer, Seneca, champion bareback rider.

things were going to be all right." He didn't make the short go at the Nationals; his goals are higher this year. "I need to have my hammer cocked, and be ready to go. My goal is to win it."

He will attend Odessa (Texas) College this fall on a rodeo scholarship and compete collegiately, majoring in ag technology.

He is the son of Mark

and Bree Bailey.

Steer wrestling champion - Coy Johnston, Stapleton

Coy Johnston comes from a long line of steer wrestlers, and now he's won his first state title.

The Stapleton cowboy finished last year's season in second place, behind his good friend and fellow steer wrestler Dane Pokorny; the two cowboys switched spots this year,

with Pokorny finishing as reserve champion.

For Sunday's short round, he gave it his all. "I had to make a good run today," he said. "I just went out there, not safetying up or anything, and beat Dane by a half-point." There's no animosity between the two;

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NE State 4-H Camp provides relief for firefighters

Kristen Sindelar
Midwest Messenger Reporter

School's out for the summer! Normally, Jodi Swisher would be in the midst of preparations before summer campers arrive to the Nebraska State 4-H Camp near Halsey. As general manager of the camp, Swisher is responsible for year-round maintenance, cooking and paperwork.

Just ten days before the start of summer camp season, most staff were sent home. Instead of youth, firefighters tired from battling the 201 East Fire filled the cabins and dining room.

"Mainly, we have been trying to get the firefighters into cabins, giving them some place so they can sleep and then providing the meals, the breakfast, sack lunches and then their supper," Swisher said.

Swisher housed up to 105 firefighters at one time, but said "there are more out there" fighting the fires. She said volunteer firefighters were managing the grass fires, but because the fire is within government property, the majority of the firefighters are hired by the forest service.

To feed the firefighters, Swisher used the food she pre-ordered for the upcoming 4-H camps. Ewoldt's Grocery in Thedford supplied additional items, and the Grocery Kart in Broken Bow donated close to \$250 worth of food, Swisher said.

"Little communities are awesome," said Swisher. "People are giving their time to come in and help me when they can."

While there have been no evacuations, the Bessey Forest district near Halsey closed to the public. The University of Nebraska-Lincoln sent home

most of the 4-H camp staff as a precaution.

The fire at the Nebraska National Forest near Halsey is just one of six ignited by lightning on May 17, according to Wildlife Today. The dry conditions were ideal for spreading the fire through the 21000 acres forest area. Gustin, shifting winds and 90 degree temperatures at the onset of the fire spread the flames quickly. A May 20 report estimated 4,100 acres had been burned.

Swisher was hopeful the camping season could begin as scheduled for youth on May 31. She expressed gratitude for those working to stop the fires.

"We're really grateful for all the volunteers and the firefighters. They have been very polite and great, hardworking people, and they have done a really good job here," Swisher said.



COURTESY

Less than two weeks before 4-H campers were to arrive, the Nebraska State 4-H Camp became home to firefighters who were battling the fire within the Nebraska National Forest at Halsey.