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Rodeo in the Show Me State

Missouri High School Rodeo continues growth

Riding High

Daylon Swearingen reaches a new milestone



Missouri High School Rodeo Continues Growth as the “Show Me” State



Many MHSRA members and alumni are “showing” they have what it takes to compete on the national stage.

The 2021 Missouri High School Rodeo Team at the NHSFR in Lincoln, Nebraska.

By Melissa Albertson

Missouri is called the “Show Me” State. There are various stories behind the slogan, but the most common legend attributes the phrase to a speech by Missouri U.S. Congressman Willard Duncan Vandiver who served from 1897 to 1903. He declared, “I come from a state that raises corn and cotton and cockleburs and Democrats, and frothy eloquence neither convinces nor satisfies me. I am from Missouri. You

have got to show me.”

If applied to today’s competitive high school rodeo arena, you could declare members and alumni of Missouri High School Rodeo are “showing” they have what it takes to compete on the national stage.

This was exemplified in 2021, when MHSRA had national title champions and many Top 20 finishes.

In the Jr. High division, Ryder Loeb

won the calf roping title, and Missouri had 12 qualifiers in Top 20 short go finishes. Two team members were Top 5 All-Around finishers. Outside the arena, Blaine Gray was elected Jr. High Division Vice President and other Missouri students won scholarships and even the talent show.

In the High School division, Cooper Freeman and Clay Clayman were team roping champions, and altogether Mis-



This year’s MHSR fundraiser raffle allowed more than \$20,000 to be paid out at the High School state finals. All-Around Cowboy and Cowgirl, Quintonn Lunsford and Kate Albertson, won a good cut of that (also pictured MHSR Queen Laney McGee and President Bart Albertson).



Alumni and young pros Cooper Freeman and Clay Clayman, barrel racer and break-away roper Emma Charleston, and Coy Rahlmann (pictured at the 2021 NFR with heeler Douglas Rich) attribute MHSRA with lessons and relationships that help them be successful today.



Outside the arena, the MHSR student officer team, along with parent volunteers, plan fun activities for members and families to enjoy together like Cowboy Prom, Halloween “trailer treating” and costume contests, fun shows and more.

souri had five Top 20 short go finishes. Clayman split second and third in the All-Around race.

Since that heeling championship, Clayman has gone onto to other big wins and says MHSR helped strengthen his mental game, which continues to serve him today.

“As a member I gained mental strength because I knew the entire season was on points—not money—and at the Finals, a weighted three-head average. It was so much different from anything I had competed in before, where money won was king,” said Clayman. “You have to operate differently when it’s on points and over that many rodeos and Finals go-rounds. It made me a lot better at scoring and completing my job every time instead of just going as fast as I can.”

Learning that long-view approach proved beneficial for Clayman, who was crowned 2022 Jr. Ironman Champion. “MHSR helped me prepare for big events like the Jr. Ironman,” he said. “It taught me to not worry about what others are doing and stay true to what I’ve practiced and been doing forever—compete against my draw instead of my competitors.”

Before winning the NHSRA title, Clayman’s partner, Cooper Freeman, and his former header, Coy Rahlmann, set the team roping arena record at the 2019 National High School Finals with a 4.0 run, a time that still holds. MHSRA alum and co-record holder Rahlmann is an up-and-coming header who last year qualified for his first National Finals Rodeo. The youngest team roper there, he and his partner, Douglas Rich, won Round 6 with with a time of 3.6. He shared many

MHSRA lessons and memories but is especially grateful for the friendships that remain strong today.

“I met people who still are some of my best friends,” said Rahlmann. “The National High School Finals were as much of an experience as anything —getting to compete and go to the jackpots and meet friends. It’s crazy how many people I’m really close with now, even pro rodeoing, (and) I can honestly say I got to be close with them from going to places like the High School Finals.” He also credited the value of making it to NHSFR because it gives you a more realistic feel of where you are, because you see other kids your age and how they compete. “It helped me set goals and gave me something to go home and work on as I was trying to climb the ladder to get better,” he said.

Kate Albertson, who is this year’s MHSRA All-Around Cowgirl, agrees about the experience of qualifying for Nationals. “Last year, I made it in several events and had a couple of Top 20 finishes, and that motivated me going into this last season,” she said. “I had goals to do well at state and knew I’d have to work hard to get there. It’s a blessing to qualify for Nationals and to get to compete with my friends and family. Some of my favorite memories come from this week.”

Like Rahlmann, another young alum blazing the pro rodeo trail is barrel racer and breakaway roper Emma Charleston. She agrees with the value of relationships from MHSRA. “High school rodeo made a huge impact in my life,” she said. “I made real friends and connections that continue to affect my career every day.”

Her advice to current members is to be kind. “Don’t just be kind to your peers, but to everyone—not only because it’s the right thing to do, but because you never know who’s watching, and they remember the way you treat them,” she said. “You never know who is going to get a great job in a clothing company, car dealership or tack store that could be a potential endorsement. These are things I am now seeing really do come full circle.”

So, whether it’s the recent success of current MHSRA members or alumni, or the draw of a sport that has family, faith and patriotism as its foundation, it’s clear Missouri High School Rodeo is growing. In December 2020 MHSRA membership was 156; as of March 2022, it was 214, with no signs of slowing. This year, MHSRA added cutting and provided shooting sports at each regular rodeo, creating more opportunities in different disciplines. “As soon as state finals ended, we had people contacting us about joining, eager for the 2022-23 season,” said Randy Conklin, Missouri’s National Director and NHSRA Second Vice President.

“I am excited about the growth because youth rodeo teaches kids so many values and things they’ll use for the rest of their lives,” Conklin said. “We’re proud to see our members and alumni competing so well. Other families and kids see that and want to be part of it—to have those experiences and make those friendships. Plus, we have a board and secretaries who work well together to make decisions. I believe this too helps growth because people see a group of rodeo families who are welcoming and working for the benefit of all members.” 🤠