

## Guymon Pioneer Days Rodeo

For information  
Contact Ted Harbin

(660) 254-1900  
[imteditor@gmail.com](mailto:imteditor@gmail.com)

### Champs have found comforts of home in Panhandle

GUYMON, Okla. – Rodeo champions like to show off their trophies a little differently than most in sports.

They wear them.

Around the Oklahoma Panhandle, the gold buckles reflect some of the most storied championships in the sport – at least for those with ties to Texas County.

You see, this vast pastureland of sagebrush and drying vegetation is a breeding ground for champions. In the past two decades, 10 saddle-bronc riding titles have come back to the Oklahoma Panhandle to roost, at least a portion of them.

Robert Etbauer (2), Billy Etbauer (5), Tom Reeves, Jeff Willert and Taos Muncy all have ties to this neck of the woods. All but Billy attended Oklahoma Panhandle State University as part of the rodeo team, but even he spent considerable time in and around Goodwell.

Look for most of the champs and all those who chase their gold-buckle dreams to be in Guymon the first weekend in May for the Pioneer Days Rodeo at Henry C. Hitch Arena. Performances will be 7:30 p.m. May 1; 2 and 7:30 p.m. May 2; and 2 p.m. May 3. Tickets will go on sale around the first of April.

“I try not to worry about any pressure that’s out there just because I won a world title,” said Muncy, who in 2007 became just the third cowboy in the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association to win a college championship and a world championship in the same year.

While competing as a sophomore for Panhandle State, Muncy won the saddle-bronc riding championship, then won the world title after a rousing finish at the National Finals Rodeo.

“I try to get on every horse the same and not worry about that stuff,” said Muncy, who is now living back home in Corona, N.M. “The best thing you can do is ride right, ride correct and ride as good as you can every time. That takes all the pressure off you.”

Billy Etbauer has known his share of pressure in his career. Now living near Edmond, Okla., with his wife and three children, Etbauer is in his 22<sup>nd</sup> season riding rank buckin’ horses. But he spent half a decade or so living in Goodwell, rodeoing with brothers Robert and Dan and good friend Craig Latham. The latter three still hang their hats in Texas County, a stone’s throw from one another south of Goodwell.

“That area has a tendency to keep the bronc riders coming,” Billy Etbauer said. “They basically have very good people that are helping out the rodeo team: Robert, Craig, Danny, Bret Franks. They all live around there, and a lot of good bronc riders have been there. It’s hard to tell who all are going to help out when you get there.”

In all, it’s led to quite a legacy. Robert Etbauer was the patriarch of solid South Dakota cowboys who trekked south for school and a future. Those that followed – Reeves of Eagle Butte, Willert of Belvidere, Jesse Bail of Camp Crook, etc. – knew what to expect when they got to the Goodwell campus.

Robert also led the way for the gold-buckle crowd, winning the Panhandle's first two championships in 1990-91. Billy, who lived with Robert and his family while rodeoing in those early years, followed suit in 1992 and has added four more since – including one as recently as 2005.

Even with one of the most respected pedigrees in the business and nearly two dozen years of PRCA experience under his belt, the 46-year-old Etbauer shows no signs of slowing. He finished the 2008 season second in the world standings and gave eventual champion Cody Wright a run for the money at the NFR this past December.

“I got along good,” the humble Etbauer said of his magnificent run last season, which included winning the \$50,000 first prize at RodeoHouston. “The first part of the finals was good. We can't complain at all. We came home healthy. We're basically pretty content and tickled to be on the go again.”

Muncy, though 24 years younger, feels the same way as he travels hundreds of thousands of miles chasing a second world title. Last spring while competing in the “Wild Ride” in Red Bluff, Calif., Muncy suffered a broken leg. He then missed several months of competition and still finished among the top 25 bronc riders in the world standings.

“I just went home,” said Muncy, who this season has already won rodeos in Rapid City, S.D., and Jackson, Miss. “If you're going to rodeo, it could happen at any time. It could be a lot worse. I still get to walk every day. Being away from rodeo was hard, but, heck, I'm still fortunate enough to get on buckin' horses today.”

That's the mindset of a champion. Robert Etbauer knows it. Billy Etbauer knows it. So do Reeves and Willert.

“There were so many guys that have lived out there that could've won the world title,” Billy Etbauer said. “Robert and I were just fortunate enough to win it.”