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## **Guymon Pioneer Days Rodeo**

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### **Cowboys plan to bring NFR experiences to the Panhandle**

GUYMON, Okla. – It wasn't the largest contingent at the Wrangler National Finals Rodeo, but contestants with ties to the Texas County, Okla., fared pretty well in Las Vegas this past December.

Four of the five cowboys were part of the rodeo team at Oklahoma Panhandle State University, and the other is a world champ who rodeoed out of Goodwell for a number of years before relocating to Edmond. In all, the quintet walked away from the Thomas & Mack Center with nearly \$189,000 in cumulative earnings.

Not a bad 10 days in the Nevada desert for five-time saddle bronc riding world champion Billy Etbauer and his Panhandle State friends: 2007 world champion bronc rider Taos Muncy, steer wrestler Joe Bell, team roper Jhett Johnson and bull rider Jesse Bail.

All are expected to be part of the field when the Guymon Pioneer Days Rodeo comes to Texas County April 26-May 2 at Henry C. Hitch Pioneer Arena. Competition will take place all week long, and paid performances will take place at 7:30 p.m. Friday, April 30; 2 and 7:30 p.m. Saturday, May 1; and 2 p.m. Sunday, May 2.

"I felt like I got pretty lucky," said Muncy of Corona, N.M., who missed the 2008 NFR after missing a good portion of the season with an injury. "I felt like I messed up some there, but, man, it was nice to be back there."

Muncy left Las Vegas with the biggest check of the group, earning \$66,346 during his two-week stay. He won the opening go-round, then placed in four others. He finished seventh in the average race and seventh in the final world standings with \$140,745.

He also watched his hero, 21-time NFR qualifier Etbauer, pull in a pretty hefty 10-day paycheck of \$62,015. After Etbauer was bucked off and fell out of the average race, the 47-year-old bronc buster showed why he is still one of the best cowboys to ever ride a buckin' horse.

Etbauer – who won gold buckles in 1992, 1996, 1999, 2000 and 2004 – placed fourth in the opening go-round then failed to place in four straight, including three straight no scores. He wound up the week by finishing second in the sixth round, first in the seventh, third in the eighth and first in the 10<sup>th</sup>.

In his outstanding career, much of which was spent traveling with brothers Dan and Robert and good friend Craig Latham, Billy Etbauer has won 51 rounds at the NFR – Dan, Robert and Latham all still live near one another south of Goodwell; Latham is the Panhandle State rodeo coach.

In fact, the Etbauers and Latham helped lead Muncy to attend Panhandle State just a few years ago. The younger cowboy had attended the Deke Latham Memorial Saddle Bronc Riding School in Goodwell before entering his collegiate career there. And just six months before he walked away from Vegas with the world champion's gold buckle, Muncy hauled in the National Intercollegiate Rodeo Association bronc-riding title.

He joined bull rider Matt Austin and all-around legend Ty Murray as the only cowboys in Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association history to have won the college title and world title in the same year. Over the past few years, Muncy has learned how to deal with the injuries, the ups and the downs that come with rodeoing for a living.

“It’s really tough, and it seems like there are more and more bronc riders every year,” he said, referring to being one of the elite competitors in his event. “There are more and more guys riding good, but that’s OK. It makes it tough, but it helps make our sport get better and better.”

Johnson knows that all too well. The four-time NFR qualifier, he is one of the greatest heelers in the game. This past year, he earned his ticket to the biggest stage in the sport while roping with world champion Steve Purcella. And while the bronc riders took center stage on payouts, Johnson proved to handle situations quite fine while working for pay in Vegas.

In all, he earned \$34,000 this past December, placing in three go-rounds. He finished 13<sup>th</sup> in the final world standings, but the experience gave him a boost – both in confidence and a little extra cash. He and Purcella won the first rodeo of the new year, the Sandhills Stock Show & Rodeo in Odessa, Texas.

Bail, the 2000 college all-around champ while competing for Panhandle State, was like most other bull riders in the field – he had trouble staying aboard the rampaging beasts. Still, Bail placed in two rounds and earned \$17,416 at the finals and ended the season 13<sup>th</sup> in the bull riding standings and 10<sup>th</sup> in the all-around race.

Out of all the cowboys with ties to the Oklahoma Panhandle, Bell struggled most. Steer wrestling is typically one of the tightest competitions during the 10 go-rounds. Bell earned just \$6,151 this past December by placing in one round, finishing tied for third in the third. He finished 15<sup>th</sup> in the world standings, which is plenty to be proud of.

In rodeo, things can change quickly. Muncy knows that as well as anyone.

“My year hasn’t been so hot,” he said in early February. “I’ve been to Rapid City, Rio Rancho (N.M.), and Denver, and I didn’t do any good.

“But that’s just part of it. You have all year long, so you can’t worry about it. You’d like to have a good winter, but you just keep plugging and hoping that one of these rodeos, it’ll turn around for you.”

Muncy – whose sister, Jordan, is a standout on the women’s team at Panhandle State – travels the rodeo road with NFR qualifiers Isaac Diaz, Cody Taton and Mike Outhier. Taton is also a Panhandle State alum, and Outhier was one of the greatest all-around hands in Oklahoma High School Rodeo Association history.

“I always love going back for the Guymon rodeo,” said Muncy, who won the event in 2007. “It’s always good to see everybody, and everybody shows back up for the rodeo. It’s always a lot of fun.”

And the fun this year actually starts in April, because the Pioneer Days celebration is the first full weekend in May. Since May 1 is on Saturday, the first performance of the rodeo is actually 7:30 p.m. Friday, April 30. So mark your calendars now, because all the best cowboys in the region will converge on the Oklahoma Panhandle beginning the final full week of April this year.