



Reigns on reins on reigns

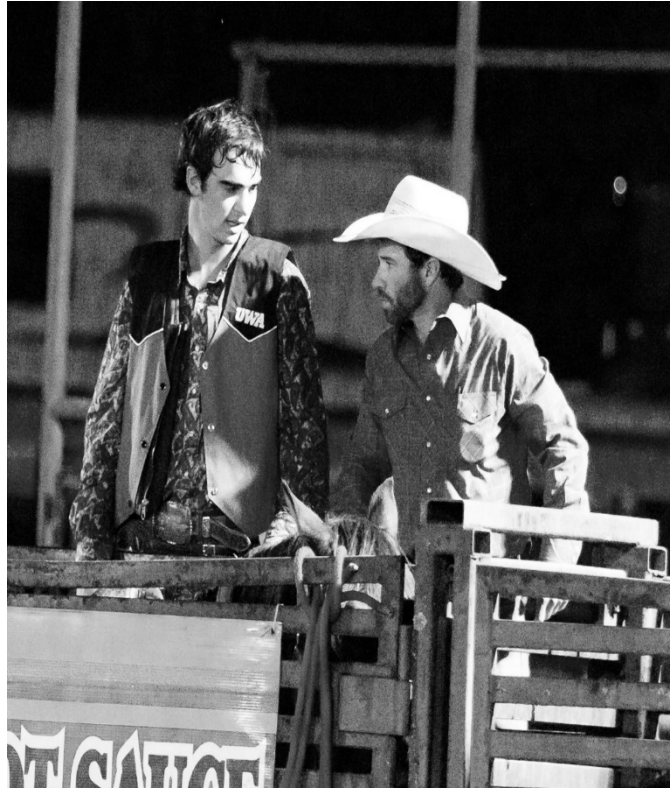
By Matthew Mason | July 19, 2020, 5:00pm CST

LIVINGSTON, Ala. – This season, the UWA Rodeo team looks to get back in the saddle after the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic pulled the reins on their reign last season. For the 2019-2020 season, first-year head coach, Daniel Poole, lead the Tiger wranglers to top-three finishes in every event for their region. Assistant head coach, Lucas Brown, tirelessly worked with the community to set a record for the highest attendance in program history. "The first year was [going] great, and our team was consistent," said Coach Poole.

By mid-spring, the team had already produced three champions: Women's All-Around Champion, Heather McLaughlin, Men's All-Around Champion, Ryder Ladner; along with Team Roping Champion, Chase Graves. Coach Poole said, "For those who aren't familiar with rodeo, the All-Around Title is given to the number one cowboy and cowgirl in the region with the most points in more than one event. They worked hard to accomplish that by beating out over 250 other contestants from 15 different colleges." Riding on the tag of "team of the decade," each was set to compete in the National College Finals in Casper, WY, until everything got canceled. Enter the pandemic.

The attendance, the events, the practice, the season, the finals—canceled. "We had to shut everything down by mid-March," said Poole. Everything... canceled. "The pandemic made it challenging for us as I am sure it has been for everyone. We were bummed that we weren't able to compete in the last three rodeos or compete in the Finals." Even though the team was forced to close the gate on dreams of a national championship, Coach Poole remains humble and focused on the positive, "although we missed the last three events, we are still grateful that we got to compete in the other seven, which is more than some sports teams can say."

Like the rodeo, sometimes life throws an unexpected twist that bucks you off. Getting 'thrown' is part of the game, but you can't just lie there with your face in the dirt. You've got get up and move! Otherwise, you'll get stomped. The rodeo is about building success through experience by bouncing back and moving forward—and this is exactly what the coaches have done. With safety guidelines preventing campus visits and face-to-face interactions, Poole and Brown are recruiting on the move. Poole said, "Coach Brown and I are working hard to build the best team we can for the upcoming season. We have many returners with a lot of talent as well as some handy transfers and freshmen coming in. We were also fortunate to attend the High Finals in June which gave us an opportunity for some face-to-face interactions in recruiting. Our fingers are crossed that everything will be a go this Fall so we can show what we got!"



The UWA rodeo lives by the motto, "when the going gets tough, the tough get going," and that's what they intend to do this Fall. They certainly know how to pull themselves up by the bootstraps and get their hands dirty, but they don't do it alone. Coach Poole reiterates the fact that we're all in this together. "One major thing that makes this program so special to be a part of its long history of support. The program was first established in 1995 and has been a dominant program in the college rodeo scene nearly every year since. It all started with the tireless work from ranchers in the community who got together and donated countless hours and materials to get the program started. It has also had many great coaches come through that produced some of the most competitive rodeo athletes in the country." Although the individuals and team carry a responsibility, it's the strong support of the student body and community that keeps everything moving forward.

"This year's been a wild ride, and we are all sitting on go waiting for the new season to get here," said Poole. The schedule is still tentative, but the team is back to practicing and preparing for a full season. Coach said, "As of now, it looks like all the rodeos will be a go for the Fall. Our first rodeo will be at Missouri Valley College Sept. 17-19, followed by our home rodeo here in Livingston Sept 24-26." Let's just keep our fingers crossed that the full season remains intact, and everyone stays healthy so we can see the Tiger wranglers continue their 25-year reign as a dominant program in the National Intercollegiate Rodeo Association (NIRA).

To support and follow the team, please check out the links below:

Facebook: www.facebook.com/university-of-west-alabama-rodeo-team

Instagram: www.instagram.com/uwaathletics

Event Photos: www.gamedayphotos.uwa.edu/rodeo

For news, stats, calendars, and more information on the UWA Rodeo roster please visit:
www.uwaathletics.com/sports/mens-rodeo and www.uwaathletics.com/sports/womens-rodeo