



Beyond 8 Seconds by Roy Graber

Scott Mendes

By Roy Graber

Scott Mendes has never officially retired as a bull rider, but thoughts of collecting high scores and belt buckles are not going through the mind of the 1997 PRCA world champion.

Mendes can now be seen hanging around bull riding circles, not as a contestant, but as a source of instruction and inspiration. As the founder and executive director of Western Harvest Ministries, Mendes now focuses on helping bull riders reach their full potential in and out of the arena.

While Mendes was always a Christian, he said it took him a long time to get him to the spiritual level where he is today.

"I'm still not perfect, but I'm a whole lot better than I used to be," he told a group of young bull riders recently at the Bull-Lot Cowboy Church near Arkansas City, KS.

Mendes says he was well prepared for a life on the rodeo trail as the child of a divorced couple, raking in frequent flier miles as he split time between the households of his mother in Texas and his father in California. But, Mendes says it also left him feeling frustrated and confused.

Mendes reached many milestones in the early stages of his career as a bull rider. At that time, his biggest quest in life was to win a world bull riding championship. Mendes had qualified for the National Finals Rodeo in 1991 and 1992, but finished both seasons outside of the top ten.

When he returned to the NFR in 1994, the same year he married his wife, Angel, he was a serious world title contender. Mendes finished second in the world title hunt, but he gained something more meaningful than a gold buckle at that NFR. Mendes recalls the bull riders joking around in the locker

room before the final round of the '94 NFR and people commenting about how nobody was suffering from any injury problems. None of them realized at the time that Brent Thurman would be fatally stepped on by a bull later that day.

Thurman wasn't the only person who died that day, Mendes said. In a sense, the former Scott Mendes died as well. Up until that point, he was a closet Christian who left most of the praying up to his mother and grandmother. But when he saw his friend - a good person who came from a good family - leave this life to meet his maker, Mendes realized he needed to get more familiar with the Lord.

Before that turn of events occurred, Mendes had trouble getting up and speaking in front of a crowd of three people. But, when he stood up at Thurman's funeral, "I never could sit down after that," he said.

Mendes would return to the NFR in 1996 and 1997 more focused on the Lord and the Lord granted him his lifelong ambition as a world champion. He entered the '97 NFR ranked seventh, but rose up the ranks by placing in the first four rounds. He also picked up another paycheck in the ninth round and covered two other bulls to win the average and gather enough in earnings to edge out Jerome Davis for the world championship.

The world title was just what Mendes was needing to further spread God's word.

"The devil knew I was a Christian, but he said nobody's going to listen to you until you become a world champion," Mendes said.

Suddenly, things changed. "After winning the world, having met my goal, I recognized the Lord had provided me with a platform," he said.

Mendes continued to ride after winning the PRCA world title and even qualified for the PBR world finals on a couple of occasions. However, he also used this time to build his ministry. Mendes walked away from the sport as a competitor without fanfare in 2003. But, he returned to competition in January 2005 at the Tuff Hedeman Louisiana Shootout in Bossier City. The event was co-sanctioned by the PRCA and the CBR.

Mendes proved he still had the talents he had when he earned his world championship, collecting more than \$4,000 at Bossier City. He earned a berth to the CBR finals that year, but opted not to compete, citing a greater desire to work on his ministry.

The 1997 world champ is non-committal when it comes to saying if he has anymore great bull rides left in him, but he is totally committed to his mission in helping riders in and out of the arena.

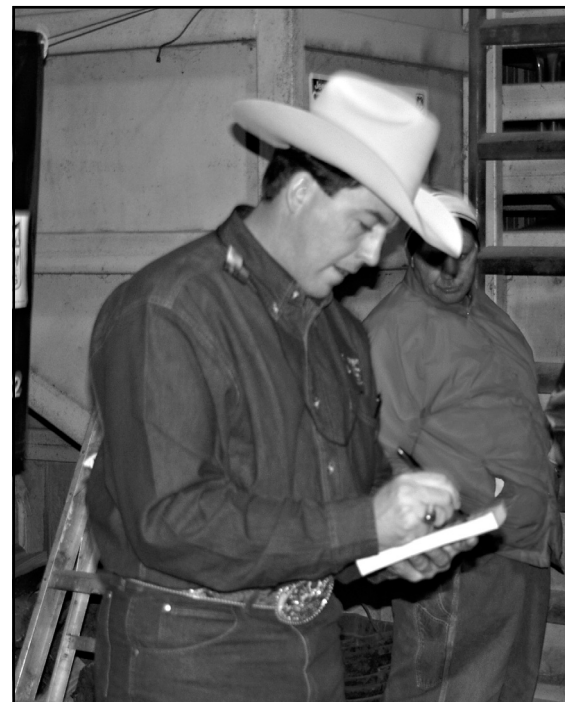
When Mendes was competing full-time, there "was not a lot of mixing" with spiritual growth and riding bulls. Mendes has set out to change that.

Through Western Harvest Ministries, also known as Spur'N With Jesus, Mendes does speaking engagements and puts on Conquering the Beast bull riding clinics. There, he not only emphasizes good bull riding techniques and good Christian learning, but also useful information such as physical fitness, nutrition and how to enter rodeos. He says his goal is to help the bull riding students learn how to be the best person they can be both in and out of the arena.

He has also formed the growing Conquering the Beast pro bull riding league. The league puts a firm focus on spirituality and only aligns itself with sponsors and investors that share his attitude for wholesome living and building a stronger community.

As a husband and father of two children, Mendes is happy with the direction his life has taken and he knows that the worldly things he once strove for are not so important - including being the world's top bull rider.

"Many times I've had people say winning the world championship is an awesome thing, but it comes second to my family and it comes second to my relationship with God," he said.



1997 world champion bull rider Scott Mendes autographs a bible for a fan during a recent appearance at a bull riding event. (Roy Graber photo)

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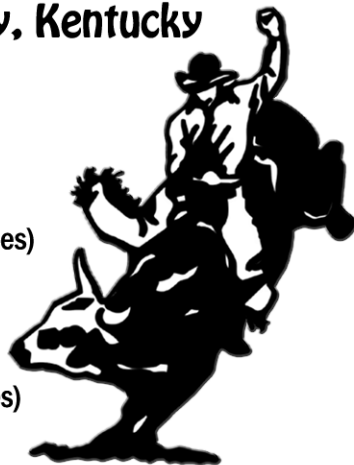
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Entry fee: \$25 (100% payback in 3 holes)

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