



NATIONAL CHAMPIONS "MAKING HISTORY"

Privately, both John Luthi and Nelson Davis had visions of the University of Tennessee at Martin men's rodeo team taking home top honors at the 2014 College National Finals Rodeo. When those thoughts occurred though may have served as a surprise.

"I never told anybody but I thought this group could go and have the experience and opportunity to win our first title when they were freshmen," said Luthi, UT Martin's head rodeo coach since 1997.

"We've taken some very talented teams to the CNFR and this was another good group."

"I knew when the seniors were freshmen," said Davis, UT Martin rodeo assistant coach and athletic trainer who has been a part of the program since 1988. "That bunch carried us for four years and we had two guys that qualified for the finals as freshmen, sophomores and juniors that just barely got shut out this year and didn't get to make the trip."

All photos from CNFR credited to Hubbell

Fast forward four years later and both predictions were spot on. Last month, the UT Martin men's team disproved traditional rodeo wisdom and became the first team east of the Mississippi River to claim a national championship. UT Martin accumulated 755 overall points at the CNFR in Casper, Wyo., edging out Tarleton State University (730 points).

Not only did the UT Martin team make geographical history but all of its six finals participants (and one cowgirl) were born and raised on the east side of the Mississippi River.

"I feel rodeo in this part of the country is finally getting the credit it deserves," Luthi said. "When I first came to the Ozark region, we weren't looked at as being a very tough region. I feel like with the coaches that we have in the region, our competitiveness has escalated in a big way. It's a neat deal to do something that nobody has ever done."

Davis was also glad to dispel the unfair notion.

"Being the first team east of the Mississippi River to win is a major deal because we've been told for years that we couldn't compete," Davis said. "They used to say if you had a kid around here that could rope, they thought they had to go to Oklahoma or Texas. You're not



*Top row: Tanner Phipps, John Alley, Clark Adcock, Tyler Waltz.
Bottom row: Coach Luthi, Will Lummus, Nealey Dalton, Colt Kitaif,
and Coach Davis.*

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National Champions cont.

supposed to have cowboys this side of the Mississippi River. But for the last several years, we've had national individual champions from our region."

While the final margin of victory wound up being just 25 points, UT Martin's cowboys took a lead after Day 2 of the seven-day event and did not concede the top spot in the standings. Will Lummus (steer wrestling and calf roping), Tyler Waltz (bareback riding), Clark Adcock (calf roping, team roping), Tanner Phipps (bareback riding), John Alley (team roping), Colt Kitaif (bareback riding) represented the

men's team while Nealey Dalton (barrel racing) also qualified for the CNFR from the women's squad.

"They weren't intimidated at all with the stage," Luthi said. "There wasn't really a situation all week that I didn't feel like they did all they could do. When Tyler and Clark won the first round, that was a great start. As the week went on, I knew we were doing well but we had to finish. I could tell they were loose, relaxed and ready when we went into the short round on Saturday."

Luthi and Davis did not spend much time dwelling on the points or place in the standings. They were given periodic updates



Colt Kitaif rides "Hot Valley" for 76 points in the 3rd round of the CNFR.



Tyler Waltz winning the first round at the College Finals with an 82 point ride on "Wrangler Valley".

from Luthi's wife Diane and daughter Katelyn, who both spent the week in Casper for the first time in nearly eight years. It was actually Katelyn who was the first to inform her father that UT Martin had won the team championship, as she pulled up the final standings on her smart phone.

"They were calculating points and figuring out stuff all week and I just left that to them," Luthi said with a chuckle. "I was tickled that they both got to be there to share that moment with me."

Overall, UT Martin competed in 10 rodeos in 2013-14 and finished first in eight of them. The other two finishes were second place

outings. But what made this title so special was the contributions from each and every cowboy throughout the season.

"It wasn't only the guys that went to the finals that helped us do that, it was the team all year long," Luthi said. "Everybody on the team had an impact on us being able to win just by doing their part in the region. It was a great team effort – everybody came together and was supportive and helpful with each other."

"Every kid we took out there got points so it was a true team championship," Davis said. "Even after they knew they were out of it as an individual, they still buckled down to get those team points to help us win when they could've

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gotten disgusted and said 'I'm done'. They just kept coming and competing hard every round."

Of course, some of the credit has to be deflected to Luthi. One year after garnering National Coach of the Year honors by the National Intercollegiate Rodeo Association, the humble Luthi saved his best coaching performance for 2014, the same year he notched his 13th Ozark Region championship in 17 years and led the program to its

41st consecutive CNFR appearance.

Davis was on the seven-person search committee to hire Luthi at UT Martin. After Luthi emerged as the clear-cut top candidate for the job, Davis and a few other members of the rodeo's booster club personally drove to Fort Scott, Kan. on their own dime to help Luthi make the move from Fort Scott Community College to UT Martin. "From Day One – this



Clark Adcock making another 8 second run at the CNFR in the tie down roping.



Will Lummus placing in the 3rd round of the steer wrestling at the CNFR with a 4.2.



Tanner Phipps sticks it on "Jason's Pride" for 77 points in the second round at the CNFR. He placed 5th in this round.

is what we have been working towards," Davis said. "It's still hard to believe – just all of the hard work, the hardheadedness, the perseverance, the people that came before us – this is the culmination of that. We thought Coach Luthi was the man to help save our program and keep it going strong. I fully believe that if we hadn't hired him, we wouldn't be talking about a national championship right now. There's no one else like him. He would be the last one to take any credit for anything but he lives it."

If you assume the UT Martin coaching staff is going to sit back and enjoy the 2014 national championship, you've got another think coming. Although Luthi concedes that the 2014-15 recruiting was

completed before he left for Wyoming, both he and Davis will return to the state later this month to attend the National High School Finals Rodeo in Rock Springs to identify potential UT Martin cowboys and cowgirls for 2015-16 and beyond.

Luthi's 2014-15 signing class has already brought along a buzz while the team will bring back several veteran returners.

"We lost some really good kids but we also have some good kids coming in and some really talented individuals coming back," Luthi said. "I'm not going to make any predictions but I know we have a good group. The biggest thing is if we can do our part with the talent we have, there shouldn't be a limit to what we can accomplish."

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John Alley and Clark Adcock roping a quick 6.2 to place in the second round of the College Finals.

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“We don’t plan to sit back and rest on this championship,” Davis said. “Next year, we have the guys who have been there before and also guys that got left home this year that are hungry to go that are coming back. We’ve signed some guys that have already been there before for other schools. On the women’s side too, we have five girls coming back next year that have been to the

college finals before so we’re looking for them to step up. We’re looking for this to carry over all the way across the board. It’s hard to get to the top and it’s harder to stay there but UT Martin rodeo has never considered ourselves having to rebuild, just reload.”

It’s been a whirlwind of firsts for Luthi. In addition to UT Martin becoming the first team east of the Mississippi



Nealey Dalton competing at the 2014 College National Finals.

River to win the national rodeo title, it also is the first-ever national team championship for any UT Martin athletic program.

“I’m thankful to be able to be a part of bringing home a national title to UT Martin,” Luthi said. “So many things could have happened

in that situation, God must have just thought it was our turn. I’m really appreciative of all the support that we get from the university, the booster club and the community. This wouldn’t have been possible without all of that.”

article by Ryne Rickman

THE UNIVERSITY of TENNESSEE **UT** MARTIN

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Newsletter Archives

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They will all be available there.



Coach Luthi holds the Rodeo Men's Championship Plaque as the team is introduced to a standing ovation during the SkyHawk Student-Athletes Orientation!

Limited Edition UT Martin National Champion Rodeo Caps Now Available



A cap commemorating the University of Tennessee at Martin men's national rodeo team championship is now on sale in the main Skyhawk Athletics suite (rodeo office) located in the Kathleen and Tom Elam Center.

The navy cap is available for \$15 for pickup or \$20 if the item has to be shipped. The cap is adjustable in the back so one size fits



all. Cash, checks, money orders and credit cards are all acceptable forms of payment. The cap is also available in the University Bookstore.

The commemorative t-shirts are also still available in the Skyhawk Athletics suite and in the bookstore for the same prices listed above. Shirts range from small to 2XL but any children's sizes or larger than 2XL can be specially ordered.

To place your order, call the UT Martin rodeo office at (731) 881-7426 or email dluthi@utm.edu.





UTM Steerhead tattoos!



Teaching roping at the SkyHawk Family Fun Fest

FUN UTM FEST

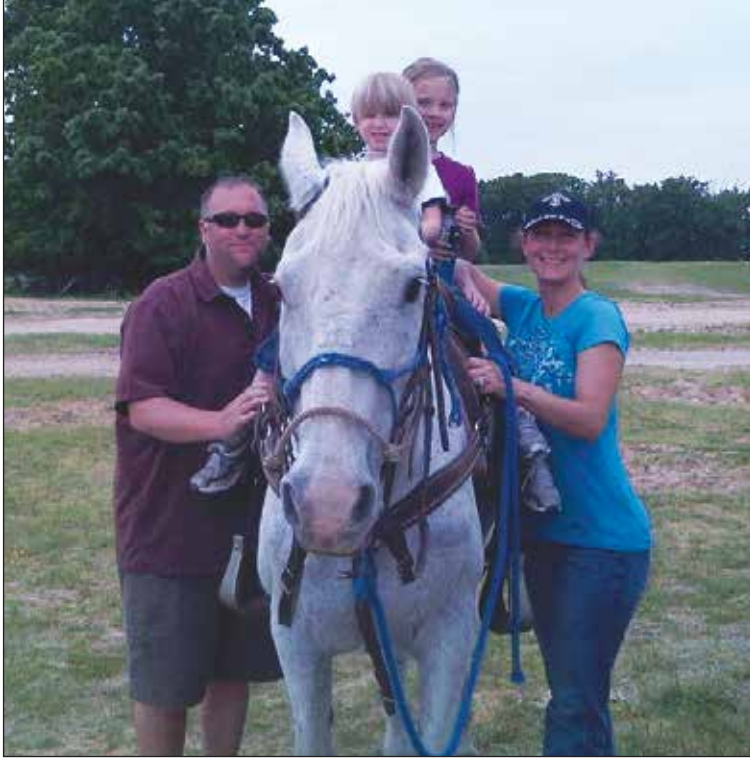


Learning to rope at the Skyhawk Family Fun Fest



Here is a group photo of the participants who learned about rodeo at the FCA Youth Sports Extravaganza in August!

Alumni Spotlight



Jessi Dunn Quarles with her family.

Hello everyone! What an honor to have the opportunity to be asked to write an article for the UTM rodeo newsletter as an alumnus. Firstly I want to send a huge congratulation to Coach Luthi, Ms. Diane, and the UTM Men's Team for their recent NIRA NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP! What a huge accomplishment for a little school in West Tennessee to whip up on all those Texans, Okies, and all of the other states that are known more to be "rodeo" states. I

personally have gotten a lot of mileage from this Championship, as my husband was born and raised in Stephenville, TX, and if that isn't enough, he is also a product of Tarleton State University. Needless to say, he bleeds purple. I have told him at least a hundred times that there's a NEW "Cowboy Capital" now!!! He assures me that isn't the case, but I keep bragging on my alma mater!

I remember my first qualification to the CNFR in 1997 as if it

were yesterday. I had people tell me not to even bother going; that our horses couldn't compete with those Texas horses. I had people tell me my horse wouldn't be able to work in the thin air in Rapid City, SD, where the CNFR was held my sophomore year. Bottom line was, there was no way I was missing the opportunity, as the chance to compete at the CNFR was the result of a lot of hard work, determination, a good deal of luck and a great horse. That year led to two more consecutive CNFR qualifications for me and that great

horse and a top 10 in the Nation finish in 1998.

College rodeo at UTM was the experience of a lifetime and was greatly improved when we were fortunate enough to have Coach John Luthi and wife, Diane, come on board to guide it. It was a program full of talent with little guidance, and I'm so very thankful to have had the opportunity to get to know the Luthi's and learn from them. In a couple short years, the UTM rodeo team went from a group of kids who lacked discipline and guidance, to a group of kids who had a purpose



Jessi racing the barrels.



Jessi Dunn Quarles at the race track.

and direction. Coach Luthi taught us that there is nothing we couldn't achieve through hard work and believing in ourselves. We always looked forward to watching "Rudy" and the meeting in which Coach Luthi would eat the worm. HA! HA! I still have the three ring binder of countless sheets handed out meant to inspire, teach the value of hard work and practice, and most of all the ability to believe there is nothing we couldn't accomplish. I can honestly say that through my entire career as a student, the Luthi's were absolutely the most influential teachers/coaches I encountered and taught me how

to achieve success competitively, personally, as well as professionally, and I contribute much of my success to the Monday night rodeo meetings and the things we learned in that room. Since college, I have worked my way up through the ranks and am currently the Director of Merchandising for M & F Western Products in Sulphur Springs, TX. We are the largest accessory company in the Western industry and offer a full line of product from footwear, to hats, to home décor and everything in between. We own Nocona Belt Company, Crumrine Buckle Company, and recently acquired

the Ariat license to manufacture and develop all of their accessory items. I work directly with our suppliers overseas in the product development phase and see the product through completion. It is quite the process and I can definitely say that there is never a day that is boring. I have been blessed with a husband who supports me in every way, and while he isn't a cowboy, he says "everybody has a little cowboy in 'em" and will haul me anywhere I want to go so long as he gets to put a brisket and some ribs on the smoker when we get home and we don't miss a Cowboys game....though lately those have been worth missing! He has two beautiful daughters that are the lights of our life, and we are enjoying watching them as they begin their journey into playing sports and learning to compete.

As far as rodeo is concerned, I couldn't tell you the last time I wore a long sleeved shirt and a cowboy hat. We rarely keep a horse much past their 5 or 6 year old year, so the opportunity to compete at a higher level hasn't been a top priority for me. In the last several years we have run a

couple of colts at the race track, and while we didn't have a ton of success, we did have a mare get her ROM and had another run AAAT in a training race. Boy, there is nothing like watching your horse storm down the race track! Those colts are now home and in our training program and I have high hopes for them. We have recently started taking an outside horse or two in per month for training and have a few customers who are keeping us busy with some really neat horses.

I'm so thankful to have had the opportunity to college rodeo for UTM. I'm thankful for the experience I gained, the life lessons learned (both good and bad), the friends made, and the overall journey. I couldn't be any prouder to live in Texas and to be able to brag about my Tennessee roots and the successes of the UTM rodeo program. Thank you John and Diane Luthi for all you did for me during my tenure at UTM and for all you continue to do in changing the lives of college rodeo athletes. It's people like you who change the lives of people like me. ***Thank you!***

Jessi Dunn Quarles
Commerce, TX



National Champion Men's Rodeo Team are Grand Marshals of Soybean Parade

The Tennessee Soybean Festival Committee honored the UT Martin's Men's Rodeo Team National Title by naming the team Grand Marshals of the Soybean Festivals Annual Parade. They made history by being the first rodeo team east of the Mississippi River to earn a national

team title at the College National Finals Rodeo. All the team members who competed at the CNFR were from east of the Mississippi also.

Coach Luthi appreciated the compliment and acknowledges "I am so very proud of these young men for what they have achieved, making

history and believing in each other to accomplish what many said could not be done. I am also humbled and thankful for this opportunity the City of Martin and the Soybean Festival Committee has given us". He goes on to comment, "We have always felt the community and all of

West Tennessee have had their arms around our program for a long time. We are truly grateful to bring the National title back to UT Martin, the state of Tennessee and to all the folks who have been waiting a long long time to see this dream finally realized."



Waiting for the parade to start and sporting their National Championship shirts.



The team enjoying their time during the Soybean Parade!

photo credit: Nathan Morgan,
University Photographer



The National Champion Men's Rodeo Team being honored at the Mayor's Soybean Festival Luncheon. John Alley, Colt Kitaif, Coach Luthi, Mayor Brundige, Clark Adcock, Tanner Phipps, Tyler Waltz and Coach Davis. (Not pictured Will Lummus).

photos credit: Nathan Morgan, University Photographer



Thanking everyone for their support.

Remember this Handout...



When you draw the bad one

by Dan Massey

The next time you have the opportunity to watch Roy Cooper rope a calf, pay special attention when he backs into the box. His face is expressionless, his body relaxed, his movements smooth and effortless. Only his eyes seem to realize the importance of what is about to happen.

Those eyes seem to absorb every moment, the condition of every piece of equipment, taking in everything that in any way could affect the outcome of what is going to happen in the next few seconds.

Then comes the time when even the eyes seem to be satisfied that every bit of useful information has been tucked away somewhere to be used later if necessary. At that precise second Roy



Roy Cooper

will nod for his calf.

From the time Roy nods until he signals the completion of the run, his body will resemble a finely-tuned machine, smoothly executing each task, blending the completion of each moment into the beginning of the next. What we cannot see, but what is even more crucial is the workings of the mind. It, too, is machinelike in its functioning. It resembles a computer, processing and using information.

Long before computers were an everyday part of life, Tuffy Cooper was teaching his children how to think like one. A computer processes data and makes decisions on a go-no-go basis. Tuffy's children, Roy, Clay, and Betty Gayle have minds that work the same way when they rope. They analyze a situation and then resort to a predetermined reaction to that situation. It is a simple procedure, but for it to work the

roper must have complete confidence in his ability to react. He must be able to look at a situation or condition nonjudgementally, and he must know exactly how he will react to a situation.

The first step in the procedure, self-confidence, is a result of the last two, nonjudgmental analysis and predetermined reaction. Tuffy calls this process of preparing mentally for competition, "not beating yourself." He feels that the No. 1 adversary, the greatest obstacle a roper must overcome, is himself. If you can learn how to think like a champion, if you can nonjudgementally analyze and have a predetermined reaction for every action, you will gain the self-confidence that will be the foundation of your success.

Nonjudgemental analysis is simply looking at a condition or action without putting a value on it. You train yourself to look at something the way it is without putting a value of good or bad on it. For example, Betty Gayle described the following incident which occurred at a major WPRA rodeo. Betty Gayle had a chance to win the rodeo and accumulate points necessary to win her first national championship but drew the worst calf in the herd for the final go-round. She was down-hearted about the draw and expected her father would also be disappointed when he found out. When Betty Gayle talked to her father, without showing any emotion at all, Tuffy asked her, "What do you need to do differently with this calf to win?"

Betty Gayle suddenly realized she had not even been thinking about how to win. Instead she had been too busy worrying about the draw and filling her mind with negative thoughts. She had forgotten to prepare a reaction to the calf's undesirable actions because she was



Betty Gayle Cooper

not thinking like a champion. She was doing something her father had always taught her not to do—putting a value judgment on a condition. The way she had been taught to think was not to look at the draw as either good or bad but to look at the facts. What were the usual behavioral characteristics of the calf?—And should she adjust to compensate for those characteristics?

We have all heard stories about athletes who beat themselves because they put a value judgement on a situation. They beat themselves because they draw the good calf and think all they have to do is to show up to win, or they admit defeat before they even back into the box because they draw a "bad one."

Betty Gayle is a champion and she didn't beat herself because Tuffy's question got her back on the right track, thinking like a champ. She made the adjustments necessary and won the go-round and later that same year won her first National title.—□



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