



# Just One of Those Things

*Angus-sponsored steer wrestler grabbed 2018 rodeo season by the horns.*

*by Katy Holdener, American Angus Association*

The story of Matt Reeves, professional rodeo cowboy and Angus-sponsored steer wrestler, is much more in-depth than his commonly repeated saying, “just one of those things.”

When it comes to the rodeo world, Matt’s story is unconventional, yet encouraging and motivational. For as long as he can remember, he has lived the “cowboy” way of life.

Matt was raised in Pampa, Texas, 60 miles northeast of Amarillo in the panhandle. His family lived near his grandparent’s farm and cattle ranch. This is where he spent most

of his childhood, working cattle and farming with his father.

At just 4 years old, he was competing in stick horse races for fun. By the time he was 5, he was riding horses with his family. His rodeo career started at the junior level, competing at local events for starters.

“When I was 10 years old, I was day-working with my dad,” Matt says. “He taught me a lot about riding young horses, even though he didn’t really rodeo himself.”

Although Matt has spent most of his career as a professional cowboy, and now serves as the steer wrestling

director for the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association (PRCA), he didn’t grow up in a traditional “rodeo family” like a lot of his peers. His dad roped calves and team roped occasionally, but Matt is a first-generation professional rodeo athlete.

The six-time Wrangler National Finals Rodeo (WNFR) steer wrestling qualifier actually began with the sport of calf roping. He eventually moved into the steer wrestling arena, and his drive to succeed in the sport grew from there.

“The only thing I was good enough to make a living at, was steer

---

Using the momentum from a horse clocking 30 miles an hour down the arena is the ideal route to a quick time, but sometimes it’s more of a wrestling match.

wrestling,” he says. “If we could all rope better, we’d be around a lot longer. It’s much easier on your body.”

Matt roped in high school and then in college while attending Texas A&M University (TAMU) in College Station, Texas.

But the success hasn’t always come easy. While he’s made the WNFR half a dozen times, he never qualified for the high school or college national finals. Though, he says he made it close.

“Sometimes, it’s not about where you start, but where you end,” Matt says.

“Everybody goes through things differently.”

Matt rodeoed for three years while attending TAMU, and another year while attending graduate school at Oklahoma State University (OSU) in Stillwater, Okla.

After graduating, he continued to rodeo professionally. It was on the rodeo trail where he met Sam Koenig, who eventually became his father-in-law.

## Rodeo related

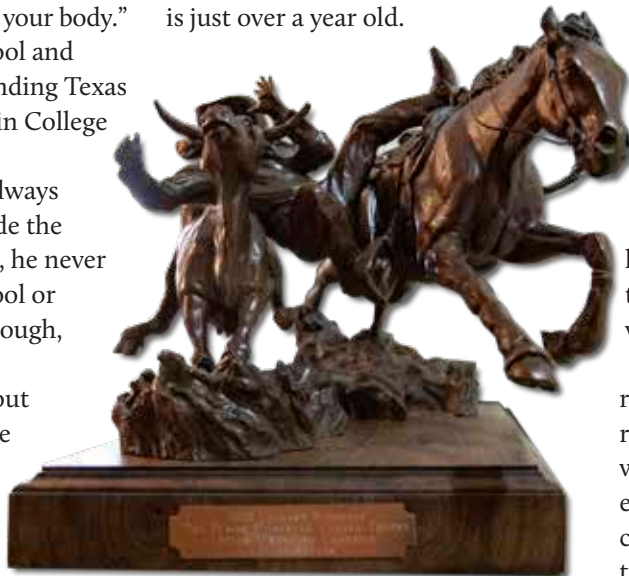
In 2006, Matt needed to get from Amarillo to Las Fresnos, Texas, for a rodeo. The vast distance between the two locations prompted Matt to call on his friend and fellow “bulldogger,” (another term for steer wrestling), Brent Arnold, who was slated to compete at the same rodeo.

Arnold and Koenig were traveling partners from the Coleman, Texas, area. Little did Matt know the trip would eventually lead him to meeting his future wife, then Savannah Koenig.

“It was somewhat of a disaster of a trip, but this all happened because I needed a ride to a rodeo,” he remembers. “I met Savannah while rodeoing with Sam. When it comes to our family, it’s all ‘rodeo related.’”

The pair were married a few years

later, and now have two young boys. Carson just turned 3 and Hudson is just over a year old.



The family resides in Savannah’s hometown of Cross Plains, Texas, near Abilene, where they run about 80 head of commercial momma cows with registered Angus bulls.

“I like to tell people that she won the lottery with me,” Matt says jokingly. “It might not be a big jackpot, but at least a scratcher.”

Different from Matt’s upbringing, Savannah grew up watching her dad rodeo and steer wrestle, and her mom compete in team roping. She competed successfully as a professional barrel racer before having kids.

“I grew up in the rodeo life,” she says. “I just didn’t know anything different than rodeo.”

When it comes to their relationship and how it began, Savannah says that opposites do attract.

“Matt is really outgoing and loves to talk. He can literally talk to anyone for hours,” Savannah says. “I am definitely less outgoing than he is.”

A commonality between them is their competitive drive.

One of the highest points of Savannah’s career, was also the hardest. She came in 16th in the final standings one year, just \$600 shy of

qualifying for the WNFR.

“We take the highs and lows as they go, and just try to stay level through it all,” she says. “We try not to be too high on the highs, or too down on the lows.”

Not many couples can say they have both competed in Calgary, Canada, at the Calgary Stampede hosted each July. Even fewer can say that both husband and wife have won championship honors there.

Savannah took home the barrel racing title in 2010, and Matt was recently crowned champion steer wrestler in 2018. Now, they have each brought home a \$100,000 check and the coveted bronze trophy traditionally given at Calgary.

## Tough as nails

When they say the rodeo road isn’t for everyone, they mean it. It’s a tough life going from town to town, hauling a trailer full of horses, tack and toddlers. Waking up in a new town each morning, heading out to a different rodeo in the evening. It means putting lots of miles on a truck, trailer and family.

“Matt’s favorite phrase is ‘never back down,’” Savannah says. “He worked his way up and learned everything on his own. Even when people told him that he wouldn’t succeed, he was tenacious and determined. He has made a successful career at rodeoing, when a lot of people thought he never would.”

Reeves bought his PRCA card in 2003, but began rodeoing for a living in 2007 at 29 years old. When Matt began rodeoing professionally, he traveled with Arnold to more than 120 events throughout the year. His time on the road has slowed down since then, but he still attends close to 85 rodeos a year.

“Rodeoing is a unique thing,” he adds. “You’re an independent contractor. No one tells you where to go, when you need to be there or what you need to do.”

*Continued on page 120*



Carson, 3, is Matt and Savannah's older son; their younger son, Hudson, is just over a year old.

While some like to look at the rodeo calendar and compete in just the highest paying rodeos, Matt thinks it's not the easiest way to make the most money. Now that he's competed in close to 100 rodeos for several years, he rarely deviates from the same travel schedule.

"We pick paths based on who we know, where we can stay and what makes the most sense," he says. "We make a big circle from Texas to the pacific north west and back. We don't want to zig zag around the country."

With so many hours spent on the road in between events, there are often two to three other competitors traveling together. To Matt, good traveling partners are a must.

"Whether anyone wants to admit it or not, most people have experienced bad relationships or friendships before," Matt says. "We've all been there. Well, take that relationship and lock it in a trailer and set out on the road for six months."

He says, "you'll find out in a hurry if you picked your partners right." Having others around to boost morale is a major factor in the sport of rodeo.

"You're going to lose more than you win," he says. "Having a group of

friends that can handle the stress of the sport and pull their weight is key to surviving the road."

The sport takes Reeves and the crew to places most people would never experience. They visit small towns across the United States, along with some of the biggest rodeos in the nation every year.

"I like traveling with the younger guys," Matt says. "They're eager to learn and achieve their goals, and I think it keeps me young, too."

### The next generation

Mentoring younger athletes is something Reeves takes seriously. With non-traditional rodeo beginnings, he knows how important it is to give back to the rodeo community. Matt is often found helping others at practice events or hosting junior bulldogging lessons.

"You've got to give back if you want to see this [rodeo] go on," he says. "I love the sport of rodeo. It brought me a family, a wife and kids."

When the next generation comes to his arena to

practice, he often tells them he is there to help, but they have to put in the effort to succeed.

"It doesn't matter who you are or where you've come from, if you ask Matt for help, he will be there," Savannah says. "He loves kids and loves getting the opportunity to speak to the next generation as much as he can."

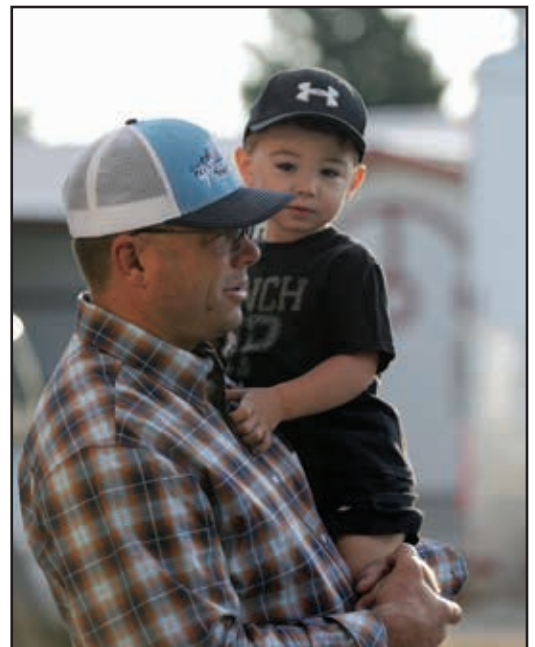
Matt knows that to do well in the sport of steer wrestling, one must be committed to putting in the time, in tandem with the drive to compete, and he encourages young steer wrestlers to do the same.

### Cowboys and cattlemen

With the addition of registered Angus bulls in recent years, their calves are becoming more uniform, Matt says.

The family purchased bulls from the Bradley 3 Ranch in Childress, Texas, last year, and plan to continue improving and expanding their commercial cow base.

When it comes to taking care of the cattle when her husband is away, Savannah steps in to feed



Handing down the ranch is a driving force for Matt to build his operation through his career as a steer wrestler.

and supplement whenever needed. The pair jokes that the first item purchased after Matt's big \$433,000 win at RFD-TV's The American last February, was a cube feeder to make Savannah's job easier.

"All she wanted was a Trip Hopper™ cube feeder," Matt jokes. "She didn't want to feed out of a bag anymore. That is not what the first purchase would have been a decade ago."

The family's long-term goal is to grow their operation by leasing more land, buying more cattle and selling truckload lots.

"My hope is that it grows enough so we have something to leave for the kids," Matt says. "There is no better way to grow up than in agriculture."

## A successful 2018

"This year has been incredible for us," Matt says. "Having won both The American and Calgary Stampede has allowed us to pay off a lot of things, make some great horses, buy more cattle, and allowed us to continue living this lifestyle."

While he was just shy of qualifying

for the WNFR this year, he thinks he will make an appearance in the Thomas and Mack arena again in his lifetime.

"Our main reason for rodeoing is that we have to feed our family and prepare for our future," he says. "This year has done that more than any before. My kids are just 1 and 3 years old, and they are set for college. I can't say enough how incredible this year has been."

When it comes to winning both high-paying rodeos in one year, Matt says his success is not something anyone could have predicted. Coming into rodeo without family ties, it was his stubborn nature that kept him going. He intends to keep training bulldogging horses, running cattle and being a support system for his friends and family.

Matt turned 40 this year, and while in rodeo years that may seem older, Savannah says she doesn't see her husband retiring any time soon.

"He got started in professional rodeo later in life than most, but I think he is as healthy as ever," she

adds. "It's hard to quit when he has had successful years and big wins like The American and Calgary Stampede."

Aside from an outstanding 2018, one of his favorite memories from his career was when four horses that his family trained in Cross Plains rode at the 2013 NFR. The family trained two bulldogging horses, a hazing horse and a barrel horse that went on to compete at the largest rodeo event in the world, all on the same night.

"I didn't win the round, or anything else," he says. "But the bulldogging horses both placed, the hazing horse hazed for both of them, and the barrel horse placed in the barrel race. That's pretty special."

As for the future of rodeo and running cattle for the Reeves family, it can be summarized as "just one of those things."

*Editor's note: The Angus Communications team took to the rodeo road to follow Reeves and his family while shooting "American Angus Association presents: Meet Matt Reeves." To watch the full documentary, visit [Youtube.com/AngusTV](https://www.youtube.com/AngusTV). AJ*

## Hazing: Your right-hand man

No bulldogger is complete without his right-hand man: his hazer. The term "hazing" refers to the cowboy riding the horse on the far side of the steer wrestler during a run. The hazer is responsible for keeping the steer running in a straight line down the arena. This gives the steer wrestler the best opportunity to keep up with the steer, and to get a quick, correct grab on the steer's head bringing him to the ground in the shortest amount of time.

Matt Reeves, professional rodeo cowboy and Angus-sponsored steer wrestler, has trained numerous hazing and steer wrestling horses, and takes great pride in hazing for other competitors.

"Hazing is a thankless job," he says. "Being a hazer is a way to get ridiculed quickly, and very seldom do you get a lot of praise for it. The only time someone notices that you were there, is when you weren't."

A lot of people can "line a steer out," meaning they can keep a steer straight so a bulldogger can catch them. But, that's not all

hazing is to Matt. It is perfected by the ability to read the cattle, to anticipate their next move, he says.

"A good hazer knows how to pick their heads up so it's easier to catch, and keeps them in the correct lead," he adds. "You have to be able to guess what they're going to do, before they do it."

There is a little bit of art, and a little bit of science behind being a good hazer, he says. But it all comes down to five components working seamlessly together for a run to go

fast and smooth.

The two horses and the two riders need to be in sync, running at the same speed at the same point on the steer between them. That accounts for four of the elements; the fifth and most important component is the steer. The competitors can only hope it will run as fast and straight as possible.

"Good horses will go a long way in any rodeo event," he says. "It's just one of those things."

