

'And They Call The Thing A Rodeo'

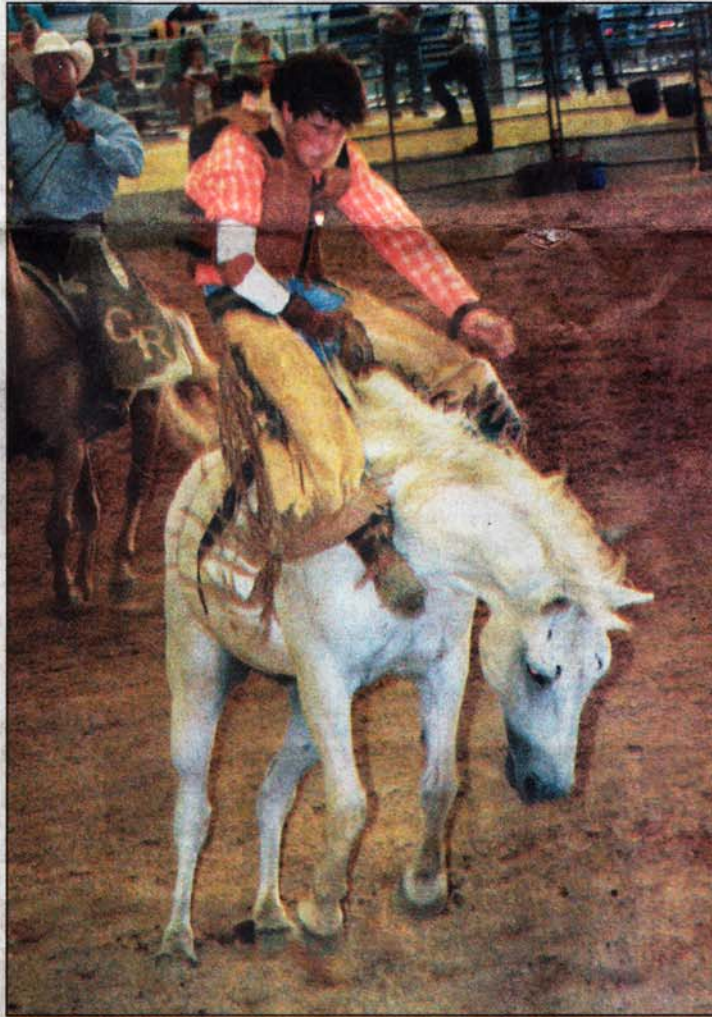


Photo by Jason Halcombe

Bareback rider Montana Smith kicked off the Georgia High School Rodeo Association event at Southern Pines Ag & Expo Center.

Event Attracts Hundreds

By JASON HALCOMBE

The dust was already hanging heavy over the ring as young bareback rider Montana Smith, horse in-tow, prepared to kick off the first-ever Georgia High School Rodeo Association event hosted by the Southern Pines Ag & Expo Center.

Ten seconds, a whole lot of bucking from his steed, and even more dust later, Smith got the crowd of more than 300 off their feet for what proved to be an eventful and exciting evening at the Ag center.

And that got the attention of kids like Michael Powell, who were glued to the chain link fence beside the ring, except for the occasional outburst following a good

showing from one of the competitors.

"Wow, daddy did you see that," Powell said from under his black five gallon cowboy hat.

Powell, along with his "daddy" Shad, traveled all the way from Mt. Vernon to see the event.

"We've been all over," Shad said. "We've been to Vidalia, Macon. He said he's gonna be a bull rider when he grows up. So we had to come."

Kids weren't the only ones thrilled by the feats of the high school cowboys and cowgirls. Laurens County Commission chairman D.M. Mullis and his wife were awestruck by the talent level of the kids in

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the competition.

"This is refreshing," said Mullis from the top of the bleachers. "It's great to see these young kids perform at such a high level. And this is a positive example and proof positive that our tax dollars can go to some really good projects."

Friday's rodeo kicked off the weekend-long event that featured everything from buckin' broncs to goat roping, barrell racing and calf roping events; all part of the GHSRA competition.

"We're really hoping we can make this an annual event,"

said Danny Jones, director for the Dublin Laurens County Recreation Authority.

The GHSRA Rodeo is the second event of its kind to come through the recently constructed facility. Earlier in the year, the Ag & Expo Center was host to a Professional Bull Riders Association event, but Jones said area crowds seem to be more attracted to events like the rodeo.

Like any other rodeo, Friday's event was broken into two major parts, with even amounts of riding, roping and rustling.

But Tonya Bemons and her

three boys, Alexander, Sahmbria and Dary, almost missed out on every bit of it. Bemons, who had planned on taking her kids all week, just happened to be driving home from work when she saw the Ag center from the highway.

"I had to hurry home, get the boys dressed and get back up here," said Bemons, who added it was all worth the rush. "I like it. This is the first one (we've been to). My kids had never been before, and I told the we were going to try to come to one so they would know what they were like."