

## **Small and Thorp win \$130,000 at 39<sup>th</sup> BFI**

*Reno, Nev., June 20, 2016* – How did a couple of kids who had never been to the BFI handily dominate the 39<sup>th</sup> edition of the richest one-day Open roping in the world? It's simple – they are born-and-bred jackpotters. The roping with the 18-foot score deemed the toughest of the year ... well, it's exactly their wheelhouse.

Twenty-one year old Zac Small of Welch, Okla., and 20-year-old Wesley Thorp of Throckmorton, Texas, were literally raised in big jackpot arenas, from the Junior World Championships to the annual USTRC National Finals of Team Roping – where some say Thorp has earned a half-million dollars already.

On June 20, 2016, Small and Thorp roped six steers in 42.71 seconds to split \$124,000 in the average plus \$6,000 in the rounds. They also claimed a truckload of BFI first-place prizes that included Coats saddles, Gist buckles, Myler bits, Best Ever pads, Justin full-quill ostrich boots, Yeti coolers and Cactus horse blankets – all BFI-customized.

“I feel like we both roped our roping,” Thorp said. “If we had a chance at a shot we took it, and we didn't safety up and we didn't try to do too much.”

Small and Thorp were team No. 1, which isn't the preferred draw position in team roping. But these two have ice in their veins. Small simply calculated the score measurements and talked to some BFI veterans and nailed the start on his first steer; they got the flag in 7.55. He did the same on his second steer, which was low-headed and faded right. Behind him, Thorp never took an extra swing, stopping the second one in a quick 6.22 for money.

“I really like the set-up here,” said Small. “I like that you score them out there and have to use your horse, and I have a good horse so it works in my favor.”

A business-like 8.25 on their third one put them second in the roping right behind the Minor brothers. Their fourth steer faded left and hit funny before straightening out in front of Thorp.

“I tried to stay patient; I tried to not rope against the clock,” said Thorp, who called for that flag in 7.12.

When Small backed in for their fifth one, his horse reared up and jumped to the side, and he had to re-set. No big deal; they went ahead and stopped the clock in 7.23 to claim the high-call position by three seconds.

“I was more nervous for that fifth steer than I was for the short round,” said Thorp. “Then it’s all about getting by the last steer and it’s over. In the fifth round, you still have to get there. And if that doesn’t work, you don’t have anything to show for it.”

That’s exactly what happened to Matt Sherwood, when the two-time world champ missed the fifth steer for Quinn Kesler, likely for high call. Luke Brown unfortunately did the same for Jake Long. But then the short round started, and it handed out very few heartbreaks, with the top five callbacks finishing in the top six holes in the roping.

The second-high team of Lane Ivy and BJ Dugger did everything they could to catch the leaders, making a great run of 6.56. But when a pair of cold-as-ice young jackpot kings have nine and a half seconds with which to win a jackpot, you can lay your money down.

Ironically, they’d also drawn the pup. Small stayed perfect, knocking it out on a black looper that would have caused most BFI headers to buzz the barrier, and their 6.34 was second in the round. Small swears he didn’t know the steer – says he just scores each steer for what it is. He hopped him off with an easy neck catch.

“I was just glad we caught him and there were no surprises,” Small said. “Even though my horse has a lot of speed, he rates really good. It went better than planned.”

In fact, Small’s horse, Sun, is so fast he made the BFI’s blistering-fast Corrientes look medium. The 11-year-old son of A Streak Of Fling was purchased by the Smalls straight out of Valentine, Neb., as a 2-year-old. Training him was a family effort, and Zac’s brother and sister, Blair and Courtney, have roped just as many steers on him as Zac has over the years.

“My brother heeled on him and I kept telling him, ‘He’s a head horse,’” cracked Small. “Then Blair made the college finals on him heading, and I heeled on him in college for Courtney.”

On the back end, Thorp did what he’d been doing all day, on a horse he bought about a year ago from Tyson Thompson. The Stephenville kids won the average title by more than three seconds, and their 42.71 on six was the second-fastest time in BFI history.

The eight-hour BFI demands mental toughness, Thorp said, and he would mount his horse about 20 minutes before each run and stay off by himself to stay focused. Also, he didn’t eat all day.

“I have a goal to win obviously, but I try not to get ahead of myself and think I’ll go win the roping,” he said. “I just rope each steer for what he’s worth. I try not to tell myself when to throw; I just ride and get position and it’s about setting yourself up for when you have a throw. It’s not always going to work out, so I don’t get that discouraged if it doesn’t.”

He’s only 20, but if he sounds like a much older veteran, it could be the mentoring he’s had from Tyler Magnus and Speed Williams. Plus, just two days before the BFI, on a different horse, Thorp won the national championship at the 2016 College National Finals Rodeo in Casper, Wyo., after catching four in 24.4 seconds with Cole Wheeler.

He’s done now with his online Ranger College business classes, and is contemplating where he’ll get his next online college credits. He moved to Stephenville long ago to rope against the best, and ever since the moment Small graduated from Tarleton, the two have practiced every

day. Through mid-June, they'd won \$33,000 in their first year of full-time PRCA competition to rank fifth and fourth, respectively, in the world heading and heeling standings.

Thorp credits Small for how well he handles steers.

"Zac's a really smart header for his age and being his first time out here," said Thorp. "I don't often get to follow guys like that. But also, it feels like I've been out here before."

The two of them were headed off to Pecos, Texas, having drawn up very well over the Fourth of July thanks to how-to-enter mentorship from Keven Daniels. But their window on the road was closing. Small's first day of four years at Lincoln Memorial University's College of Veterinary Medicine in Harrogate, Tenn., is Aug. 8. You can bet a large chunk of Small's \$65,000 will go to tuition. And maybe a little bit will go to his upcoming wedding to barrel racer Cayla Melby.

BFI reserve champions Lane Ivy and BJ Dugger never really had had a chance to move ahead of the college boys, but still had a great six rounds to take home \$43,500 a man.

"At a roping like this, you want to ride out winning first," said Dugger, who did just that with Ivy. Dugger had finished in the PRCA's top 20 about a decade ago, then started a company and a family in Texas. "Everything felt really good today. My horse made it easy for me and Lane makes it easy for me."

Dugger had borrowed back from the Wheeler family a horse he had trained and sold years ago – a 12-year-old named Rock. He doesn't leave home much anymore, but he'd done well at some amateur rodeos with Ivy, who talked him into a BFI trip.

"Our approach is to rope the steer we draw as good and as fast as we can," said Ivy. "Me and Wesley have always been good friends. I can remember roping the dummy with him as high call here. For us to do this together today is such a great experience. He's 20 and I'm 23. They let us have \$100,000 in Reno? Look out, is all I have to say!"

Ivy rode Superman, a 10-year-old he bought from Chad Masters.

"It took me a year and three months to pay for him," said Ivy, who lives at Jim Cooper's place in Stephenville. "That was so good of Chad. I wasn't nervous in the short round because I once got some good advice from Clay Cooper. He said, 'What's different about the short-round steer from the first steer?' I learn from everybody; I've had a lot of good mentors in my life."

Riley and Brady Minor wound up sixth and earned \$9,500 a man, but even without a couple of leg penalties they'd not have beat Small and Thorp. Riley did, however, win his third Head Horse of the BFI honor with "Bob," a stocky sorrel he purchased just over a year ago from #6 header Bob Moriarty. The horse at that time had a real nickname, but heck, Minor said, Speedy had a 'Bob,' and he was a good one. As for this Bob, he simply runs hard and runs straight to the steer.

"I used him at the BFI last year and did good, and knew I was mounted as good as anybody there," he said. "He's been headed and heeled on and hazed on and he's 14 this year. He's just easy. He's not too high-powered but he's stout and tough. He doesn't score perfect but lets you go when you want. For a while, he was so honest I couldn't even get him to duck, but he still doesn't get quick."

The award for Heel Horse of the BFI went to Foxy, the 13-year-old black mare ridden by Zane Bruce, who heeled his way to seventh place with Justin Davis. “Big Country” hadn’t been to the BFI for about 10 years, since he placed fourth there with Turtle Powell.

“She’s a winner,” Bruce said of the mare he’s also showing in the AQHA this year. “She’s an amazing horse and this was a goal I set for Foxy and myself.”

The mare has racked up countless AQHA points for years on both ends and roping calves for owners Dan and Jacquie Ochs of Wisconsin. She was started and trained by Christopher Chance Littlefield.

Third place and \$27,500 a man went to timed-event champ Paul David Tierney and 9-time NFR heeler Cesar de la Cruz, while last year’s defending BFI champs, Erich Rogers and Cory Petska, rode out with a bang. They won the short round in 6.11 to finish fourth in the average and earn \$19,000 a man. In lifetime BFI earnings, the money brought them within spitting distance of Speed Williams, who is the seventh-high-money earner of all time at the BFI.

### **Complete results from the 2016 Bob Feist Invitational:**

**First Round:** 1. Cody Snow and Dugan Kelly, 6.13 seconds, \$8,000; 2. JB James and Brock Hanson, 6.27, \$6,000; 3. Jaguar Terrill and Jason Warner, 6.61, \$4,000; 4. Riley Minor and Brady Minor, 7.04, \$2,000.

**Second Round:** 1. Dustin Bird and Russel Cardoza, 5.69 seconds, \$8,000; 2. Charly Crawford and Kollin VonAhn, 5.83, \$6,000; 3. Cale Markham and Steve Northcott, 6.08, \$4,000; 4. Zac Small and Wesley Thorp, 6.22, \$2,000.

**Third Round:** 1. Kaleb Driggers and Junior Nogueira, 4.35 seconds, \$8,000; 2. Chant Deforest and Bronc Boehnlein, 4.93, \$6,000; 3. Kolton Schmidt and Shay Carroll, 5.08, \$4,000; 4. Jake Orman and Tyler Domingue, 5.20, \$2,000.

**Fourth Round:** 1/2 (tie). Aaron Macy/Cody Pearson and Drew Horner/Trey Johnson, 4.9 seconds each, \$14,000; 3. Nick Sartain and Gage Williams, 6.12, \$4,000; 4. Paul David Tierney and Cesar de la Cruz, 6.23, \$2,000.

**Fifth Round:** 1. Richard Eiguren and Kyle Lockett, 5.21 seconds, \$8,000; 2. Ty Blasingame and Shad Chadwick, 5.22, \$6,000; 3. Coleman Proctor and Billie Jack Saebens, 5.35, \$4,000; 4. Rance Gantt and Kyle Lawrence, 5.37, \$2,000.

**Short Round:** 1. Erich Rogers and Cory Petska, 6.11 seconds, \$5,000; 2. Zac Small and Wesley Thorp, 6.34, \$4,000; 3. Lane Ivy and BJ Dugger, 6.56, \$3,000; 4. Paul David Tierney and Cesar de la Cruz, 6.69, \$2,000

**Average:** 1. Zac Small and Wesley Thorp, 42.71 seconds on six steers, \$124,000; 2. Lane Ivy and BJ Dugger, 45.94, \$84,000; 3. Paul David Tierney and Cesar de la Cruz, 46.61, \$51,000; 4. Erich Rogers and Cory Petska, 48.89, \$33,000; 5. Chad Masters and Anthony Calmelat, 48.95, \$21,000; 6. Riley Minor and Brady Minor, 53.44, \$17,000; 7. Justin Davis and Zane Bruce, 53.63, \$15,000; 8. Ryan VonAhn and Derrick Peterson, 57.22, \$12,000; 9. Tom Richards and Nick Sarchett, 57.86, \$10,000; 10. Brandon Webb and Mickey Gomez, 61.68, \$8,000; 11. Clay Tryan and Jade Corkill, 65.57, \$8,000; 12. Josi Young and Derrick Jantzen, 41.00 on five, \$8,000; 13. Brooks Dahozy and Brandon Yates, 42.91, \$6,000; 14. Travis Tryan and Tyler Worley, 47.07, \$6,000; 15. Colby Lovell and Travis Graves, 47.49, \$6,000.

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**About the BFI:** *The Bob Feist Invitational, founded by Bob Feist in 1977 to showcase and reward the premier ropers of the sport, is owned today by Ullman-Peterson Events. Annually it invites the top 100 teams in the industry to the Livestock Events Center in Reno, Nev., where they compete in six rounds for a cash-and-awards package worth more than \$800,000 in 2016.*