WILL THIRD TIME BE THE CHARM FOR RODEO CHAMP?

BY TERESA HENDRIX

IF BEN LONDO'S SPORT WAS FOOTBALL, he'd be a two-time Heisman Trophy winner.

Londo's sport is rodeo. His events are bronc riding, bareback riding and calf roping. For his efforts he's been named the All-Around Men's Champion in the National Intercollegiate Rodeo Association the past two years. The honor goes to the NIRA cowboy who amasses the most points over the competition season. As a *Los Angeles Times* front-page article on Londo pointed out, that's like winning the Heisman Trophy twice.

He's poised to enter the finals in Wyoming in June and attempt a "three-peat." Only one other student in the history of collegiate rodeo - a Texan - managed to do the same thing, and that was 45 years ago.

Thanks to the major media coverage, Londo's becoming known around campus, especially in the College of Architecture and Environmental Design. He's a senior construction management major set to graduate with honors in June.

"My teachers started hanging up the clips in the hallways," Londo said, sounding happy and a bit embarrassed.

After graduation, he plans to compete full time in the pro rodeo circuit. Last year, in between competing for Cal Poly, attending school full time and staying on the Dean's List, he earned $45,000 in pro rodeo. (NIRA and Professional Rodeo Cowboy Association rules allow collegiate riders to compete professionally.)

Rodeo, Londo says, is simply what he was born to do. "I grew up on a big ranch," he explains. His father competed in rodeo, too. Before settling down in Milton Freewater, Ore., Ned Londo went to Wrangler National Rodeo Finals four times - the Super Bowl of the sport.

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Just a bit after he learned to walk, Ben Londo was on a horse—sitting in the saddle with his father. He started competing in youth rodeo events when he was 10. When he signed up for his first rodeo event, his mother nearly tanned his hide. That was because he signed up for an adult bull-riding competition when he was in third grade.

Cal Poly and the Central Coast will get a chance to see Londo and the Cal Poly Rodeo Team in action at the annual Poly Royal Rodeo, April 20 and 21. More information can be found at www.openhouse.calpoly.edu. (Photo by Nick Hoover, GRC '08)

Though he’s set on a career in professional rodeo, this spring Londo is focusing on graduating and rounding up a third Men’s All-Around title. And on explaining his sport—something no one expects a football or basketball player to do.

Londo and his fellow students on the Cal Poly Rodeo Team know they have “a task to create the awareness that we are not out to hurt these animals.”

Ask him about animal anatomy, rodeo animal care, or why and how rodeo livestock do what they do in the ring, and you’ll get a complete, quiet, methodical and rational explanation and Western history lesson from the construction management major.

Every event can be traced back to historical life on a ranch, Londo says. Roping steers and calves, riding horses, and staying on a bucking horse are all skills needed on a cattle ranch. "The rodeo horse is definitely an athlete,” Londo stresses.

"Bucking is what they’re bred to do, and what they like to do. If they don’t want to buck, they’re not going to do it.”

Editor’s Note: Sponsored by the College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences, Cal Poly’s rodeo team is among the top five in the country, says Coach Tony Branquinho. Both the men’s and women’s teams have a chance to be national champions.