



RIDI





## 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.

continued on next page...

# NG HIGH

Ben Londo has a rough ride at the Poly Royal Rodeo during the 2006 Open House. (Photo by Nick Hoover, GRC '06)



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](http://www.openhouse.calpoly.edu). (Photo by Nick Hoover, GRC '06)

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.

## 'THE RODEO HORSE IS DEFINITELY AN ATHLETE.'

"I was about eight years old, and there was a man handing out flyers with entry forms for a professional bull-riding exhibition coming to town. I tore one off, filled it out, and dropped it in the entry box. Minimum age for the competition was 18 but I fudged my entry a little bit hoping no one would notice. Once my mom found out, she quickly pulled my entry and let the authorities know the whole story. I was a little upset with her. She still has that entry form in a scrapbook she keeps," he remembers, with a laugh.

His parents are now his biggest fans. His father gave Londo a St. Christopher medal to wear in competition – a family tradition. "They're very supportive of me," he says. "My dad is my greatest teacher."

Inheriting his father's compact build also helps. At five feet, eight inches tall, Londo has a center of gravity that makes it harder for a horse to throw him. "I'm built right for my events," he says.

His father's footsteps also led Londo to Cal Poly, where Ned Londo was a Cal Poly animal science student and rodeo team member.

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.

Much of rodeo is about understanding horses and cattle and partnering with them as much as it is taming them.

He spends a lot of his afternoons working with his own quarter horses – his partners in the roping events. The saddle horses and their riders are a team in the ring and on the range. "I train them the same way you'd train a dog. It takes a lot of time and patience to make a good horse," he explains.

The bucking broncos earn the same respect from the rodeo rider as an opponent in wrestling or boxing. The tougher the opponent, the bigger and better the challenge in the arena. "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.