



## 2016 Indian National Finals Rodeo

### Ready-for-Release Story #6 --- TIME TO COWBOY UP

by Lee Allen

The arena is graded and the chutes are ready. Stock contractors have picked their finest specimens and Indian Country's best cowboys and cowgirls are psyched and anxious to show their best. It's Indian National Finals Rodeo time, November 8-12, at South Point Arena in Las Vegas where some 400+ Native ropers and riders will compete for more than three quarters of a million dollars in cash and prizes.

"Once again, this year will be even better than last year with an additional increase in prize dollars --- \$350,000 in cash along with saddles, gold buckles, coats, horse trailers, and other product prizes ---increasing the total value of the winnings to over \$800,000," says INFR General Manager Donna Hoyt. "As the payouts continue to increase, the popularity of the event continues to grow, and as more people hear about us, we're hopeful of setting new record numbers of fans this year as well."

Bigger prizes are one way to keep both contestants and the crowd coming back, by continually upping the financial incentives. Another way is to keep making the event --- this year will be the 41<sup>st</sup> celebration of the largest American Indian rodeo association in the world --- an eagerly-anticipated part of the fall rodeo scene.

"It's always an exciting time when the action actually gets underway," says Hoyt. "There are always new challenges that come up, but we have a good team that works hard year-round to ensure we meet our goals and objectives every year --- and that is to build on the year before."

That gets accomplished by tweaking the successes, making what went right in 2015 go even more right this year, as well as adding some new twists and attractions. This year's package includes the popular Junior Looper roping competition, events for both youth and seniors, the traditional rodeo doctor's Walk for Diabetes, and the socializing of the Back Number event where contestants pick up their event numbers and Horse of the Year honors are bestowed upon contestants horses felt to be best in a particular event throughout the rodeo season.

Also familiar to previous rodeo attendees, Joe Beaver and Don Gay will be returning to the arena as guest announcers. Perennial crowd favorites, Beaver, an 8-time World Champion Calf Roper, and Gay, an 8-time PRCA champion Bull Rider, bring humor and expertise in their explanations of the fast action.

Some of last year's World Champions, like Navajo cowboys Aaron Tsingine and Derrick Begay will make guest appearances before heading off to other scheduled competition. "Since Tour Rodeos became an INFR mainstay, we've seen INFR contestants who now compete at the National Finals Rodeo level," says Commissioner Eugene Creighton (Blackfoot).

A new addition to the pageantry is a Parade of Nations where tribes sponsor their flag in the Grand Entry. "A lot of our top athletes come from reservations that don't have casino gaming to help sponsor them," says Commissioner Bo Vocu (Oglala Sioux), "so displaying their tribal banner shows support for INFR and the members who make it all possible." And, if one of their members wins a Go-Round, they get to display their tribal flag at the victory lap and the buckle ceremony.

Not sponsored by INFR, but under the support umbrella of the organization, are two more new features, a return of the powwow and a hand/stick game tournament that both offer cash purses. "Historically, Indian rodeos used to include a powwow and we're glad to see that return of tradition," says INFR Commissioner Frank Whitecalfe (3 Affiliated Tribes, North Dakota).

And while spectators will focus on the arena action, there are also behind-the-scenes additions that benefit Indian cowboys. "We're offering a financial literacy workshop for our junior qualifiers to learn how to keep finances and balance the books," says Vocu. "There's so many of us who have rodeoed all our lives and didn't treat it like a business. We're trying to prepare them with financial savvy so they don't make the same mistakes my generation did. We're doing our best as an organization to create new opportunities to make the future brighter for our young Native cowboys."

Log on to [www.INFR.org](http://www.INFR.org) for further information about this year's events or call INFR HQ in Browning, Montana, (406) 338 7684.



Indian National Finals Rodeo 41<sup>st</sup>  
Annual Indian National Finals Rodeo  
41st Annual INFR will be held  
November 8th - 12th, 2016, at the  
South Point Arena in Las Vegas.