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FFA MEMBERS AND RODEO PROS CONNECT AT RODEO SPORTS CAREER CONNECTION

By Kelsey Kennedy

INDIANAPOLIS (October 21, 2010) – FFA members and rodeo professionals gathered in the Indiana State Fairgrounds Pepsi Coliseum arena Thursday night for the Rodeo Sports Career Connection. The rodeo sponsors and participants used the time to tell interested FFA members about career opportunities in rodeo, and gave advice on how to make it in the rodeo business. All aspects of the industry were represented, from riders and announcers, to bucking bull breeders and sponsors.

FFA members were able to get advice from the riders, as well as autographs. Bull rider and former FFA member Justin Kennedy of Iowa said a member had even asked for his place in the rodeo that followed the Career Connection. Kennedy spoke with many students at the event. Kennedy got his start in bull riding when he convinced his uncle to let him try riding. His uncle mentored him, and Kennedy was active in high school rodeo. He said he stuck with it and enjoys rodeo because of the adrenaline rush. Some kids just want to try rodeo, Kennedy said, but there are some who do well and end up sticking with it. Jake Morehead, a rider from Bernard, Iowa, said job prospects were good for students looking to enter the rodeo industry. Opportunities include announcing, labor and competing. However, Morehead said, employers usually hire students when they are older so they're able to drive semitrailers for the crew. By attending the Career Connection in high school, students will have more time to think about entering the rodeo business. "It's long hours and low pay, and it's a hard way to make an easy living," Morehead said.

Rodeo announcer Roger Mooney was on hand to answer questions as well. Mooney announces for Three Hills rodeos, and got his start in rodeo announcing thanks to his experiences in FFA. He served as a 1983-1984 Georgia FFA Vice President and participated in public speaking events as a member. When the announcer had a heart attack at a collegiate rodeo Mooney was competing in, he was selected to fill in because of his FFA experience. Over 20 years later, Mooney is still announcing. He has announced over 300 rodeos, including rodeos on ESPN and Outdoor Channel.

Most of the attendees were interested in rider autographs or information about getting involved in the rodeo industry. Sisters Blaise Newman and Courtney Fipps, hailing from Waukomis, Okla., were at the Career Connection to get information for their family. They talked to riders, and spent some time at the American Bucking Bull booth. Their brother rides bulls, and their family is looking to raise bulls for rodeos. Newman is even planning to develop her family's bull breeding program for her supervised agricultural experience (SAE) project. Fipps and Newman said their family hopes to eventually see their bulls used for Professional Bull Riding events, and in Las Vegas.

The Rodeo Career Connection's broad scope gave FFA members a good taste of the breadth of the industry. Kennedy's advice to FFA members looking to get involved? "Keep your head on straight and try hard and keep your grades up."

Kelsey Kennedy is a former FFA member from Willamina, Ore. She is currently a science writing major at MIT.

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