

Circuit court judge gets bulldogging verdict in Southeastern Circuit Finals Rodeo

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. - The first thing Bud Hallman did when he woke up this morning in his Webster, FL, home was launch a search for the champion's buckle he won won at the Dodge Southeastern Circuit Finals Rodeo, presented by U.S. Smokeless Tobacco.

"I told my wife Cathy that I was afraid I might have dreamed the whole thing," Hallman said.

It was an understandable moment of doubt. Hallman is a 56-year-old circuit court judge from Florida's Sumter County who, until he attended friend Spunk Sasser's steer wrestling school in early 2008, had not competed in a rodeo, and not even ridden a horse in nearly 15 years.

Not improbable enough? Before Hallman could get to Davie, FL, for the rodeo and way before winning the thing with a three-head time of 16.5 seconds, he had to have a number of elements that were utterly out of his control work out just right.

Hallman finished 25th in the Southeastern Circuit standings this year, but let Sasser talk him into entering the circuit finals "because you never know what's going to happen." Because a number of bulldoggers failed to meet qualification guidelines or were unavailable, Hallman arrived at the final cut in 13th place, as the first alternate.

Then Tyler Pearson, last year's Dodge Southeastern

Circuit Finals Rodeo champion, injured his knee. Hallman was in the field.

There was still the matter of his day job. Judge Hallman was supposed to begin a murder trial at the end of last week, which seemed to preclude him from being able to take advantage of his rodeo opportunity.

"That's when the attorney for the defense filed a pre-trial motion to disqualify evidence," Hallman said. "That is almost always automatic grounds for a continuance. Normally judges are irritable about delays like that. In this case, I thought, 'Well, this is interesting.'"

Hallman had qualified for the Southeastern Circuit Finals four times previously, but not since 1994 when, at 40 and fully engaged in his law career, he decided to retire from the sport. For 15 years, his only connection to rodeo was watching the Wrangler National Finals Rodeo on TV each December.

After visiting Sasser's 2008 bulldogging school and mixing it up a bit, Hallman got the urge to compete again. He competed in 12-15 circuit rodeos that first year and 26 this year, and although he had wins at the Orange Blossom Festival in Davie and the Williston (FL) Pro Rodeo this year, his goals remained modest.

"Making the circuit finals didn't seem realistic, not at 56," Hallman said. "I just



Circuit Judge, Bud Hallman, receives congratulations from Troy Weekley.

wanted to enjoy myself. I'm a competitive guy, but it never dawned on me that I would qualify. Spunk kept pushing me. At one point I got aggravated with him. I didn't want to have to go back to training like you need to do, but he kept after me, and the last few months I've really been training pretty hard."

The win at the circuit finals automatically qualifies Hallman for his first appearance in the Dodge National Circuit Finals Rodeo in Pocatello, Idaho, next April.

After he set up his championship saddle and buckle in his chambers this morning, Hallman started working on getting the time off to make the trip.

"I've been in contact with the chief judge of the circuit," Hallman said. "He's a rancher, too, so I think he'll be OK with it."

The other champions at the Dodge Southeastern Circuit Finals Rodeo were bareback rider Scott NeSmith (246 points on three head), team ropers Will Lynd and Daniel Salley (19.8 seconds on three head), saddle bronc rider Justin Browning (226 points on three head), tie-down roper Justin Thigpen (26.5 seconds on three head), barrel racer Jewels DeNapoli (46.76 seconds on three runs) and bull rider Friday Wright II (243 points on three head).

Courtesy of the PRCA