

## Driggers first team roper to be overall rookie of the year in eight years

COLORADO SPRINGS, CO - Rookie years in professional sports are often about young, talented athletes getting the opportunity to develop, and such is the case with Kaleb Driggers. The Georgia cowboy claimed the overall and team roping heading PRCA Rookie of the Year honors, but fell just short of a berth in the Wrangler National Finals Rodeo, Dec. 3-12, in Las Vegas.

The near-miss is among the learning experiences Driggers, 19, has gone through as he has regrouped and is under way with the 2010 season.

"I didn't necessarily want to end up 16<sup>th</sup> (in the 2009 PRCA World Standings), but I really didn't head like I should have in the latter half of the year," Driggers said.

Despite finishing \$1,197 outside the Top 15, Driggers is pleased and excited about his rookie honors and his future. He is the first team roper to be the overall rookie of the year since Matt Robertson of Augusta, Mont., in 2001.

"If I head like I am supposed to, I'm going to make the Finals," said Driggers, who finished the 2009 season with \$61,446.

While Driggers, of Albany, Ga., won't be roping at the Thomas & Mack Center this year, he will be picking up his Rookie of the Year buckle, along with the

other award winners on Rookie Night, Dec. 8.

Because of unresolved business matters Driggers had with the PRCA, he was unable to compete in the Justin Boots Championships, Sept. 26-28, in Omaha, Neb. "It was definitely a learning experience," Driggers said. "I didn't check with them (the PRCA) like I should have."

Driggers' regular partner, Brad Culpepper, went without Driggers and won more than \$20,000 in Omaha with David Key. Culpepper rose to sixth in the world standings with a total of \$85,754 and is tentatively set to rope with Keven Daniel at the Wrangler NFR. Roping with Culpepper and going through the ups and downs of the past year will help Driggers down the road. "I didn't really know what to expect, but now I feel like I'm prepared for next year," said Driggers, who plans to rope with Culpepper in 2010. Bareback rider Steven Peebles is the lone Rookie of the Year to qualify for the Wrangler NFR. The Redmond, Ore., cowboy is 14<sup>th</sup> in the world standings with \$59,925.

Among the other Rookies of the Year, there is a Canadian who will become a first-time father in December and a young man following in his brother's footsteps.

Chad Bouchard, from Rolling Hills, Alberta, finished



**Kaleb Driggers proves he's one of the top team ropers in the country.**

first in the rookie steer wrestling (\$14,011) and all-around standings – he also competed in tie-down roping and earned a total of \$17,495 in 2009.

Bouchard and his wife of three years, Karen, are expecting their first child on Dec. 15. Karen doesn't want her husband to miss Rookie Night festivities.

"As far as she is concerned, I'm going, but it is just for the night, and I'm flying right back," he said. Rookie Night also will be special for Saddle Bronc Riding Rookie of the Year Jesse Wright, the younger brother of defending World Champion Saddle Bronc Rider Cody Wright. Jesse, from Milford, Utah, is coming off an average win at the Dodge Wilderness Circuit Finals Rodeo, presented by U.S. Smokeless Tobacco, held Oct. 22-24 in Ogden, Utah.

Jesse and another Wright brother, Alex, traveled with Cody during the 2009 season.

"Cody helped me out a lot along the way," said Jesse, who finished with \$50,684. "He helped with a little bit of everything, I guess, mostly entering (rodeos).

The other Rookies of the Year were: team roping (heeling) – Justin Hendrick, Rosenberg, Texas, \$29,699; tie-down roping – Shane Hanchey, Sulphur, La., \$41,480; bull riding – Tyler Willis, Wheatland, Wyo., \$54,825 and steer roping – Spicer Lewis, Abilene, Texas, \$3,025.

*Courtesy of the PRCA*