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(Neb.)-Sampson Credits Faith For Helping Him Persevere

By: Chris Fankhauser Posted at: 02/22/2013 08:12 AM

(Chadron)-From advice about choosing good friends and setting goals to a demo of proper bull riding techniques, Charlie Sampson, 1982 World Bull Riding Champion, entertained a large audience at Memorial Hall Thursday night.

He rode bulls from 1974 to 1994 and qualified for the national finals 10 times. His highest score was 91 points with many rides in the high 80s. "Everybody should ride a bull once. It will make it appreciate your job. It will make you appreciate a lot," he said.

Sampson, who hails from Watts in south central Los Angeles, was enthralled as a child by a pony ride in his neighborhood. When he ran out of money to ride, the owner let him clean stalls in exchange. He admitted having some rough patches as a youth, but credits good friends and faith as two factors which helped him leave his neighborhood and pursue his dream to become a world champion.

He reminisced about famous bull rider friends such as Lane Frost who were killed as a result of their dangerous occupation. Sampson rode one bull, named Pacific Bell, three separate times in his career. "I don't think I rode him a total of eight seconds in all three rides. I asked my friend, Ted Nuce, 'How am I ever going to ride that bull?' He told me, 'They might have to stuff him'."

In a video played after Sampson's opening remarks, he was shown being severely injured while riding a bull for President Regan in 1983. Nearly every bone in his face was broken when he hit the bull's shoulders. Four months later, Sampson was shown riding another bull while wearing a special, protective helmet/mask combination. Prior to the video, he cautioned that it was "not for the weak of heart" and gave those who wanted to leave an opportunity to do so.

Hollywood didn't want to make a movie of his life because he, as a black man, was treated well in an all-white sport, Sampson said. "They were looking for a story of my mistreatment and I told them they'd have to make a movie about somebody else because that wasn't my story. I hope they do make my movie before I die," he said. When asked who should play him if the movie of his life is made, he said "I need me to play me."

When touring the South, he did encounter racism and prejudice from the public, but never from his fellow cowboys. He shared stories about injuries as a youth and his lucky break in attending college on a bull riding

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scholarship even though he was already injured before his freshman year began.

“I have come back from all of my injuries. I credit the Lord and my desire to get back on the bull. Bull riding is who I am. I found myself. It all started from an opportunity in Cub Scouts,” Sampson said. “Bull riding is like a dance - you have to move with your partner.”

Sampson said, “We are not promised tomorrow. Live every day to your fullest - like it is your last day. Even someone younger than you can inspire you. I am thankful I had positive guidance. Write down your goals. It will help you make them a reality.”

“You're only as good as your company. Ted Nuce was a friend who lifted me up when I was down. Others aren't always bad people, but they make bad choices. Help each other out. Cheer each other on. Don’t criticize or discourage. Learn how to forgive and appreciate, you're going to feel better if you do,” Sampson said.

He will attend the CSC Rodeo Team fundraiser at the DawesCounty fairgrounds Friday at 5 p.m. "Everyone should come to perform in Chadron at least once in their life and feel the love here," Sampson said at the conclusion of his program.

—*Tena L. Cook, Interim Marketing Coordinator*

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