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(Neb.)- Chadron State Grad Among Nation's Best Breakaway Ropers

By: Jeremy Anderson Posted at: 01/09/2019 09:01 AM

CHADRON, Neb. -- A Chadron State graduate and a member of the college's rodeo team in the early 2000s is riding high in the sport.

Sarah Morrissey of Ephrata, Washington, finished among the top five in the Women's Professional Rodeo Association's breakaway roping standings in 2018 and she's one of the eight qualifiers to compete at the first Windy City Roundup in Chicago on Friday, January 11.

There will be competition in all the standard rough stock and timed-events, too.

The Roundup is being billed as the biggest rodeo Chicago has hosted in years. It has a million dollar purse. Each event winner will receive \$50,000, the runner-up \$25,000 and so on. It is being sponsored by the new World Champions Rodeo Alliance in collaboration with the Professional Bull Riders.

Morrissey, 38, is elated to be among the breakaway finalists. A native of Merritt, British Columbia, a community of about 8,000, she describes herself as "a town kid who loved horses."

When she was 8, her parents helped her acquire a horse that was kept on an uncle's nearby farm and learned to ride.

Before long, she was competing in Little Britches rodeos and then high school rodeos. She qualified for the Canadian and National High School Rodeo Finals all four years. As a senior in 1998 she won the Canadian breakaway roping championship and was fourth in goat tying.

Morrissey initially enrolled at Idaho State University, but after one year switched to Chadron State, where she majored in biology and joined the rodeo team.

Her college rodeo success included winning the breakaway championships at the Northeastern Junior College and Colorado State University rodeos and qualifying for the Three-Region Shootout at Bozeman, Montana, as both a junior and a senior.

She also did well in the classroom. She graduated from CSC in the spring of 2004 with a 3.60 grade point average and was accepted into pharmacy school at the University of Wyoming. Four years later, she earned a Doctor of Pharmacy Degree and, as she puts it, now uses her paycheck to help support her rodeo passion.

"After I graduated from Chadron State, I took about a 10-year hiatus from rodeoing while I earned my pharmacy degree and got established in my profession. Then I found a job in Washington. In 2011, I bought a couple of horses and started roping again," Morrissey said.

She now works three 10-hour days during the week for Riteaid Pharmacy in Ephrata and rodeos on weekends. She rides Oreo, an 11-year-old grey gelding that she broke and trained to keep up with the calves she ropes.

Morrissey noted that she's competing at the right time. More professional rodeos are adding breakaway roping

to their agendas and she cashed in on the expansion this past year.

She won her event at several major rodeos in the Northwest such as the High Desert Stampede in Redmond, Oregon, and the Moses Lake, Coulee City and Othello rodeos in Washington. Those victories helped her become the reserve champion in the 2018 Columbia Circuit standings and qualify for the Windy City Roundup.

The Chicago adventure will be Morrissey's first competition of the New Year, but she's also qualified for the RFD American Rodeo at the 80,000 seat AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas, on Feb. 25 and will be roping at other huge rodeos in Texas throughout February.

"I plan to fly from Spokane to some place in Texas every weekend in February," she said. "I'll be roping on the weekends, flying home to work for three days and then head back to Texas to rope again."

Morrissey notes that the crowd better be alert during the breakaway roping. It doesn't take long. Each performance is over in a few seconds.

"We do things pretty fast," she noted. "I usually take one or two swings (with the rope) and let it go. There are a lot of variables. Every arena is different and the calves are unpredictable. Sometimes I can catch them in two seconds; other times I have won in about three seconds."

The last time Morrissey roped was just before Christmas in Las Vegas. Since it's a long ways from Washington State to Chicago, she sent Oreo to Texas with another breakaway roper who also is qualified for the Windy City Roundup.

"She'll bring him to Chicago and then take him back to Texas so I can use him down there in February," she said.

She admitted she misses not having Oreo to practice with, but she's been trying to stay sharp by roping a dummy calf before and after work and during her days off.