

PRORODEO SPORTS NEWS

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Blue Who?

Bull rider Blue Stone
takes an improbable leap



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BLUE STONE

Ogden, Utah
2001 World Champion
Bull Rider

HEIGHT: 5-11; WEIGHT: 170;
BORN: May 26, 1978, in Ogden,
Utah; COLLEGE: College of
Southern Idaho (Twin Falls);
FAMILY: wife, Misty; son,
Rowdy; SPECIAL INTERESTS:
hunting, fishing;
PRCA MEMBERSHIP: 1998;
EVENTS WORKED: BR;
NFR QUALIFICATIONS: (1) BR
2001;
ACHIEVEMENTS: Wrangler NFR
BR average champion, 2001;
NFR BR earnings record
(\$112,322); PRCA BR season
earnings record (\$174,772),
2001; Cheyenne (Wyo.)
Frontier Days BR champion,
2001; Ellensburg (Wash.)
Rodeo BR champion, 2001;
Wilderness Circuit BR champi-
on, 2000; CNFR BR runner-up,
1997; Utah state high school
BR champion, 1996.

Building a dream

Stone caps big year with title

By Mike Spence

Those long hours Blue Stone spent building houses weren't aimed at a career in the construction business.

Far from it.

Hot summer days spent roofing and painting houses were simply a means to an end.

"I hated it," Stone said.

The only thing that kept him returning to work each day was the vision he had of his future.

Stone wanted to hit the rodeo road full time. But there was one catch: He didn't have enough money.

Family man: Blue Stone shared his surprising season with wife, Misty. The Ogden, Utah, couple has a 2 1/2-year-old son, Rowdy.



PRCA photo by Gene Penick

BLUE 2001 WORLD CHAMPION

So, Stone nailed shingles and painted siding, patiently awaiting the day when he wouldn't have to do it any more.

That day came in January of 2001, when Stone became a full-time cowboy.

"Before that, I pretty much did my circuit rodeos," said Stone, 23, from Ogden, Utah. "That's all I went to."

Stone didn't have much of a grub-stake to go on. He entered the 2001 season with \$3,000 in his pocket.

As it turned out, it was the best \$3,000 he'll ever invest.

The quiet cowboy parlayed his humble savings into a record-setting season and a world bull riding championship.

"All I set out to do was to make the Finals," Stone said. "I had never really even tried to make it before. I decided I would try to go at least once. It worked out a little better than I planned."

In his three previous seasons as a part-time competitor, Stone had won a total of \$40,131. But in 2001, he won \$62,450 during the regular season to qualify for the Wrangler National Finals Rodeo at No. 12 in the Jack Daniel's World Standings.

At the Wrangler NFR, Stone was unstoppable, riding eight of 10 bulls (winning or tying for first on four of those rides) en route to the average title and a Wrangler NFR bull riding record \$112,322 payday, not to mention the world title.

Along the way, Stone set a record for bull riding season earnings at \$174,722.

Entering the Finals, Stone said his only goal was to ride as many bulls as he could and "see what happens."

Stone was so intent on following that strategy that he refused to look at the ever-

'I didn't even realize I had won it until I'd already won it.'

Blue Stone

changing world standings.

"I didn't even realize I had won it until I'd already won it," Stone said. "In the ninth round, Vince (Stanton) told me I had won it. I hadn't even thought about it. I didn't want to believe it until I saw it. I didn't really realize what had happened."

At best, Stone was a long shot to win a world title. The list of favorites entering the Wrangler NFR was long and impressive, including Stanton, Rob Bell, Lee Akin and reigning world champion Cody Hancock, not to mention Jesse Bail, Mike Moore and Philip Elkins.

While Stone's name was unfamiliar to most, it wasn't to those who had watched him compete in the Wilderness Circuit.

Stone rode to the circuit's average and year-end titles in 2000.

Yet, because he wasn't a full-time competitor until 2001, he was a virtual unknown when he arrived at the Finals.

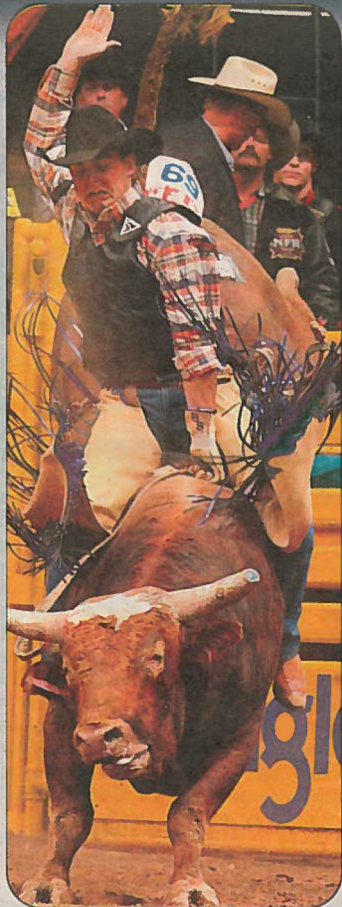
"Rodeoing full time is pretty much what I've always wanted to do," said Stone, who grew up around the sport. "I didn't compete in sports much in high school. I wrestled a little bit. Tried a few things out. But it was pretty much rodeo all the way."

As a youngster, Stone initially wanted to be a bareback rider. That lasted just one ride.

"I've never been pulled on like that in my life," Stone said. "That's just crazy."



Big haul: Blue Stone receives a bronze trophy from Coors for winning the most rounds in the bull riding competition at the Wrangler NFR.



Hot start: Stone won Round 1 at the Wrangler NFR with a 94-point ride on Copenhagen WhiteCaps.

house were the reason he wanted to be a cowboy.

"That's why I chose to go rodeoing last year," Stone laughed. "I couldn't stand working any more. I was too lazy to work."

While he could slip in and out of rodeos in 2001, it won't be as easy in 2002. He's introduced as the reigning world champion wherever he goes; has to sign autographs; and is expected to post 90-point rides every time he climbs on a bull.

So far, it hasn't affected Stone, who remains the same humble cowboy he was before the 2001 Wrangler NFR.

"It took a while for it to sink in that I won a world championship," Stone said. "It sure doesn't feel any different than before."

But the world title means no more tedious hours working construction. Stone didn't realize it at the time, but he was building the foundation for a world championship season — one nail and one brush stroke at a time.

A lot of people might think riding 1,500-pound bulls is crazy. But Stone took to it right away.

"A week after my bareback ride, I got on a bull and things went OK," Stone said. "I've been riding 'em ever since."

Stone might have hit the rodeo trail earlier but marriage slowed those plans a little bit.

Stone and his wife, Misty, have a 2 1/2-year-old son Rowdy.

"When you first get married, you don't have a whole lot of money," Stone said. "It took me a couple of years before I got stable enough to go."

Even then, Stone's rodeo gambit in 2001 operated on a shoestring budget. Although he was successful early in the season, Stone hit a slump in June and July.

"I think I won \$1,000 in July," Stone said.

By the time he arrived at the Cheyenne (Wyo.) Frontier Days he was almost flat broke.

"If I hadn't done anything there, I would have had to come home," Stone said.

Fortunately for Stone, he won Cheyenne and a few days later, won another sizeable check at the Calgary Stampede.

"From there on, it was all right," Stone said.

Indeed it was. Stone remained on the rodeo trail and stayed clear of those construction jobs he dislikes so much.

"Painting's the worst," Stone said. "It's not very hard, but it just sucks. It sucks bad."

He jokes now that visions of climbing up a ladder to paint a



THE STONE
CHAMPION BULL RIDER