



FOREVER SEARED A RED RAIDER

It is December in Las Vegas and there is a sold-out show in the Thomas and Mack Center. One soft-spoken girl readies herself to compete on the biggest stage in professional rodeo, The Wrangler National Finals Rodeo (WNFR). Canadian flags begin to wave in the air as the Texas Tech University fight song rings out across the arena. The smell of horse sweat and fresh dirt mingle in the air as the crowd's applause grows in anticipation. As her pulse quickens, she steadies her horse preparing to run full-long toward the goal they have been chasing all year, the world title.

This scene has become an annual routine for one Canadian cowgirl. Lindsay Sears graduated from Texas Tech in 2004 with a bachelor's degree in agricultural and applied economics. Since 2006, Sears has become one of the most dominating barrel racers in the world of professional rodeo. The chain of events that led her to where she is today took her from a small town in Alberta, Canada, to Lubbock, Texas. Along the way, Sears has met many people in the rodeo world, both professionally and collegiately.

Texas Tech Rodeo Coach Chris Guay said Sears was always smiling and a great person to be around. He said Texas Tech's College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources (CASNR) was a perfect fit for Sears because of her family's ranching background. Guay said it was Sears's exceptional horsemanship that allowed her to be a consistent competitor at college rodeos.

"She was always a great pilot," Guay said. "I can remember that because she was like a little jockey up there. The horsemanship was always there."

Sears started competing in rodeos when she was a young child. At the mere age of five she began riding in the Nanton Night Rodeo in her hometown of Nanton, Alberta. As Sears grew older she continued to rodeo, but also participated in other sports such as basketball, volleyball, figure skating and baseball.

While she was growing up, Sears' family never pushed her to compete in rodeo. They encouraged her to try other sports and concentrate on her education. Her goal in college was to get a degree that would prepare her to work at the family cattle operation.

Sears said when she started looking at colleges she decided she wanted to attend a university that also had a competitive rodeo team. She said she wanted an agricultural-based degree because it would be the most useful to help her family's business. Sears said she chose Texas Tech because of the quality degree programs offered and the importance that is placed on academics.

Sears said her focus on rodeo began after graduating from Texas Tech, when she returned home to work for her family. She then decided to train young horses for competition in barrel futurities. In 2006, Sears purchased a young horse named Martha from Dena Kirkpatrick, a trainer in the Lubbock area. Little did she know, the horse would sky-rocket Sears into the rodeo spotlight. The horse went on to be the horse of the year in 2008 and is now known on a first-name basis in the barrel racing world.

"I bought a young horse and it just happened to be Martha," Sears said shaking her head in disbelief. "She was not a rodeo horse. I didn't buy Martha thinking I was going to the NFR that year, not at all."



But Sears made the WNFR that year and has competed there every year since. In 2008, Sears took home the gold buckle as the first Canadian to win the Women's Professional Rodeo Association (WPRA) barrel racing title. She also set the new WPRA season earnings record with \$323,570. These accomplishments are a testament to Sears' philosophy about competition.

"I'm a firm believer in you're only as good as you're competition," Sears said, "so in order to get better you have to come to where the competition is tough. I don't think there is a college region tougher than the southwest region."

The same sentiment is shared by Canadian college rodeo students who travel to Texas to compete in the National Intercollegiate Rodeo Association's (NIRA) southwest region. Sears said the main reason she thinks so many Canadians come to Texas to rodeo is because of the

high-caliber of the NIRA.

"It's amazing how many people have a connection to Texas Tech," Sears said, "whether it's through a family member or themselves. There is a lot of pride and history at Texas Tech. It seems like once you graduate from there you're forever branded as a Red Raider, and that's kinda neat."

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Chance Honey | La Junta, Colorado

