



July 11, 2009

NEWS RELEASE

Smooth talker from Tucson wins Stampede's auctioneer contest

Calgary -- Paul Ramirez will be coming back to the Calgary Stampede. Only next time, he won't be talking our ear off.

Ramirez, 45, of Tucson, Ariz., displayed the fastest, most persuasive mouth in the West on Saturday morning, winning the Stampede's 21st annual International Livestock Auctioneer Championship under the Big Top.

It was Ramirez's fifth -- and final -- shot at the title. Once auctioneers win the Stampede's International Livestock Auctioneer Championship crown, they are forbidden from entering the contest again.

"I'm an ambassador now," said a beaming Ramirez, who'd been the Stampede's runner-up, or reserve champion, in 2008. "One thing I'm really going to enjoy as being the champion -- going out, promoting the Calgary Stampede, and bringing Americans up for this contest.

"I'm ultimately humbled," added Ramirez. "There were 25 really, really good auctioneers in this contest. It was just my good fortune to win."

Ramirez was one of 10 finalists who were put through their paces Saturday, selling four brand cattle as part of the Stampede's annual Brand Consignment Sale, as well as one Black Box item. Ramirez returns to Arizona with more than \$5,500 in cash and prizes, including a custom-designed silver Calgary Stampede championship belt buckle.

Shawn Gist of Gibbons, Alta., was named Stampede reserve champion. As runner-up, he earned \$1,000 and a Stampede belt buckle. Tom Frey of Creston, Iowa, finished third, collecting \$600, while Dan Clark of Winner, S.D., placed fourth, picking up a \$400 cheque. The top rookie award went to Brennin Jack of Yorkton, Sask.

Contestants were rated by a panel of five judges on rhythm, clarity, voice control, appearance, mannerisms, deportment, and livestock knowledge, as well as their ability to spot bids and conduct a sale.

The competition had begun Friday with the preliminary round at the Olds Auction Mart in Olds, Alta., where the 10 finalists were chosen from a field of 25.

"I try to put some excitement into the process," said Ramirez, a seven-time qualifier for the World Livestock Auctioneer Championship in the United States. "We use cadence, and we try to build some rhythm and momentum.

"And the most important thing an auctioneer needs to keep sight of is being clear," he added. "He has to be understandable. If the crowd can't understand you, and the buyers can't understand you, they can't participate."

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Ramirez is the first American to win the Stampede's International Livestock Auctioneer Championship since 2006, when Matt Lowery of Burwell, Neb., took home top honours.

Gist, who keeps busy selling cattle and cars in Ponoka, Alta., Clyde, Alta., and Dawson Creek, B.C., finished fifth overall at this year's Canadian championship in Brooks, Alta., at the end of May.

"I'm ecstatic," said Gist, 29. "It's been a dream of mine to be an auctioneer since I was two years old, and I'm fortunate enough to live it every day.

"Today, we had 10 guys who are phenomenal auctioneers, and I drew the 10-hole" as the final performer, added Gist, who sells about 100,000 cattle a year. "I knew I had to come with my 'A' game.

"That's the spot you want to draw in a contest like this. You want to be the No. 10 guy," he said. "They've seen everybody else go, and they've got an idea in mind. You can step in and make that final impression."

Also participating in the final round were Ross Annett of Brooks, Rob Bergevin of Stavely, Alta., Patrick Cassidy of Olds, Jake Cheechov of Eugene, Ore., Andrew McDowell of Vandalia, Ill., and Jay Romine of Mt. Washington, Ky.

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The Calgary Stampede is a volunteer-supported, not-for-profit community organization that preserves and promotes western heritage and values. The Stampede contributes to the quality of life in Calgary and southern Alberta through its world-renowned 10-day Stampede, year-round facilities, western events and several youth and agriculture programs. All revenue is reinvested into Calgary Stampede programs and facilities. For more about the Stampede, visit www.calgarystampede.com.