

# Cunningham ready for the national rodeo stage



Lakin Cunningham, an eighth-grader at Louisburg Middle School, will be competing in two national rodeos in the next three weeks. She will travel to Tennessee this week for the National Junior High Rodeo Finals and will also compete at the National Little Britches Rodeo in Oklahoma in early July.

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During these next three weeks, Lakin Cunningham will find herself among some of the best youth rodeoers in the nation.

It is a familiar place for her, actually.

Cunningham will leave tomorrow for Tennessee to compete in her second straight National Junior High School Rodeo Finals (NJHSFR). Then in the first week of July, she will depart for Oklahoma to take part in the National Little Britches Finals Rodeo.

The national spotlight isn't anything new for the Louisburg Middle School eighth grader. Cunningham took part in the NJHSFR last year in the goat-tying competition and was the Kansas Reserve Champion in that event as a sixth-grader.

This year, Cunningham qualified for the national rodeo in barrel racing and goat tying and is ready for a better showing this time around. The NJHSFR features competitors from 43 states, five Canadian Provinces and Australia. Each of the

states or provinces bring their top four in each event.

"I am very excited to be competing at the NJHSFR again this year," Cunningham said. "This is my second year making it and this year I even made it in two of my three events that I competed in at my state competition. The national rodeo is the toughest junior high competition in the world."



**Goat tying is one of two events Lakin Cunningham will compete in at the National Junior High Rodeo Finals.**

At the state rodeo, Cunningham finished fourth in barrel racing and also took fourth in goat-tying to earn a spot in the national competition, but it led to some mixed reactions.

"I was very pleased with making it in the fourth spot this year in barrel racing," she said. "It was one of my goals for the year. However, in goat tying I was a little bit disappointed because I led the state of Kansas all year long. I went into the state finals to win state and get a state championship title. Unfortunately, I didn't have a great finals as I let my nerves affect my runs and ended up fourth. I am still very happy about making it in both of these events."

"This year the Kansas circuit was tough. We have girls in our state that our definitely contenders in my events for a

national title and I hope that I am one of them.”

The national spotlight won’t be quite as bright for Cunningham this time around as she plans to use her experience from a year ago to propel her to a good finish.

“This year I am not that nervous because last year the national finals rodeo was my first nationals experience ever and nerves got to me and affected my runs,” she said. “This year I know I can’t get nervous or it will mess with me just like it did last year. I’ve been working on mental toughness along with my skills so I don’t get nervous.

“I want to go in there and make the short go, which is when the top 20 in each event advance to the final round of competition. That is my expectation going into national finals this year – do what I know how to do and know I can do it. Being in the top 20 would be awesome.”

Although she will be competing in those two events, Cunningham will also hit the campaign trail. She is currently running for the position of National President, and with that, she will be giving speeches and handing out campaign materials.

It is a lot of work for a middle school student, but she is looking forward to the challenge.

“It would be great to bring one of only three national officer positions back to our state,” she said.

If that experience wasn’t enough, Cunningham will also compete in the world’s oldest youth association in the world, which is the National Little Britches Rodeo Association (NLBRA).

Cunningham qualified for the National Little Britches Rodeo Finals (NLBRF) in four events – barrel racing, goat tying, pole bending and ribbon roping. Last year, she qualified in three events and placed fourth in the 1<sup>st</sup> go round in barrel racing.

She is also the current National Rodeo Princess for the NLBRA, which has allowed her to travel to eight states to represent the association.

"I'm very excited to compete in the NLBFR again this year," Cunningham said. "My goals for this year's NLBRA national finals is to get in the top seven in the world in goat tying and barrel racing. I would also like to place in go rounds and the short go in those two events as well.

"I am also very excited to compete with my Ribbon Roping partner Chancy Johnson from Whitewater. It's a team event and she's a great roper. I'm the runner. I hope we do good in that event as well."