



REAL AMERICAN

FEBRUARY 24, 2014

# COWBOY

MAGAZINE



# COLBY YATES

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When professional bull rider Colby Yates decided to hang up his bull rope and chaps in August 2012 it was not a decision that was propelled by a significant injury or a particular event, the 32-year old Texas cowboy just realized that there was life beyond the arena. It was a decision that many questioned but ultimately many respected.

Colby Yates was born and raised in a family of cattle ranchers and started his rodeo career at age 8. By age 18 he obtained his pro card and began competing in the PRCA circuit before joining the Professional Bull Riders Built Ford Tough Series permanently in 2006. In his 6 years on the PBR BFTS tour Yates won 3 events and his earnings topped out over half a million dollars. By 2011 he was juggling sponsorship requirements, competing in the BFTS series, and an emerging music career. Also in 2011, Yates won the Iron Cowboy competition at Cowboy Stadium and released his debut studio album "Right Amount of Renegade".

But there was a life beyond the arena, Colby's wife Katie, his son Cutter, and his ranch outside of Sulphur Springs, Texas were also depending on him to not only provide for them, but to physically be able to be there for them; Yates has had more concussions than any other cowboy with a whopping 38 in his 14-year career. And so in August 2012 Colby Yates made the courageous decision to walk away from the sport he loved and turn his attention to his true priorities, his family, "I was burnt out, my head and my heart

were at home and I just had to be there, it was a tough reality to bite down on though. I didn't know where I was going to go and I was just clueless about life after rodeo, no one ever talks about that."

Yates spent several hours every night prior to his difficult decision handwriting personal notes people such as Ty Murray, Randy Bernard, and Cody Lambert explaining his decision to retire, thanking them for all they'd done for him over the years, and not only tipping his hat r to them but walking away with their respect as well. That mutual respect would help him in the months following his exit from bull riding.

Yates also decided to let his musical ambitions go following his album's 2011 release, "It meant being on the road just as much as I already was, I just wanted to be home. I was missing out on things with my kid and I didn't want to do that anymore." Yates will still pull his guitar out to serenade his son Cutter or to play a friend's event such as fellow bull rider Chris Shiver's annual Pasture Roping event. "I don't regret it either, I'm glad I did it." However following his decision to retire from the sport, reality hit Colby hard when he realized he was just going to be another name on an application, another guy sitting across from the desk, and future employers didn't care about the career and fame the cowboy had experienced beforehand. "It was heartbreaking to realize how lost I was, I was clueless as to where to go. I would've

liked to have done some commentating but those spots were already filled. There aren't many avenues available if you aren't if you aren't a world champion and you don't have a load of money readily available to you."

Yates had juggled the bucking bull business simultaneously with his rodeo career, but after 8 years realized that when he put the pen to paper financially it was coming out more as a hobby instead of a business, "When you're outside looking in it's a very different story. I had a blast, I miss it, but it just didn't pay the bills. I wasn't losing money but I wasn't making any money either." He then turned to something else, "I liked working with my hands, I built my house and ranch myself so I thought I could flip houses and make a living that way."

Yates realized however that he was going to have to do more, ultimately deciding to sell the ranch he worked so hard for and was once again left without direction. "Luckily with the PBR, rodeo, and music I got to meet a lot of people, you just have to know someone who knows someone. I had all these guys trying to help me find something and I am still so appreciative of their help."

Finally thanks to his uncle Mike Reilly, Yates found a home in the oil and gas industry of Texas with a job that allows him to provide for his family and still flip houses on the side.

Yates also looks back at the beating his body has taken and wishes he had approached things differently. "When I started out

there was one guy who wore a face mask and that was a big deal, guys didn't wear helmets because they were "sissies" if they did. Doctors didn't have the authority to tell us we weren't allowed to ride. I'd get knocked out and then turn around and go compete in the short go." Yates started wearing a helmet late in his career with the PBR and now wishes he'd worn one from the very beginning. He states that he can think clearly and stays on top of things with regular doctor's appointments but can tell his memory is starting to get shaky, "It's a day to day thing, I just have to keep working on it. Guys don't talk about life beyond the PBR. When you're 18-21 you don't care that you're beating up your body and you don't think about the future. You just think it's never going to end. Eventually I started to think about it but I didn't do anything to plan for it, you just kinda expect it all to work out and it doesn't always go that way."

It's not to say that Colby Yates regrets any part of his career because he doesn't, "I loved the PBR, it paid the bills and it was my career." He still remains close friends with the guys he competed alongside of, referring to them as family even. He's even rooting for Justin McBride to win RFD-TV's upcoming event "The American", in which McBride will compete for a million dollars in a single day with 2 bull rides. Yates remains super supportive of his friends who are still actively competing but urges them to plan for the future beyond the arena, "Take the time to prepare for the

future, do some research, figure out what makes you happy and how you can financially afford to do it.”

Today Yates says he knows where he wants to be, what he wants to be, but he wishes he'd figured it out a long time ago. “I wish I would've had it figured out but I didn't. I'd be happy to help any of them. I'm not a millionaire and I'm not rich by an conventional means but I can still give advice and help a guy out.” While Colby Yates certainly spurred his way to the top in the rodeo world and within the Professional Bull Riders, he's made his mark beyond the arena in being a solid cowboy who's upstanding character proceeds him wherever he goes.

Looking back at Yates' decision you can't help but want to shake his hand for following the cowboy code in putting his family and his health first. By exiting the sport in the way that he did Colby Yates not only showed respect to the sport that had been his life as far back as he could remember, he earned the respect of his fellow cowboys. Cowboys will always come and go but it's those with remarkable character and who are mindful to others that are remembered for years to come.