

Local cowboys head to MPRCF this weekend

George Ferguson, Havre Daily News sports editor

Friday, January 14th, 2011

There is always a strong rodeo tradition on the Hi-Line. But this weekend, plenty of Hi-Line cowboys will make their presence felt even stronger as they compete in the annual Montana Pro Rodeo Circuit Finals.

The 32nd annual Montana Pro Rodeo Circuit Finals hits the Four Seasons Arena starting tonight. The three-performance rodeo, which includes 7 p.m. performances tonight and Saturday and a 2 p.m. matinee on Sunday, features large purses and huge crowds.

And Havre and the Hi-Line will be there.

The top 12 money-winners from the 2010 season in each of pro rodeo's seven events have qualified for the Finals. All 12 will rope or ride each performance before expected sellout throngs of 4,500 or so.

Leading the Hi-Line contingent of five cowboys trying to move on to the annual Dodge Circuit Finals this spring in Pocatello, Idaho is Havre's Troy Solomon and Josh Granell.

Solomon, who is also the rodeo coach at MSU-Northern, was the leading money winner in bareback riding a year ago, and he captured the bareback title at last year's circuit finals in Great Falls. The longtime Havre cowboy finished third in the Montana bareback standings this season, winning close to \$8,000 while competing mostly part time. With his strong finish to the season, Solomon has a good chance to defend his bareback title with three good rides this weekend.

Joining Solomon is another Havre Blue Pony. Granell won nearly \$5,000 and finished 10th in the steer wrestling standings this season, and is one of the top up-and-comers in the event.

Several more Hi-Line cowboys could be in the money this weekend in Great Falls. Box Elder's Cody Four Colors, one of the younger competitors in the field this week, had a strong summer in bull riding. Four Colors won nearly \$5,000 on the bulls and finished fourth in the overall standings. And he has a good chance to finish even better in Great Falls. A pair of area team ropers will also be in action this weekend, albeit with different partners. Zortman's Shane Schwenke has been a stalwart roper for years in Montana, and this season, he teamed up with Lolo's Kory Mytty to finish fourth in the overall standings. Hays' Ed Hawley Jr. also had a strong summer. Roping with Worden's Brett Fleming, the pair finished ninth in the standings at season's end.

Year-end Circuit champions and MPRF average winners qualify for the Dodge National Circuit Finals Rodeo, a \$525,000 event slated for March 31-April 3 in Oklahoma City, Okla. The DNCFR has been in Pocatello, Idaho, since its inception in 1987 but will now move to the Oklahoma State Fair Arena, the site of the National Finals Rodeo from 1965-78.