

Cowboy Cole

This cowboy keeps himself busy not only in the arena, but in his local community as well.

By Emily Rhoades

If you saw him riding around on his family's 100-acre farm, you would not know that 22-year-old cowboy Cole Erwin was any different from other men his age. That is, until you see Cole's eyes light up as he drives by his roping arena and starts to talk about his horses. Cole's love for his farm and horses runs deep, just as his spirit and drive to help the community makes him stand out from the pack.

Cole, a native of Belleview, Florida, grew up like many kids in rural America, playing baseball and showing sheep and hogs in 4-H. Living on Camelot Farm, owned by his family, he would ride horses occasionally. However, it was not until that fateful day when he was 12 that his mother Janet, who bought and sold racehorses for several years and now helps with the family's veterinary hospital, made Cole jump in the saddle for good.

"I got hooked," Cole remembers. From that day on, he "worked hard at it." Cole Erwin

Rodeo Bound

Cole soon found his love of rodeo and roping horses.

"Back in high school, we would rope seven nights a week," Cole explains. "A lot of kids did their thing, ours was right in this pen."

Starting at age 13, Cole participated in Southern Junior Rodeo Association and Florida Junior Rodeo Association calf roping, team roping and steer wrestling events. However, those years were just the warm ups. Cole shined as a rodeo star throughout high school. Qualifying four times from 1996 to 1999 for the National High School Finals Rodeo, Cole always worked hard roping and taking care of his horses. He served as the Wrangler All-Star High School Rodeo Captain and finished sixth in the nation in roping in 1999. Cole also competed from 1996 to 1999 at the International Finals Youth Rodeo in Shawnee, Oklahoma. This huge rodeo for high school cowboys and cowgirls, which gives away nearly \$1 million in prizes each year, awarded Cole seventh place out of 300 competitors in team roping in 1999.

"Roping is my favorite event because it is just you and your horse," he says. "You have one partner and that is your horse; if you don't put the effort and the time into working with your horse, he is not going to be there for you to win it."

Touring Camelot Farm, Cole proudly points out the trailer he won at a holiday roping series against four world champion ropers.

“ The guy who taught me to rope was D.R. Daniels, and he is an NFR (National Finals Rodeo) champion calf roper who used to live here in Ocala,” Cole says. “I grew up roping with him. So they always say you only get as good as your competition; so when you rope with the guy best in the world you learn from the best,” Cole explains. “ I beat him by a couple of dollars for the trailer. He called me the night before and said I was beating him by a little bit and I better rope good.”

Not a 9 to 5 Job

Since 1999, Cole has been competing in the Southeast Pro Rodeo circuit, but he has found more of his time going to the family farm these days. Cole is in charge of the 30 horses and several calves and sheep that reside on Camelot Farm, which is nestled behind the family’s Belleview Veterinary Hospital. The farm raises Thoroughbreds and Quarter Horses. Cole Erwin

“ Every year I take care of seven to 10 Thoroughbreds for the horse sales, and prep horses for three or four other people,” he says.

As if taking care of a farm full of horses and rodeoing on the side was not enough, Cole also finds himself as a coach. He teaches roping and riding to his two younger brothers, Clay and Case, as well as five other local youths at least three nights a week.

“ I teach them as much as I can, and I just want them to go on and do better,” Cole says.

Cole’s other two weeknights in the spring are spent coaching tee ball for one of the two teams his father, Rick Erwin, D.V.M., sponsors.

A Family Affair

Cole’s drive to help others comes from his parents, who are very active in supporting the community. Approximately four years ago, Cole and Janet started one of their two 4-H clubs at Hillcrest School, a school for mentally challenged children in Marion County. The family provides hogs and goats for the students to show at the Southeastern Youth Fair in Marion County and provides training for the show and free veterinary care. The hogs have been in the top five every year at the show, and the money raised from selling the pigs goes back to the school to help buy wheelchairs and other equipment needed, according to Cole.

“ They could not do it without him,” Janet said of all of her son’s hard work with Hillcrest students and their projects.

The other 4-H club led by the family, the Belleview Bald Eagles, also benefits from the family’s generosity. Many of the club members who live in the city keep their 4-H projects on the Erwins’ farm.

The family’s veterinary clinic is run by Cole’s sister Cara, also a veterinarian, and his parents. The clinic also supports Belleview High School’s FFA program, providing animal care for the school’s hogs, steers and horses. Free services are also provided for the seeing-eye-dogs of the area.

Cole’s time is busily spent helping on the family farm and in the community, but he has big plans for his future as well. He plans to start college in the fall, majoring in radiology. He claims that he could not keep up with all of his projects and commitments if it was not for his fiancée DeAnne, who is always there to help him give lessons, warm up horses and get things done on the farm.

As Cole heads off to take care of the horses for the evening, his mind is racing with the thoughts of schooling his new roping horse that evening and helping his younger brother, Clay, prepare for the Southern Junior Rodeo Association Finals in Ocala, on May 30. This cowboy knows that this day may be done, but the future is his.