

## Gavin French scores wins in the NIRA and PRCA

Achieving numerous victories in both his academic pursuits and the rodeo world is Gavin French, a junior animal science major at Texas A&M University, who competes in the bareback event for the NIRA and PRCA.

### NIRA vs PRCA

As a member and Capital Campaign Chair of the Texas A&M Rodeo Team, French competes in the National Intercollegiate Rodeo Association, or NIRA. This association hosts collegiate rodeos where college teams compete for the most points against other schools in the region. In addition to the NIRA, French also competes in the PRCA, known as the Professional Rodeo Cowboy Association.

“The PRCA is the NFL of rodeos,” French said. “There is a lot more competition and exposure.” French is able to establish his presence in the professional rodeo world while simultaneously competing in the NIRA.

“The main difference is when you are in the PRCA, you are rodeoing for yourself. In the NIRA, you rodeo for yourself kind of, but you are also under a team and trying to get points and represent them as well,” French said.

With a slow start to the year, French has accumulated wins, making the Permit Finals in the PRCA as well as the Texas Circuit Finals. He also qualified for the College National Finals Rodeo this past summer and the Las Vegas Permit Challenge this coming December. While he’s

making these wins, French remains dedicated to competing in every NIRA rodeo as a member of the TAMU Rodeo Team.

“Since college rodeos are mandatory for my scholarship, I do have to fit pro rodeos around. Usually, college rodeo will be pretty flexible, and they will have slacks, which means instead of being in the performance on Friday and Saturday nights, they will buck horses Saturday morning so we can go to a pro rodeo Friday or Saturday night as well,” French said.

“One of the greatest challenges,” French said, “was getting excited for the NIRA rodeos after feeling the electric atmosphere at a PRCA. It is hard to adjust from fireworks, flames, music, and NFR guys to the more subdued NIRA rodeo with 20 people in the stands at the NIRA rodeo.”

French has a passion for agriculture and the rodeo industry, and it shows as he does not look at this career as a chore. He is putting in the hours and work required to excel. “With rodeo, every day we are visualizing our ride and what we want to do with the next rodeo. When we finally get to be at the rodeo, for 8 seconds, we are not thinking about it anymore or stressing; we are just doing it. It’s almost relaxing when the shoot gate opens.”

## Past and future of riding

While French moved around as a kid, he calls Fredericksburg, Texas, home. With his father riding bareback when he was French’s age and now raising bucking horses, French was exposed to this rodeo lifestyle at a young age.

“My dad made me stick with it as well. To be honest with you, when I started, I was like 12 years old, so we were getting on ponies. At that point, it was so scary, so if he didn’t push me and not let me give up, I would’ve quit,” French said.

While still balancing a bachelor’s degree between all of this, French plans to graduate from Texas A&M University in May of 2025. As he aspires to attend dental school, he plans to obtain his goals in the arena as well.

“I would say riding is definitely a part-time job right now, but when I finish my bachelor’s degree, I do want to take about three to four years to just rodeo full time and try to accomplish my goals and get it out of my system,” French said.

Competitors in the PRCA all strive to make it to the National Finals Rodeo and win the World Champion title, and French is no exception. At the rate he’s going, this may be an attainable goal in the next three to four years.

French’s dedication and hard work to balance both associations are paying off as he continues to work towards his goals within and beyond the rodeo industry.