ABAC alumnus Justin Thigpen will be in action at the ABAC Rodeo Arena for the Gee Haw Whoa Back Rodeo on April 1-2.

Thigpen Returns for ABAC Rodeo April 1-2

TIFTON—Rodeo fans are in for a special treat as they fill the stands for the Gee Haw Whoa Back Rodeo on April 1-2 at 7 p.m. each night at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College.
ABAC alumnus Justin Thigpen will return to the campus he once called home to compete in the Professional Cowboy Association (PCA) sanctioned rodeo during ABAC’s Homecoming Week.

Thigpen has been competing in rodeo for as long as he can remember.

“I grew up in rodeo,” he said. “My mom ran barrels, and my dad rode bulls. I started riding professionally when I turned 16 and could drive myself to the rodeos.”

Although his list of accolades is impressive, including 11 champion titles in the International Professional Rodeo Association (IPRA), the humble cowboy doesn’t take any of his titles for granted. When asked which title meant the most to him, Thigpen simply replied, “They all hold special meaning, not one of them trumps the other.”

The ABAC Collegiate Rodeo Team was the reason Thigpen, an agri-business technology major from 2001-03, chose ABAC.

“I got to rodeo with all of my buddies because a lot of kids I grew up with came to ABAC too,” said Thigpen. “The coach taught us a lot about winning and stepping up in competition.”

Remembering his time at ABAC, the 33-year-old cowboy said his favorite part was getting to rodeo and meeting lots of people in the college circuit who have helped him throughout his career. Being a college athlete takes a lot of hard work and dedication.

Thigpen recalls, “We practiced every day, but one time the whole rodeo team got in trouble for something and our punishment was that we weren’t allowed in the arena. They had turned the practice calves out in the pasture, so we just went out into the pasture to rope. That was fun!”
Alumni will fill ABAC’s campus for Homecoming week to celebrate and remember their time on the beautiful 516-acre campus. The Waycross native says he’s excited to return.

“I always like coming back to ABAC and seeing what’s changed and what’s stayed the same,” Thigpen said. “It brings back a lot of memories to drive down the old horseshoe lane.”

Winning over $19,000 in the 2015 season of the PCA as the second place All-Around Cowboy, it would be easy to assume that Thigpen would want to win it all this year. But when asked about his goal he said, “I’m just trying to rodeo and make money, make finals and provide for my family.”

Thigpen’s wife, Lauren, and their two sons, Slade and Trent, travel with him often “as far west as Texas and Oklahoma to as far north as Canada” when he competes. He says the life of a professional cowboy is “non-stop and a lot of travel time, but I get to meet lots of people from all walks of life. I enjoy getting to take my family with me, it’s what I grew up doing.”

Thigpen has no special rituals or superstitions before he competes. He just simply sees what he’s drawn, makes sure his tack and horses are ready and “just competes. I’m very blessed to wake up every morning and get to do what I do.”

When the National Anthem is over and the rodeo begins at Homecoming, the seasoned rancher will saddle up his horses and prepare to make a clean ride in both steer wrestling and tie-down calf roping. Rodeo spectators will also get to watch bareback and saddle bronc riding, team roping, breakaway roping, barrel racing and bull riding.

ABAC Alumni Director Lynda Fisher said the rodeo is a part of a week-long series of events on March 29-April 2 designed for students, alumni and the general public. For more
information on rodeo tickets or the Homecoming Week, interested persons can contact the
ABAC Office of College Advancement at (229) 391-4900 or go to www.abac.edu/homecoming.

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