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For the St. Paul Rodeo

TREATING THE INJURED

Oregon native volunteers time as an athletic trainer at St. Paul Rodeo

St. Paul, Ore. (June 24, 2019) – Kelly Whitney-Babcock loves her job at the St. Paul Rodeo so much, she drove all across the country, from Florida to Oregon, to do it.

And for no pay.

The Albany, Ore. athletic trainer was living in Ft. Lauderdale, Fla., last year, but wanted to help out in the sports medicine trailer at last year's St. Paul Rodeo, so she drove 3,500 miles in four days, just to work the rodeo.

She's been helping in the Justin Sportsmedicine trailer since 2014, taping up cowboys and cowgirls, prepping them for their rodeo performance and treating them for injuries.

She got her start as a youngster in Tillamook County, when she went to the local rodeo and rode horses as she participated in 4-H.

After high school, Whitney-Babcock went to college to become a massage therapist. She worked at local barrel races, but when cowgirls came to her after accidents, because she was the only person with any medical knowledge on site, she knew she needed to learn more.

So, at age 28, she went back to school to become an athletic trainer.

She attended Oregon State University, graduating in 2015, then got her master's degree from Indiana University two years later.

Her paying job was at a college in Florida, helping with the women's soccer team and the men's and women's swimming teams.

But rodeo is in her blood.

Since becoming an athletic trainer, Whitney-Babcock has worked the St. Paul Rodeo four times and rodeos in Florida, like the Silver Spurs Rodeo, the Southeastern Circuit Finals Rodeo and the RAM National Circuit Finals Rodeo.

She loves working with the rodeo athletes, in part because of their demeanor and their toughness. "They are kind and respectful," she said. "If you ask them to do something, they do it. They're amazingly tough. They're very motivated to get better which makes my job that much easier."

The athletic trainers on site at the St. Paul Rodeo are part of the Justin Sportsmedicine Team. Their duties vary. Before the rodeo, they help rodeo athletes stretch cramped muscles and tape strains and sprains, stabilizing them, “making it a little more comfortable for them,” Whitney-Babcock said. “The less pain they’re in, the better they can perform.”

During the rodeo, Whitney-Babcock and the other trainers watch the action, taking note of how a rodeo cowboy might dismount from a horse or bull, and noting any potential injuries.

Then after the rodeo, they might help cut off athletic tape and make note of bumps or bruises. Because the cowboys and cowgirls are headed to the next rodeo, Whitney-Babcock and the trainers might take pictures of the taping they did. “Sometimes the tape jobs we do aren’t necessarily the standard tape jobs,” she said. “So finding what works for them, and making sure whoever they see next can reproduce it, is good. We’ll take pictures of the tape and send it to the cowboy’s phone, so the next person knows how to do it.”

Rodeo is a tougher sport, said Whitney-Babcock, and that’s evident in the injuries. “There’s no other sport that has this amount of impact and collisions,” she said. “Not even football sees these types of injuries.” And the rodeo cowboy isn’t guaranteed a salary, either. “These guys are all independent contractors. If they get hurt, they’re out of the money. I think they take it more seriously than most, because of that. They have more on the line.”

When she was working with the college women’s soccer team in Florida, the soccer players were curious about rodeo. Whitney-Babcock would show them videos and the injuries. “They’d get a little more quiet about their smaller injuries. I might show them a cowboy competing without an ACL, and a soccer player with a blister on her foot might decide it’s not as bad as she thought.”

Whitney-Babcock and her fellow athletic trainers will be in the Justin Sportsmedicine trailer, treating cowboys and cowgirls competing at the St. Paul Rodeo. And even though she’s donating her time, she loves it. “Being able to get the cowboys and cowgirls back to doing what they love” is what she enjoys. “Seeing them succeed is my favorite thing.”

Services provided by the Justin Sportsmedicine Team are free to all cowboys and cowgirls.

This year’s St. Paul Rodeo is July 2-6 with nightly performances at 7:30 pm and a 1:30 pm matinee on July 4. Tickets start at \$16 and can be purchased online (www.StPaulRodeo.com), at the rodeo office in St. Paul, and at the gate.

For more information, visit the website.

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Cutline: The Justin Sportsmedicine Team, with Whitney-Babcock on the left, gathers in their mobile sports medicine trailer at the 2018 St. Paul Rodeo.