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20,000 Rodeo Fans Rode the Web to Watch the IFR

(Augusta, Ga) The World Wide Web met the world of rodeo up close and personal at the 2005 International Finals Rodeo (IFR) as HorseCity.com brought rodeo fans the action live from the arena floor. Not only did HorseCity.com capture the rodeo live, but they fulfilled their overall goal to enhance the family experience of rodeo by uniting families online that could not make it to Oklahoma City.

Until you witness it up close, outsiders to the rodeo world will never know the true "family" that occurs in the rodeo world. The IFR is a true example of a place where family meets passion for a sport. Competitors rage head to head for dollars in any given go-round and yet those same competitors are still in the chute helping their arch rival pull the next cinch strap tight. Family is one of the aspects of rodeo that keeps competitors on the road and running show to show looking for that next paycheck. This is one of the many reasons that HorseCity.com went to edge of the Internet world and pushed technology to the limits to bring the IFR into the homes of thousands of families around the world. You see, for most IPRA members, rodeo is a passion not a vocation. The majority of IPRA members have a "real" job back home. Thus, competing at the IFR means time off from work, expensive travel and in most cases the inability to bring family to the event due to lack of funds or prior job commitments. But, despite all that, HorseCity.com truly believes that IPRA competitors are die-hard, dedicated athletes that deserve serious recognition for their accomplishments.

The planning for the 2005 IFR Web cast began 2 years ago when Ryan Dohrn and Alan Moorhead brought the idea to IPRA President Dale Yerigan. Dale immediately loved the idea and the ball started rolling. From there IPRA Executive Director Butch Stewart worked closely with Moorhead, Dohrn and the HorseCity.com Team to be sure no detail was left unnoticed. The main technological issues were removed from when the IFR moved from the Ford Center back to the Fairgrounds in Oklahoma City, OK. The OKC Fairgrounds have a staff that is used to this type of technology request. From the Barrel Futurities of America World Championships to the AQHA World Show, this is not the first Web cast for Andrew Putnam and the staff at the fairgrounds. Putnam, Director of Operations for the OK State Fairgrounds, is a technology enthusiast and was integral to the success of the IFR Web cast. HorseCity.com General Manager Ryan Dohrn said, "This was one of the biggest Web casts we have ever done. We had so much planning in place. The last real issue was to explain the concept of Web casting to the rodeo competitors. I looked around the room when I explained this concept on the Wednesday before the first performance and you would have thought I was speaking a foreign language. I think they all thought I was joking. After the first performance I had no less than ten qualifiers come up to me to say that their grandma or mother was watching their run on the computer. From Clinton, Iowa to Baghdad, Iraq, this Web cast was truly global in scope! After the final performance, the most common question was if we were coming back next year?"

HorseCity.com employed the talents of IPRA Rodeo Announcer Alan Moorhead to host the action live on the Internet. This is the tenth Web cast for Moorhead who has embraced the concept from day one and is also the host of HorseCity.com TV that airs 5 times each week on RFD-TV to 20 million homes. (www.HorseCity.tv) Moorhead said, "I truly enjoy the thrill of a live show. The fact that hundreds of people are watching makes me really intense on giving the people at home

a play by play perspective of the event. The IFR Web cast is no different. This Web cast made it possible for a mom, dad or spouse to keep up with the IFR action. Never before have so many family members and fans from around the globe had an opportunity to watch the IFR. Just image the excitement of seeing your son or husband win a go-round from the living room of their home 1,000 miles away from the arena." It was vital for the performance online to match the action in the arena. Having a professional staff of announcers, rodeo professionals and score watchers on site was vital to the success of the Web cast. A full time "runner" was also employed to be sure that each go-round winner was brought to the broadcast booth for an interview as well. Dohrn also said, "This was all about taking the IPRA to a new level. No other professional rodeo organization has brought all their performances live, with video and audio over the Net. Plus, we also had live hosts, color commentary from past champions and interviews with all the winners. The IPRA truly set a standard for others to follow."

During each performance there were more people watching online than were in the actual stands at the fairgrounds... keep in mind, almost every performance was a sell out. With over 3,500 watching during the Thursday performance and ending the week with 6,000 users watching the final Saturday performance, the success of this Web cast was easy to see. Dohrn said, "This was huge. We do a lot of Web casting, but this one takes the cake. The cost is very high, over \$10 per minute, but it is worth every penny to know that one cowboy's ailing mother could watch him compete." With nearly 20,000 users online during the week, it is easy to see that the IFR Web cast was a need that was fulfilled. Moorhead continued that thought by saying, "This was a high point in my career. Working side by side with Cord McCoy and Jimmy Roper was a real treat. Knowing that Army personnel from Iraq were watching and sharing the stage with past champions made this an experience for me and the users at home."

Web casting is a fairly simple concept to the majority of "Web junkies". But, as foreign as rodeo is to these same geeks, Web casting was a far leap for most rodeo fans until January of 2005. Here is how Web casting the IFR worked. A high speed telephone line was run from the phone company to the top of the Oklahoma City Fairgrounds arena. This line was then connected to a lap top computer. This special phone line is the equivalent of 100 of your home phone lines put together. A camera high above the stands captured all the action live on the arena floor. This camera was operated by a videographer that followed all the action on the arena floor from chute to chute. This camera was electronically hooked to a computer. This computer captured the picture from the camera and fed it over the special phone line to a super computer server in Augusta, GA. HorseCity.com is hooked up to that same computer. Rodeo fans from around the globe went on the Internet to HorseCity.com and clicked on the link to watch the IFR Web cast. That link opened up a small window or channel so the user could see the action live from OKC. Sound simple? Well maybe not. Try to tell a Web geek to just throw a rope off a running horse when the calf leaves the chute and then leap from the running horse onto the ground, run up, throw the calf down and simply tie up the calf's legs. Sound simple? Well maybe not.

The Internet is no longer considered a fad. It is here to stay and is an integral part of our lives each day. As rodeo fans further embrace the Web, they too will begin to see the power that comes when two forces join together to share an experience that only rodeo can deliver. Dohrn summed up his first IFR experience like this, "Never before have I felt so welcome. From the bull riders to the barrel racers, the entire group truly embraced our wacky idea and allowed us to run with it. Now we have to focus on making next year even better!"

HorseCity.com began in 1997 as the idea of Ryan Dohrn and his wife Andre' in the basement of their home. The Internet was in its infancy then, but the idea to bring horse enthusiasts online together was strong. In 2000, HorseCity.com was purchased by Morris Communications Company of Augusta, GA. Morris, who also owns Western Horseman Magazine, saw HorseCity.com as a unique idea and bought the Web site to take the Web site to the next level. Web casting equine events was a part of the over-all plan for success. HorseCity.com has been recognized by Forbes, the American Horse Publications and USA Today as the industry leader in

the equine Internet space. Each year HorseCity.com and its network Web sites BarrelHorses.com and RopeHorses.com Web cast 15 of the industries top events to the world.

HorseCity.com is also taking all footage shot at the 2005 IFR and producing a 4 DVD box set of the action. It will be sold to benefit the IPRA in early March on iprarodeo.com. The footage will also be a part of HorseCity.com TV to air some time in March on RFD-TV.

For more information on HorseCity.com visit them online or call 877-505-4344.

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HorseCity.com, based in Augusta, Ga., is an award-winning equine portal Web site serving the horse owner, the horse enthusiast and the equine industry. The site operates under the auspices of Morris Digital Works, the online services division of Morris Communications Co., LLC. For more information, visit www.horsecity.com.

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