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Macon youth wins world horse racing championship

HIGHLIGHTS

Gray had an impressive time for a youth

She only had a week to learn to control a new horse to use in the competition

She is the second person in her family to win this world championship title





BY THAIS ACKERMAN

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Macon is the home of a new world champion.

Fourteen-year-old Abby Gray from Macon took home the title of barrel horse racing youth world champion Saturday at the Georgia National Fairgrounds in Perry.

“It was such a good feeling ... kind of indescribable. Just overwhelmed with excitement and joy” Gray said. “I was very proud that I accomplished one of my main goals.”

Gray won first place in the highest division of the 14 divisions offered in the National Barrel Horse Association against 151 competitors in the final round. She dominated with a time of 14.836 seconds. Second place came in at a time of 15.023 seconds.

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Barrel racing is a rodeo event, usually for women, in which a horse and rider must race in a certain pattern around barrels, competing for the fastest time.

For winning the world championship Gray received a horse trailer, a bag of feed, a saddle pad and about \$2,300.

“Not many kids run under 15 seconds,” said Phillip Gentry, fairgrounds youth director.

Gray said she even impressed herself with her ability to maneuver the horse around the fairgrounds too. The horse she usually competes with had a leg injury, and Gray was forced to learn the ability of the new horse in just a week.

Gray borrowed a family friend's horse for the competition, Doc's Getting Reckless. She said she was nervous to use the horse for the first time but she knew it had a very high potential. Its owner, Carl Wise, has won many other awards using it as his horse including the Senior World Championships.

"It was difficult because you don't know the horse, you don't know really what it's going to do," she said. "I didn't really have a hard time doing it I just had to learn fast so that was a challenge."

Gentry said he attributes Gray's impressive time to her ability to control her horse, steadily keeping it in the right direction.

"Abby's run was really good, and what made it so good was just how smooth she was," he said. "You can imagine how hard it is to stay calm and to stay under control when you've got a 1,200-pound animal."

Although she said conquering a new horse was nerve racking, Gray tackled the challenge just like she has done since she started barrel horse racing at 3 years old. Her father, Christian Gray, said her accomplishment doesn't surprise him since she is known to never fear anything. He said she could get on just about any horse she can.

"It's amazing," Christian Gray said. "You ride all year and you practice all year and when you finally win it gives you chill bumps, I'll tell you that."

A large crowd of family and friends "filled a whole section" to cheer the teen on in the finals on Saturday. Among the section filled with loved ones was her older sister, 21-year-old Colby Gray, who cried tears of joy on her sister's shoulder after she won the championship.

Abby Gray won the same title Colby Gray did four years ago. Gray said her sister's accomplishment in the past is big a part of what inspired her to work hard to win this title. After her older sister won the same championship, Gray said she made it a main goal to follow in her footsteps.

"She was so happy and she told me how proud she was of me," Gray said. "It was neat having two world champions in the family."

Gray said she hopes to continue barrel racing in the future. Her dream is to head west with her sister to compete against the top barrel racing women in the world at the National Finals Rodeo in Las Vegas, Nevada. She dedicated her championship title to her friend, Jacee Thomas, who was recently injured in a train accident.

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