

# TELEGRAM & GAZETTE

**Critically ill children get thrills from bulls. Tough-guy riders take time to give kids behind-the-scenes tours of DCU event.**

By Priyanka Dayal TELEGRAM & GAZETTE STAFF

WORCESTER — It was man versus bull at the DCU Center yesterday, and 6-year-old Tyler Feen saw the battle up close.

“I want this one to be mine, the big one,” Tyler said as he gazed at a 2,000-pound horned beast before the start of the Professional Bull Riders competition.

It was the third and final day of the U.S. Air Force Invitational, the 20th stop on the Built Ford Tough Series, where the world’s best bull riders competed to stay seated on top of wild, bucking bulls.

But before the rush of competition began, some of the cowboys did something a little different. Contestant Wiley Petersen led a group of critically ill children and their families on a behind-the-scenes tour of PBR.

“They’d rather do this than be a hamburger,” Mr. Petersen said. “The bulls are gonna be spinning. Some of ’em are just real crazy.”

More than 60 bulls were at the DCU Center, and the place smelled like it. Tyler, of Millbury, seemed fearless as he viewed the massive creatures.

“This is our first bull riding event,” said his father, Joseph Feen. “We’ve seen it on TV.”

Tyler and other children dipped their hands in paint and, for luck, left bright handprints on the leather chaps that would be worn by competing bull riders.

Mr. Petersen, a contender for the world championship, said a prayer for the families and signed their T-shirts before preparing for his bull ride.



Bull rider Wiley Petersen shows 6-year-old Tyler Feen, of Millbury, where to place his red-painted hand to make a “good luck” handprint on a rider’s chaps before the Professional Bull Riders event started at the DCU Center yesterday. Several young patients and their families from UMass Memorial Medical Center got a behind-the-scenes look at the event. (T&G Staff / DAN GOULD)



Bull rider Caleb Sanderson takes his turn on a bull named “The Prophet.” Mr. Sanderson got tossed, and didn’t score. (RICH DUGAS)

The 30-year-old has been riding bulls since he was a 10-year-old in Idaho, and now his career earnings total more than \$1.3 million.

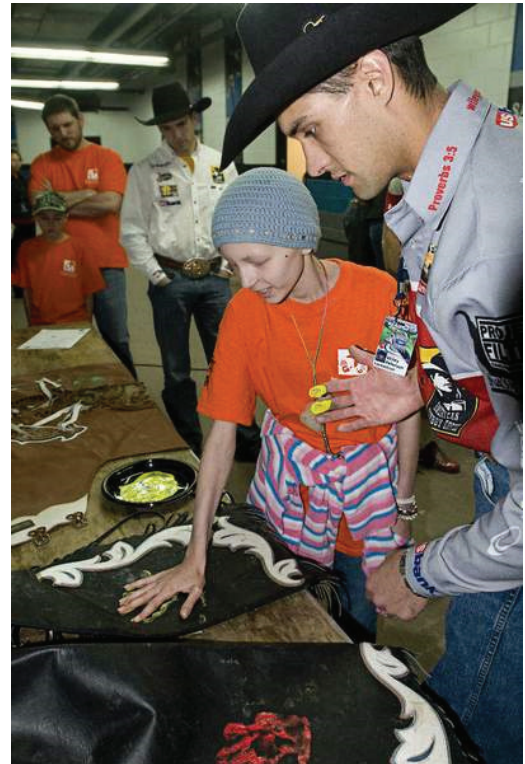
“The adventure, the excitement of it, the challenge of it, it’s just fun and extremely difficult,” he said in an interview. “Doing stuff like this is what really makes it worthwhile. To share with kids who are going through tough stuff, and hopefully put a smile on their faces.

“You can learn from them that life is precious,” he continued. “No matter how bad a day you might have, you still get up.”

When the championship round of competition kicked off at 2 p.m. yesterday, 11-year-old Miranda Berry of Orange and her family were seated in the second row, close enough to be hit with dirt — or something smellier.

When thunderous explosions and bursts of fire opened the show, the Berry family and everyone else seated up front could feel the heat.

The program for pediatric patients from UMass Memorial Medical Center and the Why Me organization was sponsored by PBR and the Believe In Tomorrow Children’s Foundation, based in Baltimore. The foundation’s Hands On Adventures program is designed to let critically ill children participate in an activity that helps them think about the future, rather than the stressful routine of hospital visits.



Miranda Berry, 11, of Orange, places a painted “good luck” handprint on a pair of chaps under the watchful eye of bull rider Wiley Petersen. Several critically ill children were treated to a behind-the-scenes tour before the Professional Bull Riders event yesterday. (T&G Staff / DAN GOULD)