



# Young Trainer Takes the Reins of Opportunity

By Matt Heindl  
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Horse trainers may be the most honest people left in this day of Wall Street bailouts, bundled sub-prime mortgages and athletes on steroids. Among horse trainers you still find an appreciation for hard work and the humility to start at the bottom, learn from the great ones and work up to a championship.

Chad Shepherd is a perfect example of this kind of individual, and at 29, considers himself a young guy in his field of Roping. But he's learning and moving up fast. Chad recently became a head trainer for the first time, hired by Robert and Connie Helms, owners of Eleven Bar East Ranch in Sanford, N.C.

Chad can attest to the ups and downs of his career choice. He didn't show as well as we would have liked in the February Dixie National Quarter Horse Show and watched as his Heading partner, Brad Lunn, a former World Champion, break his finger during a run. But if he was disappointed, he showed no signs.

"I'm a young guy in the business," Chad said. "So you've got to compete with these guys who've been doing it for 30 years. The Helms' gave me a great opportunity to go and show their horses and represent them. You can't ask for more than that."

His enthusiasm and dedication is palpable. Just ask him about his first visit to the AQHA World Championship Show two years ago.

"You've got the top guys in the nation there, the best of the best in the business," he said. "You go out there and you have to compete at their level. So every year I get out there I look forward to it. I learn something new every year, and I try to use that in my training. It just makes you a better horseman."

Chad, who is originally from Plant City, Fla., learned what the horse world had to offer from Ted Chancey, a renowned trainer who "practically raised

me" in Dover, Fla., and then started at the bottom Triple J Ranch in Sarasota, Fla., riding colts and starting horses.

"They gave me a great opportunity to show horses and meet a lot of people like J.D. and Bobby Lewis. It takes somebody like Jay [Holmes] to take you there and get your foot in the door and just keep going. That's where we are now."

Chad moved up to North Carolina a year ago.

The Eleven Bar East Ranch is a growing operation with about 150 horses, including 50 brood mares. The farm is undergoing a facility enhancement with construction of a covered open facility to ward off rain and snow during training and make it suitable to host small horse shows and roping events.

The farm in Sanford is one of few in North Carolina to train and breed Cow and Roping horses. There aren't many Roping trainers in North Carolina at all, which Shepherd appreciated before making the trip.

"It really looked like a win-win situation from the beginning and it really has been. We've had a lot of success and positive reaction from the community, as far as the Jackpot Roper shows that have really made an impact on the area in the short term. We offer a kind of a place you can come and get all your needs met — get riding lessons, buy a horse, breed a horse."

And Eleven Bar East is continuing its goal to expand into new areas, including securing approval this year to hold cattle events sponsored by the North Carolina Quarter Horse Association.

Chad's focus remains on growing the farm. The mares

bred a number of horses before he arrived and he's spent a lot of time with them. About 40 foals are coming every year, some sold as weanlings and yearlings, and he's starting about 30 2-year-olds a year.

One of the premiere up and coming studs on the farm is Heat N Glo, a Palomino with a long mane that won the 2008-09 Gold Coast Circuit Heading Championship.

Chad's plan is to start a number of horses off in a cow horse-training program.

"You can take a lot of cow horses that have been through a cow horse training program and put them in a roping pen and rope on them almost immediately because they have a lot of cow in them," he said.

"They've already been taught to rake going down the fence and they have a lot of stop. That's initially the ideal thing to do is to get your horse broke enough so that you can do a reining pattern and teach them cattle when they are 2 or 3. It's physical, but it's not as physical as the rope pulling on them."

Chad said his brand of training is not unique, but his key to success is being flexible.

"You kind of put together these things you learn from other guys. I think it all just comes together as a whole. You've got to have an open mind when it comes to training horses because once you close your mind, you might as well forget it. Every day is a new experience and you can learn something from everybody you work with. I'm always looking for opinions from people I respect in the business. These guys are winning at the World and I think they have a lot of knowledge I can use." |HC|

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Left, Chad gets ready to take Heat N Glo into action at the 2009 Dixie National Quarter Horse Show in Jackson, Miss.  
At right, Chad rides Loun Doctor in the ring.

