



LaRae Luis and Very Smart N Lucky competed at the 2016 National High School Finals Rodeo.

## YOUNG HORSEMEN

# LaRae Luis

This California native's promising high school rodeo career happened almost as an afterthought.

Interview by **CHRISTINE HAMILTON**

**L**ARAE LUIS SAYS she had never really thought about competing in high school rodeo. She just enjoyed practicing and helping her dad, reined cow horse trainer Mark Luis, and going to a few jackpots.

"Then in my freshman year, all my friends were rodeoing, and I decided I wanted to try it and see what would happen," she says. "It was really last minute."

That was just last year. She competed in six events—poles, barrels, break-away, team roping, cutting and reined cow horse—as a freshman at Independence High School in Paso Robles, California. She ended up qualifying for the National High School Finals Rodeo in reined cow horse, and finished seventh.

"I set my goals really high for my freshman year to make it [to the NHSFR]," she says. "I focused on that, and I worked hard. I couldn't have done it without my dad. He's always there for me."

Mark, along with LaRae's two older brothers, Brad and Adam, are past high school rodeo champions. Mark competes in National Reined Cow Horse, National Stock Horse and American Quarter Horse associations, and his accomplishments include being a two-time NRCHA Snaffle Bit Futurity open finalist, as well as twice earning a finalist spot in the NRCHA World's Greatest Horseman. Mark and his wife—LaRae's mother, Shari—own and operate Mark Luis Training Stables, a business they relocated from California to Wynnewood, Oklahoma, in the fall of 2016.

"My favorite event is the cow horse, for sure," LaRae says. "And cutting. I love them both."

Her reined cow horse is Very Smart N Lucky ("George") a gelding Mark bought to develop into a World's Greatest contender but turned over to LaRae when her previous horse went lame. For cutting she rides Really A Reyner ("Sunshine"), a 20-year-old mare whose long list of accomplishments with Mark include making the World's Greatest finals and winning the event's steer stopping; and winning the cutting and steer stopping (twice) at the Magnificent Seven.

Big-hearted Doubledogdareme ("Tex"), a son of High Brow Cat, handles her other events. Last fall, when George was still in California, LaRae even rode Tex to win the second go in the reined cow horse at her first Oklahoma high school rodeo competition.

LaRae has high goals again for her sophomore year.

"I want to make it to nationals in the cow horse and the cutting," she says. "Last year I had a chance to make it in the cutting and I made one mistake and missed it. This year I have a feeling that I will." 🐾

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