Scott Abrahamson rides to victory at Horse Nations Indian Relay’s “Champion of Champions Indian Relay Race” in September.

Photo courtesy of Diana Volk/Horse Nations Indian Relay Council

Scott Abrahamson

WSU Student Wins Indian Relay’s Biggest Event!

by Shana Lombard, Communications Assistant

Scott Abrahamson, Colville, is a sophomore in the Mechanical Engineering program here at Washington State University. His future engineering career, however, is being planned to support his true passion – horseracing.

“I started riding before I could walk, probably,” said Abrahamson, sharing that his parents had him out on horses as a young child.

He got his start in horseracing in the 7th grade, but fell out of racing for quite some time. However, after his father’s death, Abrahamson wanted to continue his father’s legacy on the racetrack competing in Indian Relays. With horseracing on both sides of the family, he felt the need to do so, and began competing in relay around age 16.

Indian relay as Abrahamson describes it consists of a team of three people: a rider, a “catcher,” and a “holder,” and three horses. Abrahamson is the rider for his team. A critical part of his role is to “jump on and off a horse as fast as you can.” The rider completes three laps around a racetrack, exchanging horses each time around the track. They must leap off one horse (that is then caught by the catcher), and from the ground, leap onto another mount being held by the holder. Timing is everything, said Abrahamson, from when to start and when to jump, and “every second, every horse-length counts.”

“And it’s all done bareback,” said Abrahamson.

Abrahamson said he picked up some knowledge of relay racing from his uncle Jonathan Abrahamson who had been a member of the Omak Express team and is now part of Abrahamson Relay. The bulk of his Indian Relay education, however, came from watching videos on YouTube and then putting in long hours on the track. It has taken him two years of consistent practice to become a championship rider.

The competition season begins for him in June, though practice begins in spring. Over the summer, he and his team family–owned Abrahamson Relay, are on the track every day practicing exchanges and working with the horses to ensure they’ll stand still and keep calm when it comes to race day. Abrahamson lives in Coulee Dam, but travels 45 minutes each way to Omak to practice daily during the summer. The race season extends into the school year.

“Once school starts, I don’t ever get to practice, because we go straight to the races on the weekend,” said Abrahamson. It also becomes a challenge to balance his schoolwork. “It’s hard. I try to finish everything by Friday or even Thursday. One race was in Pendleton during exam week. It was tough. I didn’t really get to study.”

They took first place in Indian Relay at Pendleton Roundup this fall, however, and Abrahamson is also doing well in his courses. He treats his academics with equal dedication and has found success in the classroom as well as on the racetrack. Abrahamson was nominated by his tribe for the MOU Tribal Scholarship and was selected for the WSU Tribal Nation Building Leadership Program that prepares students with the skills needed to be future tribal leaders. He plans to use his mechanical engineering degree to go back and work on his reservation as an engineer at Grand Coulee Dam. His engineer’s salary will go to “buy more horses and better horse trailers.”

When on the track, Abrahamson does his best to stay focused on the race and use the other competitors as a source of motivation, adding, “everyone makes everyone better and we kind of push each other.” The final event for Indian Relay 2017 was the “Champion of Champions Indian Relay Race” in Billings, MT, during the last weekend of September, hosted by the Horse Nations Indian Relay Council.

Before the race, there was an issue of whether or not the rain was going to be a tough factor all weekend. There were weather predictions for possible rain all weekend. Because of the heavy rainfall, the dirt track at the MetraPark stadium turned into thick mud before the weekend came. Race officials decided to still hold the race. For his team, Abrahamson recalls racing in mud before but not to the extent of the thickness there.

“[The mud] was so deep and muddy. We just wanted to keep the horses safe.” To do so, the team made sure they...
Scott Abrahamson dismounts during the 2017 Champion of Champions Indian Relay Race in Billings, MT.
Photo courtesy of Diana Volk/Horse Nations Indian Relay Council

wrapped the horse’s ankles well to give them stability and strength to combat the track.

While at the “Champion of Champions” race, Abrahamson Relay had a couple goals in mind: to do better than last year’s race and to continue their winning streak that they were currently on.

“We just wanted to keep our motivation, everything going... as we went into the race.”

Last year, the team’s horse collided with another team’s and did not qualify for the final round of the relays so the stakes were even higher this year. When it was time for the last round of racing for the weekend, the team did their best to keep their excitement and nerves at bay.

“We had a lot of momentum going into that last race,” said Abrahamson, adding that his team won both of their heats prior to the final round and were feeling pretty confident going into the last race of the 2017 season.

As the race played out, Abrahamson broke off from the pack relatively early to take home the win! Abrahamson Relay has now successfully won the title of “Champion of Champions” among numerous other accolades they have won this season. Congrats, Scott!