

Amberley Snyder: A Recap of the American

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Amberley Snyder competes in The American. (Photo by Kenneth Springer)

Amberley Snyder has been in the news. A lot.

The Utah State University student was a champion barrel-racer who was more at home on the back of a horse than anywhere else. Her life changed in 2010 when she rolled her truck, leaving her paralyzed from the waist down.

Eventually, she began to ride, and then to race.

A group of mechanical aerospace engineering students, with the help of the Assistive Technology Lab at USU's Center for Persons with Disabilities, designed and built the prototype of a wheelchair lift that would allow Snyder to independently mount her horse.

Snyder continued her education at USU, and is now completing her student teaching in ag education at Preston High School. She has become an in-demand motivational speaker, sharing her story to countless fans.

Those fans, in turn, flooded the ballot boxes, as Snyder became the Fan Exemption to run in RFD-TV's The American, on March 1.

Snyder shares her thoughts on the days leading up to her run in The American, and after, in this recap that first appeared in The Rodeo News.

Wow! What an amazing couple weeks we have had. From the announcement as the Fan's Exemption to running up

the alley at AT&T stadium for RFD-TV's The American, my life has been a whirlwind.

The Sunday before The American, RFD-TV hosted the first ever Patch Auction for those competing in the world's richest one-day rodeo. I'll be honest I had this great plan when I went up on stage that I was going to model my chair or do some wheelies, but once I got up there I chickened out and just sat there! I did not know what to expect and was completely honored as my price rose to \$31,000. I was so proud to wear a Busby Quarter Horses patch for my run in Cowboy Stadium!

Thank goodness for my mother as she began the drive the Tuesday before The American to Texas. Power was able to arrive by Wednesday evening to Brock, Texas at the Busby's Ranch. I am so grateful for the care that went towards Power from the moment he arrived. I think he was more spoiled with them than with me!

Ryan Lovendahl, Busby's trainer, rode Power for me on Thursday. They were shocked to see the real personality of my horse that not all get to experience. Power is a very special horse as everyone knows. What they don't know is he is not always the same "perfect horse" on and off camera. It took them four people to get my big black horse saddled and booted to be ridden. Once on his back, Ryan shared with us that his name fit him perfectly. My horse has a lot of "power" underneath him, more than what shows most of the time.

I was able to take off from Salt Lake City, Utah with my little sister Autumn on Thursday evening. The jitters had already begun for me as we were boarding the plane to make our way to Texas. The weather obviously did not get the memo that there was an important rodeo that weekend as all of Friday we could not get over to Arlington. Instead, we headed to the Busby's Ranch to ride Power. They were all surprised to see Power stand perfectly still for me as I put on his boots and lower his head into my lap for me to bridle him. My horse definitely knows when to behave. I was able to work him on the barrels and he felt great, definitely a big comfort for the upcoming run on Sunday!

Saturday was eventful from doing an appearance for the National Little Britches Rodeo Association to the Busby's dinner that night. It was a neat experience to give back to an association that fosters Hope Counts as well as the one that gave me the first opportunity to become a World Champion in 2009. Check in for The American was like Christmas! The sponsors for the event were spectacular and did a great job supporting all of the contestants. The Busby's dinner was truly amazing! The love I received

from sponsors, family and friends to the speech I was able to give made the night one to remember.

Going to bed that night it became so surreal that the following morning I would be making a run in the same arena as the people I have watched for years compete in the Thomas and Mack in Las Vegas.

The morning of The American started early, as the barrel racers were able to work horses from 6-8am in the arena. Power felt great as we worked the pattern and was very confident running back out the small alley way of the arena. As we were done I was able to take one last look at the pattern knowing the next time I entered I would be running for a million dollars. Now the contestant meeting was one of my favorite parts of the whole weekend. Wheeling into the room full of idols, legends and champions made me giddy, yet I had to remain cool and calm like it was no big deal!

Getting ready for our run was quick and we headed to the stadium to get warmed up. Power was so anxious he wouldn't even let me put his bridle on. Once on his back though, he warmed up easily and responded softly to my hands. At one point I asked Fallon Taylor for a picture. Thank goodness Babyflo is quick or she might have been missing an ear as Power tried to bite it off! He didn't want any other horse by him, which is an attitude I am used to when I am on his back. Once inside the stadium, Power put on his best behavior as we moved up to stand next to Charmayne James and Grasshopper. This was another favorite part for me chatting with the legend as we were waiting to be last two to make a run.

My horse Power was being so quiet it was almost eerie. As my introduction video was playing I was waiting for the nerves to set in. I had prayed that morning for God to keep my hands calm and my head clear for this run and at that moment I knew he had heard my prayers. Even as my heart started to pound, my hands stayed steady and I was as calm as someone can be about to make the biggest run of their life. I did have to pop Power once with my whip just to make sure he was awake as we entered the alleyway. The run went by pretty fast, 15 seconds to be exact! The roar of the crowd was phenomenal as Power and I crossed the timer. I will tell you I didn't plan to whip quite as much as I did but the competitiveness in me wanted to leave everything we had in that arena! There were a few things we could have cleaned up but to be only a few tenths off of the past two World Champions had me pretty pleased.

I wanted to make a run that proved we deserved to be there competing with the greatest women in the world and I hope we did that!

I had a surprise right after my run that I am truly honored to share. First, when I was in the alley I asked the man if I could get out of the gate. He replied that I wasn't allowed that way. I was completely shocked and a little panicked as I had watched every other girl leave that way. Dave Appleton came through the gate and started my post run interview. I definitely didn't have time to even catch my breath! I was very thankful Power and I work on coming back in the alleyway at home after our runs as he handled this surprise like a pro. I am completely honored to have had RFD-TV set up the Amberley Snyder Courage Fund and put forward \$100,000 towards the National FFA Organization in the form of a scholarship fund in my name. I hope this award will help others facing challenges in their lives pursue an education and build a bright future! The experiences I had in FFA are a big part of the reason I am the person I am today.

To wrap this all up, I just want to thank all those who made this journey possible. I would not have had this experience if not for RFD-TV, Busby Quarter Horse, family, friends, the rodeo competitors and the fans. Power and I did our best out there and hope we made you all proud in being this year's Fan Exemption for The American!

To see Snyder's wheelchair lift, built in conjunction with the AT lab, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dQ7UB3HwoJo> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cfrYR7e37kU>.