

# Invitational Freestyle Reining

## 2026 Recap



Denver, CO – Emotion overwhelmed the CINCH Arena on Saturday, January 11<sup>th</sup> during the \$30,000 Invitational Freestyle Reining at the National Western Stock Show (NWSS). Twelve nationally recognized competitors stepped into the spotlight to showcase reining in the richest freestyle in the country. Sharee Schwartzenberger's moving performance set to Cody Johnson's rendition of "Travelin' Soldier" paid tribute to our service men and

women; honoring those who never made it home. Sharee included The Fallen Comrade Table, honoring fallen, missing, or imprisoned members of the U.S. Military. Retired Sergeant Phillip Boyes joined her performance and was honored for the valor he showed during his time in the United States Army. Sharee and six-year-old Live Love Laugh, owned by Patrice Lee, topped the leaderboard early as the second draw with an outstanding score of 227 under a three-judge panel.

The Schwartzenberger family made it an extra special event as Steve Schwartzenberger bid farewell to freestyle reining in his final appearance aboard Game Day Surprise (Eli), who also retired from the show ring. Steve was a key influence in the creation of the NWSS Invitational Freestyle, competing 27 times in 31 years, winning three of those years including the inaugural year. Eli's show career began with Steve where they competed at the NRHA Futurity his three-year-old season and has remained in their barn until Sharee purchased him. Sharee and Eli have been elite ambassadors for the sport of reining both locally and nationally and traveled throughout the past year as one of Breyer's 2025 special edition models which was announced at the 2025 NWSS. Steve's heartfelt performance to "The Cowboy Rides Away" left no dry eyes in the house and earned the coveted People's Choice award from a grateful and supportive audience.

Prior to the Invitational Freestyle Reining, two youth riders performed routines in the Youth Freestyle Reining Showcase. Donna Fern and Hayden Walker offered a glimpse into the future of the industry as they gained experience in a premier event.

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Photos by Performance Horse Photography

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