

# RODEO ROOTS

Professional breakaway roper **Kelsie Domer** embraces the lifestyle she loves while making a name for herself in the rodeo arena.

BY KAYCIE WILL

**K**elsie Domer was practically born with a rope in her hand. By age 5, she got her first taste of rodeo at local competitions with her family. But for Domer, it's always been more than a sport—it's a lifestyle.

"Growing up, we were always in the Western way of life, whether we were in rodeo or not," Domer recalls. "My granddad farmed for a living and raised cattle. We learned about hard work and values like that before we ever rodeoed."

Domer and her two brothers grew up working with cattle and horses, contributing to the family's livelihood and learning countless lessons along the way.

"Even if we weren't competing, we still used horses to go gather or check cattle," Domer says. "That's how we helped the family. We learned how to work hard in the cold or the hot. Having those types of experiences helps with anything you want to put your mind to after that, whether it's rodeoing or if you're a CEO of a huge company. You have to know how to work hard and instill those different values in those different areas."

Domer found her passion in breakaway roping, but she's never lost appreciation for the foundation her childhood gave her.

"I still love going home and helping in any way I can," Domer says. My family's a huge deal to me. My parents always did anything they could for me and my brothers. As long as we were working at it, they tried to provide as best they could."

## The Big Leagues

After leaving home, Domer played college basketball while pursuing her degree, but she never stopped roping. As she continued to develop her roping ability, Domer began to wonder if breakaway could become more than just a hobby.

"In college, I realized that I wanted to rodeo for a living," she reveals. "But for a long time, after the college level, there wasn't a place for the breakaway ropers to go."

However, as Domer's graduation drew near, the sport of breakaway began to blossom, too. She dove deeper into the sport, seeking out mentors and honing her skills.

"When I started figuring things out and learning more about breakaway, I saw people like Jackie Crawford and Lari D. Guy," she recalls. "I looked up to those two and many others."

PHOTOS COURTESY DURANGO BOOTS



*This year, Kelsie Domer was one of just a few breakaway ropers to compete for a million-dollar prize at the American Rodeo in Arlington, Texas.*

Just a few years later, Domer found herself in the winners' circle, shoulder to shoulder with her heroes.

"I went from wanting to be like them to standing next to them," Domer recalls. "It is super special to see those girls at the top, the very best, and then get to travel with them or rope against them. It's cool to see things come full circle. And hopefully I can do that for generations under us, too."

## The Next Level

As she reflects on her journey, Domer credits not only the ropers who've helped her on her rodeo journey, but also those who've helped put breakaway on the map. Although the event has around for many years, it has only recently been added to the docket at larger rodeos.

"Breakaway just got bigger and bigger," Domer says. "Now it's on the professional level. We've got great jackpots with a lot of added money, and we get to go to places like Fort Worth, San Antonio, Houston and the American."

The event's growth opened doors for female athletes like Domer to pursue a career in the male-dominated rodeo industry.

"The last few years have been pretty crazy for breakaway ropers and women ropers in general," Domer explains. "Barrel racing has been at the top level for a long time. I've al-

ways been a huge fan of that and excited for the women that got that opportunity. Now, to see female ropers starting to get that same opportunity is super exciting."

With more inclusion at pro rodeos comes larger purses and bigger crowds, both of which bode well for the future of the sport.

"It's been amazing to go for some bigger money at these pro rodeos," Domer says. "It's exciting for the younger girls coming up, too. I don't think it's going to stop growing. It's just going to get better and better, and I'm excited to see that."

This year, Domer felt that growth firsthand while roping in the crown jewel of rodeo, the American Rodeo. Held at AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas, the 2022 event marked the first time breakaway ropers could vie for a million-dollar prize.

"At these bigger venues, there's a bunch of people and the money's bigger," Domer shares. "It brings a whole new level of excitement. But then again, it's the same things that we do day in and day out. I try to keep grounded to that."

That excitement adds pressure to the already high-stakes competition, but it's worth the stress for Domer.

"It's pretty amazing to think where the sport's going and it's exciting to look forward to what can become of that," she shares.

## Behind the Chutes

As the sport's growth allows Domer to level-up her career, she stays true to the reason she first picked up a rope: the people.

"A group of rodeo contestants is a close-knit group," she reveals. "You're traveling with each other, you've got children there—the whole family's going. A lot of people don't get to see behind the scenes. I think that's the most important."

It's the people waiting at the trailer after a rodeo that motivates Domer to persevere through the tough days. Everyone has finished with a less-than-perfect result, so they all support each other, win or lose.

"Everybody's in it for the same reasons," she continues. "Of course, everybody's in it to win. But you make relationships, you make great friends, and you get to do it with your family. That's super important to me."

For Domer, that family is about to get a bit bigger as she and her husband prepare to welcome their first child. Naturally, she's already dreaming of introducing her daughter to the rodeo circuit.

"It would be super special for my little girl to rope with me and love it just as much as I do," Domer says. "But I want her to have her own goals too, and I'll support her in whatever she wants to do."

No matter what dreams her daughter chooses to chase, Domer plans to instill in her an appreciation for the sport's roots.

"My child—hopefully children someday—will be raised in a Western lifestyle," Domer shares. "If they want to rodeo, that's awesome. If they don't, that's great too."

## Path to Greatness

Preparing for motherhood has given Domer time to reflect on her own childhood.

"I feel like I'm super lucky to have grown up the way that I did and have an opportunity to learn how to take care of cattle that way first," she shares. "We wanted to have the best horses and the best set of cattle, but we wanted them to be healthy and happy too."

The techniques Domer now relies on to bring home a paycheck were developed for practical applications, taking care of horse and cattle with her family.

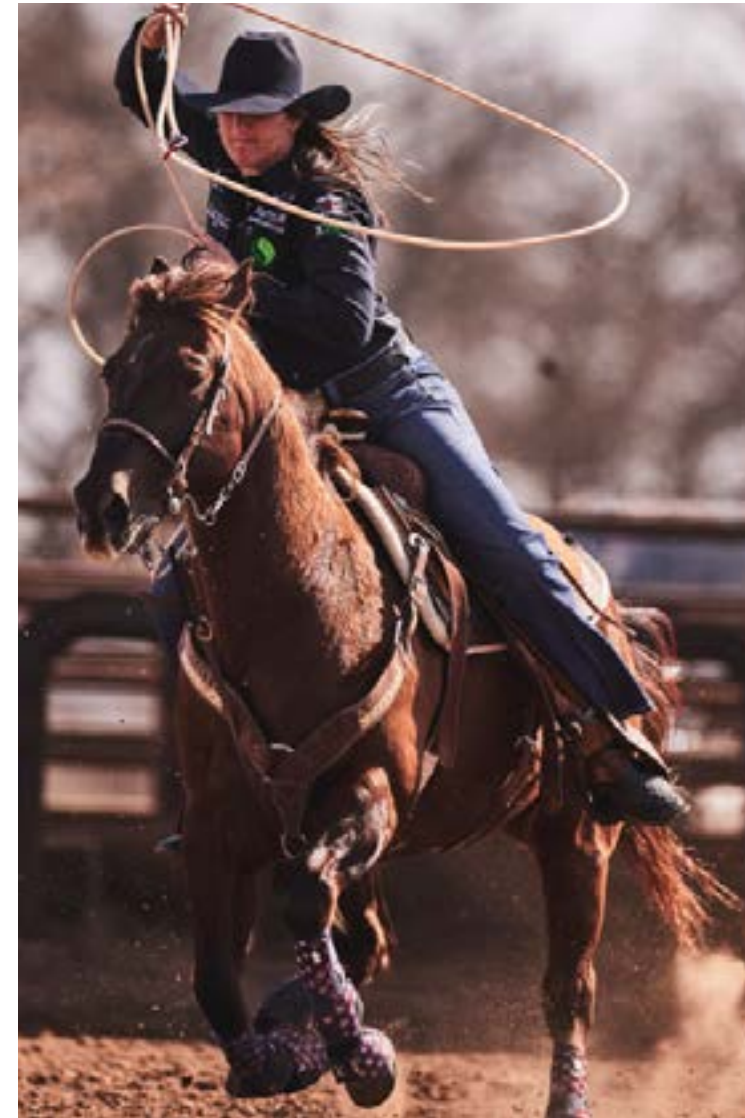
"We grew up using our ropes out in the pasture to care for and doctor the cattle," Domer recalls. "We did that to make sure they were in the best state possible. We took care of our horses not just because they're a tool, but because they're a part of the family. They helped us put food on the table. Those values were instilled in me, and now I use those skills in the arena to make a living."

Although the application of those tools has changed, Domer's heart remains focused on the welfare of the animals she works with.

"We take pride in taking care of our animals," Domer affirms. "They're very important to us because without them, we wouldn't be able to do anything, whether it's competing at a rodeo or working at the farm."

However, Domer also knows not everyone took the same path to the rodeo pen.

"Everybody was brought up differently," she admits. "I have friends that grew up on



a ranch, and I have friends who are strictly rodeo athletes."

Rodeo brings people from all walks of life together. For Domer, it's not about where you're from, it's about a shared passion.

"It's so diverse in the rodeo world," Domer shares. "Almost every year at the [National Finals Rodeo], you might have a bareback, saddle bronc, or bull rider who's never ridden a horse that doesn't buck. They just learned to do their event, and that's awesome. We all love this way of life."

That love is what keeps people coming back to rodeos across the country, both as competitors and spectators. But for Domer and other rodeo athletes, it's more than an action-packed night—it's a lifelong commitment.

"Rodeo, to me, is a lifestyle," Domer concludes. "I love everything about it." 🤠

*Kelsie Domer's love for breakaway roping started at home on her family's ranch and developed into a successful career.*