

Dean Holtkamp awarded the Duke of the Chutes Scholarship at the 2025 CNFR

By Lydia Hill

Dean Holtkamp received the prestigious Harry Vold “Duke of the Chutes” scholarship on June 17, 2025, during the 2025 College National Finals Rodeo (CNFR) in Casper, Wyoming.

The scholarship is named in tribute to the late Harry Vold, a legendary stock contractor and lifelong supporter of collegiate rodeo. Vold was a respected member of both the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association (PRCA) and the National Intercollegiate Rodeo Association (NIRA). Inducted into the Pro Rodeo Hall of Fame in 1994, Vold was known as the “Duke of the Chutes” for his professionalism, patriotism and significant contributions to the rodeo industry.

After Vold’s passing in March 2017 at the age of 93, his daughter, Kirsten Vold, assumed the role of the CNFR's primary stock contractor. Recipients of this scholarship are chosen not only for their talent in the arena, but also for embodying the high standards of character, community and cowboy culture that Vold valued.

A sophomore majoring in agribusiness with a minor in landscape and design, Holtkamp hails from Conroe, Texas, where he was raised on a family cattle ranch that played a central role in his upbringing. His grandmother owns One Free Cattle Company in Orangefield, and rodeo runs deep in the family’s bloodline.

Today, Holtkamp competes as a calf roper for the Aggie Rodeo Team, carrying on the family tradition. While his performance in the arena is impressive, it’s his commitment to excellence in all aspects of life that makes him particularly worthy of this award.

“I’m honored to be receiving this scholarship, and I’m very blessed to be a part of this program,” Holtkamp said. “There are wonderful people in this, and I’m excited to watch and help this team grow.”

Outside the arena, Holtkamp maintains an impressive academic record, consistently earning a spot on the Dean’s List. He is also an active member of Kappa Upsilon Chi, a Christian fraternity at Texas A&M, where he finds support and inspiration through his faith. His ability to balance academics, athletics and service speaks to the depth of his character and work ethic.

Before rodeo became his focus, Holtkamp was a decorated swimmer, having reached the Texas state finals in 2023 and 2024. He draws comparisons to sports by highlighting the similarities in mental toughness, time commitment and physical demands.

“I wanted to bring the best out in one another (teammates) and grow a lot out of that program,” said Holtkamp.

Holtkamp’s aspirations reach beyond the chutes and classrooms. After earning his undergraduate degree, he plans to attend law school and pursue a career in agricultural law. He hopes to focus on vital issues such as water conservation, landowner rights and sustainable agriculture.

“I want to advocate for water conservation, sustainable farming, and the rights of ranchers and landowners because I believe in preserving the land and legacy of rural America,” said Holtkamp.

Holtkamp is also dedicated to serving his community. In 2015, he co-founded the Special Needs Angels Rodeo event with his sister in memory of his late cousin Ryan, who had special needs. What started as a small community event has transformed into a major gathering, featuring over 500 contestants and 900 volunteers.

From makeshift bull rides to tractor pulls and petting zoos, the event brings smiles to hundreds of children and families each year. Holtkamp is inspired every year by this event, witnessing the smiles on every contestant’s face and the tears of gratitude from their parents. The event continues to grow yearly, fueled by Holtkamp’s passion and the generous support of the rodeo community.

“We just try to make it special as we can for them and their families,” said Holtkamp.

Much of Holtkamp’s character is rooted in the values passed down by his grandfather, Buck, a U.S. veteran and cotton farmer. Buck instilled in him the importance of patriotism, strong morals and integrity. Holtkamp learned the significance of a firm handshake and of doing the right thing even when no one is watching. He carries these lessons with him in and out of the arena.

As he looks forward to the remainder of his college career, Holtkamp is focused on maintaining high grades and staying competitive in rodeo.

“I just want to keep being a part of this team, growing as an athlete and being the best all-around person I can be,” said Holtkamp.

This honor recognizes not only Holtkamp’s rodeo accomplishments but also his dedication to academic excellence, strong moral character and unwavering commitment to serving the community. These qualities embody the spirit and legacy of Harry Vold. With his combination of academic excellence, community involvement and rodeo grit, Dean Holtkamp not only honors Harry Vold’s legacy but also highlights a young man ready to leave a legacy of his own.

With a strong academic foundation, deep community ties and a deep-rooted commitment to service, Dean Holtkamp embodies the best of the next generation of rodeo athletes. His selection as the 2025 Duke of the Chutes Scholarship recipient not only honors Harry Vold's legacy but also showcases a young man who is prepared to leave a legacy of his own.