

‘Rez Girl’ to lead Diné College rodeo team

Written by By Bernie Dotson Diné College Public Relations
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Heather Williams is Ivy League, Chinle High grad

TSAILE, Ariz. — Heather Williams said it just came down to where she'd feel comfortable.

And after meeting the people — most of whom she's acquainted with — involved with the Diné College rodeo program, the self-proclaimed “rez girl” from Lukachukai, Ariz., knew exactly where she belonged.

“This is where I'm from and this (coaching) is what I want to do,” Williams, 23, said after an informal team meeting Aug. 23 at the Student Union Building at Diné College. Williams accepted the rodeo job on Aug. 14. “Each of us within the program is looking forward to a very positive and successful season.”

Williams, a 2016 animal science graduate from Cornell University in Ithaca, N.Y., said there are more than 15 members on the 2017 rodeo team at Diné College. She said as far as expectations go, she'd like to see academics and team spirit the priorities, commenting, “These are student athletes first and foremost. Everything else is secondary to that.”

Williams grew up in rodeo, with barrel racing her specialty. A true scholar, she enrolled in Diné College's Navajo Cultural Arts certificate program not long after graduating and returning home from Cornell.

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Fred Tahe, interim athletic director at Diné College who served as rodeo coach prior to Williams taking the reigns, said, “We have the right players in place and we have the right coach in place. We are gearing up for what we believe will be a very successful rodeo season at (Diné College).”

Diné College has been without a rodeo coach since the late Jackson Craig vacated the job about three months ago. Williams said she’s aware that she’s a role model to the team.

“It’s looking like we will have a team member competing in every event,” Williams said. “I think we’ll finish in the Top 5 for the team standings by the end of the year.”

Diné College, which participates in the NIRA Grand Canyon Region, opens the 2017 rodeo season Sept. 15 at the Tsaile Rodeo Grounds. “We have a rodeo club and our new officers are planning events for the year,” Williams said.

WARRIORS RODEO

Williams graduated from Chinle High School in 2012 and is the third female to serve as rodeo head coach at Diné College. Leslie Teller of Chinle coached the Warriors from 2007 to 2009 and Amy Redhorse of Rough Rock coached the team from 2012 to 2014.

Tahe landed superstar team ropers Alonzo Begay of Indian Wells, Ariz., and Skyler Gishie of Holbrook, Ariz., in June. Begay finished first in Gallup’s Best of the Best Timed Rodeo this summer and Gishie won a 2017 Dodge Ram truck in February at the National Team Roping Tour La Fiesta Truck Roping in Wickenburg, Arizona. Williams said returning barrel racer Raquel Curley of Coolfields, Ariz., is looking forward to finishing her last year of eligibility in good standing.

And, returning team member Wyatt Betony of Tonalea, Ariz., (bullriding, bareback riding) has been a contestant the past two years at the College National Finals Rodeo in Casper, Wyoming.

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