“Faster!” I kicked my horse as we ran around the third barrel. Dirt flew up from under my horse as she made a tight yet fast turn. I needed to beat my time. I grabbed the reins in a tight grip as my horse ran home under me. I checked the time… it read “18.91”. I was one second too slow. I sighed as I thought to myself “Someday… I will make it pro. Someday, I will.” That was the last practice run I had, soon I’ll be running in the arena, fighting for that winning spot. I mounted my horse, Belle, and walked her around, trying to stretch her out really well. She was a feisty red mare, the best horse a girl could ask for. She was the best of me. Our work together is what I lived for, what I worked for.

“Hey Saige, you ready?” My best friend Dalia approached me. “I don’t know. There's so many good riders here; they’ve all been doing it for so long. I’d be lucky to even place 5th today, which is very unlikely.” I pet Belle, who has always been my rodeo team. Belle looked at me, as if to tell me that we’ve got this. “Girl, don’t say that. You put in so much work to get here, you’re going to do great. Just remember, only you can do this. Remember everything you’ve learned. I believe in you,” Dalia said as she gave me a hug.

A chill ran down my spine when my dad came up to me and told me I’d be on soon, I was the 10th and last rider to compete. I looked at Dalia and she nodded at me for reassurance. I took a deep breath and started the walk over to the arena. I looked around and saw so many other people that looked so experienced. I knew I wouldn’t do as good as them. I looked at Belle, her beautiful coat glistened with a red tint. “You ready girl?” I scratched her ears. I knew she was ready, but I didn’t know how ready I was.

The first person went into the arena. She started running. Off to a slow start, but smooth around the first barrel. A little wide around the second run. The run to and around the third barrel was perfect and they ran home fast. A time of 20.342. Not bad at all. I continued to track every person that went, noting every run and turn. Good turn around the second barrel… she knocked over the third… perfect run home… Times were coming in quickly. 19.76, 18.873, 20.839, 17.948, 18.92… All of these times were amazing… no idea how I’d beat half of those. Two more people then I’d up.

A lady who looked like she’d been doing this all her life ran out there with so much confidence. She looked like she could do this in her sleep. Her strides, her turns, the way she held her reins. The way she did everything was perfect. She ran home with an incoming time of 16.72. Wow, she was amazing! Now I was very worried. How could I compete with that? The next person was up- the last before my turn. That rider rode wonderfully but hit a barrel which added 2 seconds to her time, coming in with a 19.93, which was still so impressive.

Now it was my turn. I was so nervous. I took a deep breath and led Belle into the arena. I wondered if she was nervous too. She and I were a great team. I saw a large crowd of people around me and felt tons of eyes on me. I was so nervous- this was it. At that moment, I knew it was me and Belle against the world. I looked over to Dalia who gave me a smile and mouthed, “You got this.” I nodded and looked straight forward at the barrel pattern. We’ve done this so many times; we can do this. I looked at Belle who looked so calm, so confident and safe with me. In that second I felt a boost of confidence I’d never felt before. I kicked Belle and we were off. We got to the first barrel, and I turned Belle around it, just barely missing it. Perfect. Faster. We ran to the second one and went around it. I heard cheers all around me. Faster! We ran to the third and last barrel and made it in a tight but perfect turn. This was it. I let loose on my reins and Belle ran home as fast as she could. I looked at the stopwatch that read 16.93. I felt something explode inside me when I realized Belle and I got 2nd place. We did it. Together, we were amazing.

I gave Belle a nice long pet and hugged her as tight as I could, as Dalia ran up to me and grabbed my hand. “I told you you could do this,” she said as we both smiled. I realized to do anything in life, you just need a little confidence. Well, a little confidence and an awesome horse, that is! Someday, if I kept up with practice and training and believed in myself and Belle as a team, I could make it pro. Someday, I will make it. Someday, we will make it. I just know it. It’s me and Belle against the world.