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NEWS RELEASE

Defending middleweight champ upended in Heavy Horse Pull



The Belgians of the Springbank Belgians rig, owned by Red Deer's Jason Weinberger, compete in the middleweight division of the Calgary Stampede's Heavy Horse Pull, presented by DundeeWealth, under the Big Top on Saturday night. Photo credit: Calgary Stampede

Calgary -- A test of strength became a game of inches Saturday night, and Dennis Weinberger came up 38 inches short.

With victories in four straight years, and five of the past six, Weinberger's two-horse New West Truck Centres outfit had been the heavy favourite entering Saturday night's middleweight final of the Calgary Stampede's Heavy Horse Pull, presented by DundeeWealth.

But Weinberger, like many of his competitors, encountered a weighty problem Saturday. When handlers added another 500 pounds' worth of concrete blocks to the weight sled, bringing it to 11,500 pounds, gravity kicked in as the five remaining teams

kicked off the 10th round of competition under the Big Top.

The Befus Construction rig of Bob McGowan, first in the order, managed to drag the sled 70 inches. From there, the Belgians and Percherons struggled gamely, but no one could match that distance as the sled dug deeper into the turf.

Weinberger's Belgian pair, Spike and Dillon, the last of five outfits, thrashed and heaved, but managed just 32 inches for second place at the world's richest Heavy Horse Pull.

"The sled just got progressively deeper," said Weinberger, of Cochrane, Alta., who collected \$2,500 as runner-up. "When we went up to set the hook, the ring was buried under the dirt. But what the heck. Nothing lasts forever. That's life."

The Stampede's middleweight division consists of teams that weigh a combined 3,001 to 3,500 pounds.

McGowan, of Lebanon, Ore., claimed a first-place cheque of \$3,000 in his first appearance at the Stampede's Heavy Horse Pull, presented by DundeeWealth. The Kesteven Cattle outfit of Randy Dodge, who hails from Albany, Ore., managed 28 inches at 11,500 pounds for third place and \$1,500.

"It was my lucky day," acknowledged McGowan, whose hooker Bill Martson, of Pullman, Wash., had pulled as a teamster at the Stampede for the past eight years before selling his outfit to McGowan. "If I'd been fourth or fifth in the order, I would have finished fourth or fifth. We just got lucky we were first out."

McGowan's middleweight pair, Belgians named Ace and Pat, tip the scales at a combined 3,419 pounds, and have won Heavy Horse Pull competitions across the United States in the heavyweight division. They're not exactly colts, but they get the job done.



"I don't know why, but they just click," said McGowan. "They're both 14 years old. These are their lower years, not their better years, but they've still got what it takes."

The Glover International Trucks unit, McGowan's second team in the middleweight final, tied for fourth place overall alongside the Jans Lowline Cattle rig of Ron Sebastian, from Lumsden, Sask.

The Stampede's Heavy Horse Pull, presented by DundeeWealth, concludes Sunday night at 7 p.m. under the Big Top with the big boys of the heavyweight division, whose teams weigh in at 3,500 pounds and more.

Last year, the Soderglen Ranches outfit out of Airdrie, teamstered by Stan Grad and pulled by Jim and Ben, set an outright Stampede record by pulling 13,000 pounds the entire 14 feet and then dragging 13,500 pounds 55 inches.

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