

AP Associated Press

New bionic hand uplifts team roper

Louisiana man awaits return to ring

By Janet McConnaughey Associated Press



In this Sept. 7, 2012, photo, Barry Landry, 56, of Lafayette, Louisiana, stands with his sorrel quarter horse, Barney, in New Iberia, Louisiana. The prosthetic arm shown in this photo was replaced Sept. 28 with a newer model, the Michelangelo Hand. (AP Photo/Advanced Arm Dynamics, Bob Stovall)

NEW ORLEANS — Barry Landry taught himself to rope cattle right-handed after a factory machine crushed his left hand. The amateur rodeo cowboy couldn't dismount and tie up calves fast enough after roping them, so he switched from calf-roping to team roping.

He doesn't know if his new bionic hand will let him switch back to left-handed calf-roping, but it's already doing something his last one couldn't: hold a plate without spilling anything.

Landry, 56, of Lafayette, learned how to use it last week at Advanced Arm Dynamics in Irving, Texas. With his previous prosthesis, "When you grab a plate, it wants to tip it upward," he said in a telephone interview Thursday.

The new one, a model called Michaelangelo, has a more flexible wrist and an opposable thumb that can touch the tip of any finger. The plate trick is thanks to another feature: a "key grip" between thumb and the side of a curved forefinger, as one holds a key.

Other prosthetics' opposable thumbs must be moved into position by the other hand, said prosthetist Rob Dodson.

This thumb is motorized and controlled, like the fingers and wrist, by tiny arm muscle movements.

The hands, including training in their use, cost \$80,000 to \$100,000, company spokeswoman Carol Sorrels said.

Landry said workers' compensation has paid for his rehabilitation and prosthetics since the accident on Jan. 7, 2010.

A plant manager at Acadiana Plastics, Landry was doing maintenance work on a mold for bottle caps when it accidentally closed on his hand with 190 tons of pressure.



Amateur rodeo roper Barry Landry (right) works with his new bionic hand with prosthetist Rob Dodson of Advanced Arm Dynamics, Irving, Texas. Landry thinks his new hand will make it easier to keep the final coil of rope on his left arm in team roping. (AP Photo/Advanced Arm Dynamics, Bob Stovall)

He was back at work in six months, but back in the saddle even sooner.

“I was tying things on my stump with Velcro so I could ride,” he said.

He sold one of his quarter horses soon after the accident but kept Black and sorrel Barney.

His first prosthesis, a hook, “kind of freaked them out,” he said. They got wide-eyed and extra-alert at the sound of his first artificial hand’s myoelectric motor — an earlier model by the same manufacturer, Otto Bock HealthCare of Vienna, Austria — but quickly got used to it.

His left hand is now his rein hand, holding the rope as it guides the horse. Advanced Arm Dynamics laminated the arm section on each myoelectric prosthetic with the brand on his horses — Landry’s initials inside a loop of rope — and he’s not shy about leaving it uncovered.

Landry estimates it was four or five months before he could throw the rope accurately right-handed and eight months before he could do so from a horse.

He gave up calf-roping, something he’d done since he was about 18. Once the lariat is around a calf’s neck, the competitor must dismount and tie three of its legs together.

Landry said he could do it with his previous hand, but was too slow for competition.

He’s been team roping for nearly a year, as the “heeler” who throws a loop under the legs of a steer after the “header” has lassoed its horns, neck, or neck and one horn.

Landry thinks the new hand will make it easier to keep the final coil of rope on his left arm. “That last coil has to stay stationary or it fouls your loop,” he said.

Can he use the new hand to throw a rope or quickly tie up a calf? “We’re going to try and see.”

But not immediately. There was a rodeo Saturday in Crowley.