

THE HISTORY OF RODEO

Professional rodeo evolved from a working lifestyle, and the cowboys who compete in today's events carry on the rugged tradition established by their eighteenth & nineteenth century predecessors. Life on the cattle trails produced a breed that became a living legend --- the American cowboy.

To succeed in the early West, cowboys had to develop their roping and riding abilities to a high level. As they honed these skills, their competitive spirits broadened as well. Wild West shows, such as those produced by the legendary Buffalo Bill, painted a colorful portrait of this hybrid of frontiersman and athlete. Challenges to determine who could rope the quickest calf or ride the wildest horse became common practice at day's end. Roping and riding contests were often staged in the nearest available corral or pasture. These friendly competitive matches among ranch hands evolved into the modern sport of professional rodeo. Today, PRCA rodeo evokes images of the early West with its contests between untamed horses and cattle and that independent breed --- the American Cowboy.

During the past century, rodeo has developed from casual, individual contests into a highly organized national sport. Cowboys first organized in 1936, calling their group the Cowboys' Turtle Association (CTA). In 1945, the CTA became the Rodeo Cowboys Association (RCA), and the sport of rodeo began to grow. By 1952, the RCA sanctioned more than 500 rodeos annually. In 1975, the name of the organization was changed to the "Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association" (PRCA), a more accurate name for what had become the largest and most prestigious sanctioning body in the history of rodeo.

Today the PRCA has over 9,000 cowboy members and each year sanctions more than 650 rodeos, which entertain an audience estimated to exceed 23 million. In addition, more than 40 million people annually enjoy the Wrangler Pro Rodeo Tour series on OLN, CBS, and ESPN2 cable TV networks. Total prize money exceeds \$34 million annually, and the Wrangler National Finals Rodeo in Las Vegas, Nevada, has grown into a more than \$5 million super series held each December to determine world champions in each rodeo event. The Wrangler NFR is also televised on the ESPN and ESPN2 TV networks.

BAREBACK BRONC RIDING

A bareback rider places himself in the middle of a 1,200 pound twisting, bucking tornado, and aims to make it through an 8 second ride without benefit of a saddle, reins or stirrups. His only handhold is on the leather-and-rawhide rigging placed around the horse just behind its shoulders. Judges award up to 50 points each for horse and rider. They watch for the bucking pattern and power of the horse, as well as the rider's strength, control and spurring action. As in all rough stock events, the rider is disqualified for being bucked off or touching himself or the animal with his free hand.

STEER WRESTLING

In steer wrestling, rodeo's most telling test of leverage and strength, a contestant attempts to topple a steer averaging three to five times the bulldogger's weight. With his "hazer" riding parallel to the steer to keep it running straight, the steer wrestler must catch up to the steer (which is given a head start), lean off his horse at top speed and secure a firm grip on the steer's horns. Once on the ground, the steer wrestler plants his feet, brings the steer to a stop and wrestles it to the ground. A rodeo judge stops time when the steer is on its side with all four feet pointing in the same direction. As in other timed events, a broken barrier will add 10 seconds to the competitor's time.

TEAM ROPING

Team roping is the only rodeo event where two cowboys compete as partners, sharing victory or defeat. The "header" ropes the steer's horns and rides to the left. Then the "heeler" goes to work, roping both of the steer's hind legs in one of the most difficult maneuvers in rodeo. The ropers must "dally" (wrap their ropes around the saddle horn) after their head and heel catches. Time stops when both horses are facing the steer with ropes dallied. A 10 second penalty is assessed for breaking the barrier, as well as a 5 second penalty if the heeler catches only one of the steer's hind legs.

SADDLE BRONC RIDING

Rodeo's classic event --- saddle bronc riding --- is an exercise in style and finesse that demands near perfect timing. To earn a score, a saddle bronc rider must remain aboard a pitching bronc for 8 seconds. And to earn a high score, he must ride with the grace and fluidity of a dancer. The cowboy uses a PRCA approved saddle with stirrups and a six foot braided rein which he holds in one hand only. Saddle bronc riders are disqualified if they touch themselves, the horse or their equipment with their free hand. A perfect saddle bronc ride (never yet achieved) would earn the contestant 100 points.

TIE-DOWN ROPING

Tie-Down roping, which can be traced directly to the ranch work of catching calves for branding or medical treatment, has evolved into one of professional rodeo's quickest and most exciting events. The calf gets a designated head start into the rodeo arena and must trip a barrier string before the cowboy and horse can begin their chase. A cowboy who "breaks the barrier" by leaving the roping box too soon is assessed a 10 second penalty. Once in the arena, the roper must "catch" his calf with a lariat, dismount and run to the calf, drop the 300 pound animal to the arena floor, gather three of the calf's legs, tie them together with a six foot "pigging" string and throw up his hands to signal the end of his run.

BULL RIDING

Bull riding is at once one of the most dangerous and one of the most popular events in professional rodeo. The bull rider weaves a flat-plaited rope around his gloved hand to help secure himself to the animal. As with the other riding events, 100 is a perfect score for an 8 second ride. The rider is disqualified for touching the animal, himself or his equipment during the ride.

WOMEN'S BARREL RACING

Barrel racing shows off a horse's agility and speed, as well as a rider's skill and control. Horse and rider speed around a cloverleaf pattern of three barrels, starting and finishing at the same line. Tipping over a barrel during her maneuvering will cost the barrel racer a 5 second penalty and running an incorrect pattern can lead to disqualification. Electronic timers are used to record elapsed time between the start/finish line in hundredths of a second.

RODEO BULLFIGHTERS

The bullfighter's duty is explained in the name of his specialty: He goes head to head with an ornery and dangerous bull, either to save a dismounted bull rider or to prove his own prowess and agility.

RODEO ANNOUNCERS

Another indispensable element in a professionally produced rodeo is the onsite rodeo announcer. These masters of ceremony welcome the spectators, introduce each event, call the action during the competition and add color commentary on the rodeo. Rodeo announcers, the voices of PRCA rodeos, are trained professionals dedicated to bringing the best entertainment possible to rodeo fans.

STOCK CONTRACTORS

Stated quite directly, rodeo wouldn't exist without the animals. The PRCA recognizes that simple fact and highly values the livestock that make rodeo one of the most exciting sports today. These animals are raised and cared for by stock contractors, specialized ranchers who make their livings providing stock and producing rodeos. Nearly 90 PRCA stock contractors provide the stock for more than 650 PRCA sanctioned rodeos each year. Rodeo livestock --- including the broncs, bulls, steers and calves --- receive constant care. The financial investment made by the stock contractor is quite substantial; he may own up to 600 head of broncs and bulls alone.

OTHER CONTRACT PERSONNEL

Vital to any rodeo's success is its team of key personnel, including pickup men, chute laborers, specialty acts, timers and rodeo secretaries. Many of these dedicated people work countless hours behind the scenes to keep a rodeo running smoothly.

RODEO COMMITTEES

PRCA sanctioned rodeos are held each year across the United States in more than 650 communities. Endless volunteer man-hours are expended by organizing committees in these communities to plan, coordinate and produce a professional rodeo. In many instances, local charities and civic projects benefit directly from the revenue generated by these community sponsored PRCA rodeos.