

Simple Rules Guide Today's Bull Riders

Rodeo is the least organized of all organized professional sports. It has no teams or leagues, no commissioner to rule with czar-like authority. It is a series of autonomous, individual contests, held wherever a committee can be gathered that wants to put one on and open to whatever cowboys want to enter.

Its professional athletes sign no contracts, draw no salaries, get no guarantees. They are free to compete wherever and whenever they please.

It is produced primarily by amateurs non-salaried committees of business men or civic leaders who put it on as a community venture.

But it's as big as college football or major league baseball, bigger than a long list of less attended spectator sports. And it's one of the very few major American sports that hasn't been losing attendance steadily the last few years.

To the average American, used to the well charted world of professional baseball or college football, the cowboy sport seems a trackless wilderness.

Actually, as much as it ever can be, rodeo is well organized and well regulated. The organizing influence is the non-profit Rodeo Cowboys' Association, with headquarters in Denver. The RCA sets the rules, approves the contests, names the champions, and, on such knotty problems as network TV rights, speaks for the sport as a whole.

Rodeos are divided roughly into two levels: RCA approved and non-approved. On the approved list are virtually all of the nation's major cowboy contests, from Madison Square Garden to the Cow Palace, from Calgary to San Antonio.

All told the RCA approves about 500 rodeos a year including ancient and perennial greats like Cheyenne, Pendleton and Salinas.

Frequently the approved rodeos are referred to as "professional" the unapproved contests as "amateur." The terms are misapplied. Any rodeo, because it pays prize money, is a professional contest. And there are just as many part-time contestants and once-a-year entries at the approved rodeos as the unapproved ones.

The only truly amateur rodeos are the inter-collegiate, high school and junior rodeos that pay no prize money.

As much as league lines can be drawn in rodeo, the contests approved by the association, regardless of their size, could be called the "major league." Their rules are all standard. Their prize lists and contest events have been passed on and approved. They are open to all RCA members including all the past and present world's champion cowboys.

And the prize money they pay off will be counted in points toward the world's championships of this season.

To the RCA which began as a contestant's organization, has fallen the responsibility of managing the sport on a national basis. The one other national outfit in the sport, the International Rodeo Management, is an association of rodeo committees working to improve their own contests through the pooling of experience and the exchange of ideas.

The IRM holds no sanction over its members, has no enforcement powers.

With its right of approval and suspension, the cowboys association works to rid the sport of its worst elements. Frozen out are the suitcase promoters of yesterday, who promised great profits for the sponsoring committee community, then skipped town with the gate receipts.

Also closely controlled are the would be rodeo burns, the cowboys who would pay their way around the country with rubber checks. The stiffest fines in the RCA rule book are reserved for contestants who don't meet their financial obligations.

The association also arranges group insurance for the competing cowboys, considered uninsurable before, and enforces a rule that absolves the management of all approved rodeos from any liability for injury to the contestants.

Speaking for the sport as a whole, the RCA maintains rela-

tions with such groups as humane societies and negotiates contracts for network television rights. Fearful of the detrimental effects too much live television would have on the box office of the approved rodeos, the organization limits national telecasts to two a year.

The cowboy directors have kept a wary eye on the declining gates of most other sports telecast on a regular basis. They point to the firm national attendance figures maintained by rodeo as proof of the effectiveness of their policy of preventing overexposure on TV.

Rodeo's major league drew attendance of 14 million in 1957. There's no way to estimate how many paid to see the unapproved cowboy contests, since there's no way even to count them.

But most observers seem to agree that the true amateur rodeos, produced at schools, by 4-H clubs, etc. and the so called amateur contests, would add another 10 million to the total.

The part time sport of the cowboy has gotten to be pretty big time.

Cowboy Garb Not Designed for Play

Kids Across Country Use It For Dress

The cowboy's boots, big hats and blue jeans have become, in the last generation, a dressup costume for kids across the country. But for the leather-tough twisters who enter the rodeo arena to match wits and muscles with the worst the wild stock has to offer, they are no playtime garb.

They are work clothes, the most practical outfit a cowboy can wear. They haven't changed essentially in four generations because, as far as the cowboys are concerned they can't be improved upon.

Each article is made the way it is for solidly utilitarian reasons. Take the jeans, still cut of durable blue denim, still riveted at points of strain as they have been for nearly a hundred years. They're tailored tight in the crotch, snug in the leg, and low at the waist, because this style is most comfortable in the saddle, least likely to ride up around the knees.

They're made of denim because that workaday fabric, more than any other, still looks reasonably neat after a man has been dumped in the dust or dragged across the arena by a runaway steer. Rodeo riders need pants the makers back with a promise of "a new pair if they rip."

The high heels of the boots, tapered at the back as a concession to easier walking, make it easier to hold a stirrup: the pointed toes make it easier to get a lost stirrup back. The tops are loose on the leg so a boot hung up in a stirrup can come off before it's wearer is dragged to death.

If the cowboys save money on the jeans (at less than \$5 per pair) they pay well for their boots, buying the best fit available. A good pair of work boots for competition will run \$40 or more. And many others in the arena, dress boots too scuffed to be worn for dress again, cost considerably more.

The competition of rodeo has hastened one evolution in the basic design however. In recent years calf ropers, who have to move fast on the ground, have taken to a flatter heel.

The big-brimmed hat is pure practicability, too. It's a sunshade, or, on other days, an effective umbrella to keep rain out of the neck opening of a poncho or saddle slicker. Only the ten gallon quality is unmitigated myth.

Cowboys, even old timers, never drank from their hats. They drank from the river—or straight from the bottle.

Open Class

In addition to the premium awards, the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben will be sponsoring premium awards in the open-class division on beef cattle and exhibits hall entries.

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Kids Getting into Today's Competition Prep, College Events Across Country

Rodeo, like other professional sports, these days, is drawing most of its future champions from a field unknown to the oldtime twister of a generation ago; the nation's high schools and colleges.

Ten years ago, if a youngster wanted to try his hand at rodeo he was welcome to do so - under adult rules at adult contests against adult competition. Few kids were eager to enter the lists under those terms and even fewer were able to make much of a showing.

But today, rodeo at the school level is a tough training ground, turning out polished performers who time and again have shown their talent to be as big as that of the big time pros.

Take Harley May, for example, the current president of the Rodeo Cowboys' Association and twice world's champion steer wrestler. At little Sul Ross State College in Alpine, Texas, May won a total of eight national intercollegiate championships before graduating in 1951.

Then, in 1952, his first full season as a pro, he not only won the world's steer wrestling championship, but set a record for single-season winnings in the event that stood until he broke it himself to win his second title in 1956.

Then there's Glen Franklin, who won the New Mexico State high school all around cowboy championship his senior year. The next year he turned pro and finished third for the world's calf roping championship. Last year, his second in the big time, he was runner-up for the title, roping better than any other pro in the country except five time champion Don McLaughlin.

Alvin Nelson proved by the way he won the 1957 saddle bronc riding championship - coming from way behind after early season injuries sidelined him for several months—that he's one of the very toughest twisters ever to sit an Association saddle.

Nelson learned his big-winning lick at high school rodeos. He won the national high school bronc riding championship in 1953. Three years later, as a pro, he placed fifth for the world's championship.

These days, rodeo for the youngsters is no informal, sandlot set-to. It is well organized on three levels: 1.) intercollegiate, 2.) high school, and 3.) junior.

At the college level, the National Intercollegiate Rodeo association is made up of local chapters or rodeo clubs on the campuses of about eighty central and western colleges and universities. NIRA membership cards are of two types, bodily stamped "RCA" or "amateur" across the face. Collegiate members holding the RCA cards may enter RCA rodeos without joining the association, in addition to entering their own intercollegiate contests.

Intercollegiate competition includes the standard RCA events, with a few extra events such as ribbon roping, goat tying, and barrel racing. In the eighty college rodeo clubs there are approximately 800 individual members.

In order to maintain a position on a collegiate rodeo club, the team members must maintain a scholastic average of C or better.

The NIRA champions are named each year by a point award system similar to that of the RCA, with points being tabulated for some sixty intercollegiate rodeos.

Below the collegiate level, rodeos are grouped into two associations with some overlapping—The American Junior Rodeo association and the National High School Rodeo association. The Nebraska prep rodeo is held each year at Harrison. This year a half dozen Holt youths competed and

Gayle Stevens of O'Neill won one of the events.

The NHSRA limits its member contestants to students in high school and approves high school rodeos in 13 states. The organization also sponsors a national high school championship rodeo, which was held in 1957 at Albuquerque.

The American Junior Rodeo association extends a little farther than the high school organization. All state and national high school rodeos are AJRA-approved and the two organizations have almost identical rules for the various events. The AJRA limits its members to under 20 years old

Gayer, Roland Bands Scheduled

There will be dancing both Wednesday and Thursday nights, August 20-21, following the rodeo performances.

The dancing will be at the American Legion ballroom in Chambers.

On Wednesday night it'll be Jesse Gayer and his six-piece orchestra, well-known in this area. The Gayer band headquarters at Grand Island and features an appealing ballroom program.

Forrest Roland and his seven-piece orchestra will be playing Thursday night. The Roland organization hails from Broken Bow.

Tough-Luck 'Pokes to Be Remembered

Levi-Strauss & Co. will issue three award certificates in connection with the rodeo.

Certificates will be awarded to competitors as follows:

1. First "no-time" in calf roping.
2. First "no-time" in bulldogging.
3. Hard-luck cowboy.

There will be a jackpot purse for the girl's cloverleaf barrel race.

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