

Something New Added to Rodeo

Officials Now Wear White Stripes

Something new has been added to the Holt county rodeo this year. You'll notice the contest officials—the cowboy judges—are obvious in their new uniforms,

vests tailored in bright black and white stripes.

The judges have been there for years, but now, for the first time, the spectators can see who they are and what they're doing.

If you like to boo the officials of sports contest, it has never been easier in rodeo. If you'd simply rather know better what's going on, well, that's easier too.

The cowboy judges rule the arena in all contest events. They are the president, supreme court, and congress all rolled into one.

During the riding events, you'll find them posted in front of the

chutes, one on either side, as the horses and bulls are turned out. They decide who wins—and it's strictly a matter of opinion.

The horse (or bull) is scored from 65 to 85 points, mostly on how hard he bucks. The cowboy, if he qualifies, is marked from one to 20 points, on how well he rides and spurs.

Scoring the ride requires not only a sharp eye and a sound knowledge of the rules, but also a solid background of experience in rodeo. The judge must be competent to tell which are the hardest-bucking horses, which riders are really spurring and which are just swinging their heels and missing.

That's why rodeo is the only big time spectator sport in the world that has no professional officials. The rules require every judge to be an active rodeo contestant and the judges for the bigger rodeos must be approved in advance as competent by the Rodeo Cowboys' Association.

The judge's judgment of a ride is somewhat simplified if the rider disqualifies. He can do this by bucking off—an elimination obvious to the highest row of the bleachers. But the second most common reason for disqualification or a "goose egg" as it's called is much harder to spot.

In the bronc riding events, the rider must spur the horse over the shoulders on the first jump out of the chute. Whether he does it properly is sometimes hard to see from the stands. But if you see either judge turn his back on the ride before it is over, you can be sure the cowboy has "missed him out."

In the timed events, calf roping and steer wrestling, you'll see one judge mounted in the arena, the other posted near the chute from which come the calves and steers. The man in the arena is the flagman, who passes on the legality of the catch, the throw or the tie, and indicates time to the timers by bringing his striped flag down sharply.

If you see him waving the flag wig-wag fashion the contestant gets no time and has disqualified on that head of stock. The other judge is the scoreline judge, whose responsibility is to see that the stock gets a fair start out of the chute and that the cowboy doesn't break the barrier, the rope is held across the roper's and dogger's box until the released calf or steer has been given a sufficient head start.

Rodeo judges are well paid, getting from \$25 to \$100 per performance. But, surprisingly enough, there are seldom any long lines of applicants. In the first place, it's a high pressure job. Often several hundred dollars rides on the judge's opinion of whether one horse

bucked just one point better than another.

Besides that, most contestants would rather take the chance of winning more than the judge's salary in prize money.

One fairly frequent source of judges is the constantly changing group of cowboys who are temporarily too crippled to compete. The striped vests, crutches and slings are pretty common equipment.

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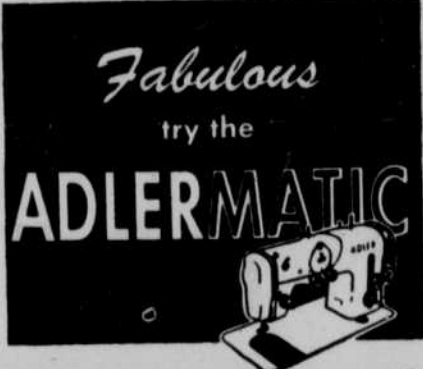
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