



Steer wrestler wastes not an instant in his violent race against the stopwatch.

Steer Wrestler Brakes Steer with Boot Heels

One of the most important things about judging a rodeo is knowing all the rules about the event. Rodeo, like other sports, has its share of unforeseen events that require a huddle of officials on the field.

Steer wrestling, for example, can be pretty routine. The dogger rides after the steer from behind the barrier as in calf roping. He has a hazer who rides on the other side of the steer to keep it from running straight. The bulldogger, as he's called by the cowboys, drops out of the saddle onto the horns, brakes the steer to a stop by digging in with his boot heels, then twists him down. It's a timed event and the quickest time wins.

Nothing difficult about judging an event like that. But what happens if the cowboy misses the steer altogether? Or if the steer gets out of the arena? Or if the dogger loses his grip and

takes out after the escaping steer on foot?

Now let's see. Where's the rule book?

The rules say the steer, once he's crossed the scoreline, belongs to the contestant regardless of what happens. Thus if an over-enthusiastic spectator downs the critter with a well-aimed leap from the seats, the cowboy gets another turn at the chutes.

But if the arena belongs to the contestant, the stands are forbidden him.

Should the steer escape the arena, time is stopped, the steer is returned to the chutes and turned out again. The watches are started where they were stopped. The dogger can't wrestle the steer down in the aisles or the runways under the stands.

If the dogger misses the steer on his jump, like the calf roper

he gets another chance. But after crashing into the ground full tilt from the back of a galloping horse, often the cowboy doesn't feel like taking another jump just now, thank you. So the rules require the field judge to ask him and the "dogger must reply at once".

To get another jump, the cowboy must remount his horse and make another run. He can't

take more than one step on foot to catch the steer he's lost.

"Houlihanning", jumping on a steer from the saddle in such a way as to knock it down, is illegal and if the judge feels a contestant does it intentionally, the cowboy can be disqualified.

Occasionally the steer will stumble accidentally as the dogger makes his jump. When that happens the cowboy must let the steer regain all four feet and twist it down again.

Stopping the steer and then throwing it must be two distinct movements. Should the contestant down the critter before it is brought to a full stop, the field judge will not flag time until the steer is let up and thrown properly. In the violent action, which may take longer than a few seconds from chute to stopwatch, judging this important distinction requires the practiced eye of an experienced contestant.

Also outlawed is the practice

of "pegging" — sticking a horn into the ground to gain leverage.

But the most crucial decision the steer wrestling judge must make — and the one he faces most often — is calling time on the fall. The field judge drops his flag only when the steer is flat on its side, with all four feet straight and free, pointing the same way as the head.

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