

Rodeo clown entertains, saves injured bull riders

By John Ortmann

Miles Hare is a nine-year veteran of rodeo bullfighting. After suffering a broken hand, broken ribs and numerous knee injuries, he is at the top of his profession. He is 22 years old.

The Gordon, Neb. native said that last year the top 15 bull riders in the world chose him to be the clown at the professional National Finals Rodeo in Oklahoma City. He was the youngest man ever selected to serve there as arena comedian and frequent lifesaver.

Hare was in Lincoln April 7-9 to clown at the 11th Annual University of Nebraska Intercollegiate Rodeo. Although he is demanded nationally to work professional rodeos, he said he enjoys college rodeos as much as when he was an amateur.

"I come back to UNL because it's a good rodeo," he said, explaining this was his fourth trip. "I enjoy college rodeos because I'm among my peers."

He began fighting his father's string of rodeo bulls when he was 13. As a performer he participated in high school rodeos, where he once placed second in national bareback bronc riding competition.

Hare said his duties in the arena go beyond clowning it up for the benefit of the audience. Few people understand how a good clown can help the bull riders get a better ride, he said.

Before each ride he talks with the stock contractor or someone familiar with the bull about how to produce a spinning and therefore higher scoring ride. He explained that he dashes in front of the bull as it is released from the chute and begins to circle it. The bull, intent on stomping someone, follows the clown and thus begins to spin, at which point a good clown withdraws, Hare said.

The clown's most important duties begin when the ride ends, either by a buck-down or the blowing of the eight-second whistle. Hare said a good clown will stay back and let the cowboy try to free himself.

Once the cowboy is on the ground, the clown should instantly appear between him and the bull to give the often shaken rider a chance to escape, Hare said.

The most dangerous moment in rodeo occurs when a bull rider is bucked off on the side opposite the hand he holds on with, he said. When this happens the cowboy often becomes hung up in his rigging and is left dangling at the plunging bull's side.

The best way to free the cowboy, Hare said, is to draw the bull into a spin away from the rider. The centrifugal force usually pops the rider's hand free, he explained. If the rider is unconscious or otherwise out of control the clown must mount the bull and untie the hand itself.

Hare performed this feat at the UNL rodeo and received a bad ankle bruise in the process. He worked the remaining two performances in a leg splint in addition to the knee brace he usually wears.

In spite of his broken bones and bad knee, Hare said he never has been seriously injured. His experience has produced what he calls a healthy fear for the bulls but no paranoia. He said paranoia was the major reason for rodeo clowns quitting the business.

"I think if you don't get scared, you're not human," he said. "I'm afraid when I'm down under a bull or one has me hurt."

"It's probably as much mental stress as physical," he said. "If I ever start getting scared before the performances, I'll have to quit."

Hare said the job holds for him a mixed attraction of love and money.

"Sure, I'm in it for the money," he said, explaining that he receives as much as \$2,000 for working a rodeo such as Fort Worth's.

"But I love it also. I used to fight my father's bulls and get horned for nothing."

"I've always dreamed of being the very best at something, even if it's tiddly winks," he said. "I'm not the best, but I'm working on it."

Life on the road can be depressing, Hare said, but he does not consider quitting.

"Rodeo is all I've ever done," he explained. "That's the only money I've ever made."

"I would like to do it year-round until I'm crippled, and I'm not planning on getting crippled."

Theft investigation continues

University Police have no leads in the investigation of approximately \$180 stolen Wednesday from the Nebraska Union Bakery, according to one University Police spokesman.

Assistant Union Director Frank Kuhn

said the money was not taken to the bank by one of the Union employees as it was suspected Wednesday night.

"We think someone reached over the counter and took the cash box with the money," Kuhn said.



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