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# Official says rodeos gaining appeal

By Dionne Searcey  
Senior Editor

Cowboys and cowgirls have been competing in rodeos for years, but the events now are harnessing a lot of popularity, an official said.

"There are more rodeos now than ever," George Pfeiffer, a professor of agricultural economics and faculty adviser for the UNL Rodeo Club, said.

The World's Toughest Rodeo, a professional event, comes to Pershing Auditorium Friday through Sunday.

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln Rodeo Club will hold its annual rodeo April 9 through 11, he said. The event will include participants from many upper Midwest states, Pfeiffer said.

Sid Mignery, a team roper in the UNL Rodeo Club, said the sport has made some technological advances, but its roots were in the past.

"It still has old-fashioned values," he said.

Mignery said one reason for the sport's popularity gain was the improvement in quality of rodeos.

"There are better contestants and better stock," he said.

Pfeiffer said rodeos were gaining popularity even in countries that didn't have many country-western traditions.

He said the UNL Rodeo Club traveled to Japan in 1989 to perform.

Some participants have been involved in rodeos all their lives, Pfeiffer said.

A few of the kids that compete have been doing this since they've been pretty small," he said.

Sid Mignery is one such competitor. He grew up on a ranch. Mignery, a senior agricultural business major, said he learned the fundamentals of team roping at home.

"I grew up with it. That's what we have to do to yearlings," he said.

Mignery said he was practicing

to compete in the UNL rodeo in April.

The UNL rodeo will include events such as bull riding, break-away calf roping, steer wrestling, barrel racing and goat tying, Pfeiffer said. He said the rodeo was fun for contestants and entertaining for the crowd.

"It's a fun, entertaining, wholesome sport. People enjoy the action, the color and the excitement," Pfeiffer said.

He said the rodeo animals were cared for and well-fed. They must be kept in top condition so they will perform well, Pfeiffer said.

"If we abused our animals, we wouldn't have a rodeo," he said.

Sometimes accidents happen, though, Pfeiffer said.

"Any event where people or animals are putting out their maximum effort, there are going to be accidents. It's true in all sporting events.

"We do our best to see that they're not hurt," he said.

# Nebraska animal welfare group protesting cattle use in rodeos

By John Payne  
Senior Reporter

The return of professional rodeo to Lincoln this weekend, along with college rodeo April 11, has reignited the controversy over the use of cattle for entertainment.

The Greater Nebraska Animal Welfare Society, an organization concerned with the humane treatment of animals, opposes the use of cattle in rodeos.

Last year, about 40 members of GNAWS picketed the Nebraska State Fair Grounds during the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Rodeo Association's annual competition. The group also has protested during the River City Round-Up, a yearly rodeo at Ak-Sar-Ben in Omaha.

"People like to claim that it (rodeo) is a tradition, and that it's something that has always been done," Marcia Andersen, a GNAWS board member, said.

"It might be tradition, but so was slavery. So were a lot of things that needed to be abolished. As far as entertainment goes, I think it's really akin to bull fights."

Among the traditional rodeo events that Andersen finds "especially cruel" is calf roping. According to Andersen, electric prods often are used to force calves out of chutes during the event. Last year, during a GNAWS videotaped calf roping event at Ak-Sar-Ben, a calf's neck was broken, she said.

## Cowboys

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shoes. They might be doing a form of country swing, but it's hard to say. They're just not cowboys.

No hats hanging from the ceiling beams here, instead, lanterns, a saddle, yet another wagon wheel, a bale of hay and a horse blanket.

No cowboys in sight, but they must come here sometimes. There's cowboy-type clothes everywhere, from the posters to the walls, on

"We taped it to show people that this does happen," Andersen said. "It doesn't happen each time a calf gets roped, but why place an animal in that situation?"

Mike Schram, a member of the UNL Rodeo Association, said he grew up riding horses and roping calves in Springfield. He said concerns about the safety of rodeo animals were unwarranted.

"I've been doing it for a long time," Schram said. "And I've never seen a situation where an animal has been seriously injured or mistreated."

"We do everything we can, including (putting) protective wraps on the animals' horns, to prevent injuries."

Although rodeo organizers usually consult veterinarians to ensure that animals are being treated humanely, Andersen said she thought the precautionary steps didn't go far enough.

"It's really kind of a Band-Aid approach to the whole thing," she said. "It's more for the public's benefit — because there has been a lot of outcry — than for the animals."

Andersen said she thought it was possible for cowboys to be humane.

"I like cowboys," she said. "I think they're pretty neat, actually. We're not against them, we're just against this outdated tradition."

Maybe the cowboys aren't missing, maybe they are here in disguise — hiding from the stereotypes that have been created for them.

The bartender and his partner are gone. A different couple has taken their place. They are dressed more the part: Wranglers, boots and bolo ties.

They look like they're practicing a routine. They look like they'll win. Wonder what the prize is.

Andersen said it was difficult to change public opinion on the treatment of animals in Nebraska, where cattle outnumber people. Still, Andersen said she continually was surprised by the way Nebraskans viewed the matter.

"It's funny," she said. "We get a lot more thumbs up than you might think. I've talked to ranchers, and surprisingly, a lot of them don't like rodeos. They think it's wrong. They tell me that they would never treat animals like that on the range."

Andersen said certain rodeo events, such as stylized riding competitions, did not draw protests from animal rights organizations, such as GNAWS. And, she said her group was encouraged by recent efforts to "tone down" rodeos.

Andersen said college rodeo organizers were considering using "break away" ropes for calf roping events. Such ropes are supposed to be more humane.

Plans to picket this year's UNL Rodeo Association competition, April 11-13, still are tentative, Andersen said.

"We simply believe that a lot of the things that go on at rodeos are unnecessary," she said. "And assuming that these things do need to be done, they should be done on the range. Why make it entertainment?"

Made the way to the last stop of the night. The Prospector, 640 W. Van Dorn. The name is promising, so then is the sign — it has a western look to it, like a lariat or some such ranch thing. But the parking lot is empty, except for what looks like a commercial truck. Not the sort a cowboy would drive.

Can't hear any music, the lights are off. Door is locked, the bar is closed.

Guess the cowboys didn't go out tonight.



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