

# Professional bullfighter fights pain for profession

**GINES** from page 9

booking events as far in advance as 1999.

Watching him from the stands, his girlfriend said Gines is a born athlete who loves his work despite the punishment.

"I can't tell you all the times he's been hurt," she said. "He got kicked in the face last October and the next night a bull horned him while he was trying to get a cowboy out from under a bull."

In the arena, Gines is all feet and face paint. Bedecked in soccer cleats, an oversized pair of patched and tattered denim shorts (he keeps them on with a pair of suspenders) and a polka-dot polyester shirt, Gines looked like a living insult to "Hee-Haw."

"We look a little silly," he said when he was painting his nose, "but our job is pretty serious."

Gines isn't exaggerating. Bullfighters, whose main function is to distract bulls so thrown cowboys can safely get away, risk life and limb every time they jump into the arena. But, believe it or not, this isn't the dangerous part of their job. Bullfighters are famous for an event called "freestyling," which involves taking on the bull one-on-one.

The bullfighter tries to catch the bull's attention to provoke him to give chase. The fighters try to outmaneuver the bull while engaging in stunts like jumping over its head and slapping it on the nose.

It was a mistimed jump over a bull's head two weeks ago that resulted in Gines' fractured ribs.

Friday night the thin fighter seemed limber but nervous in the arena as he threw his straw hat at bucking bulls and then nimbly led them away from thrown cowboys.

But being nervous is a life instinct, according to Gines.

"If I ever quit being nervous I'm done fighting bulls," he said. "That's when I'll be hurt bad, bad, bad."

But being nervous didn't seem to help Friday. It was during the freestyle event that Gines hit the fence with bone-crushing force. As his face twisted in pain, Marcie shot out of her seat in the audience and cowboys lifted him out of the arena.

Gines had just separated his fractured ribs.

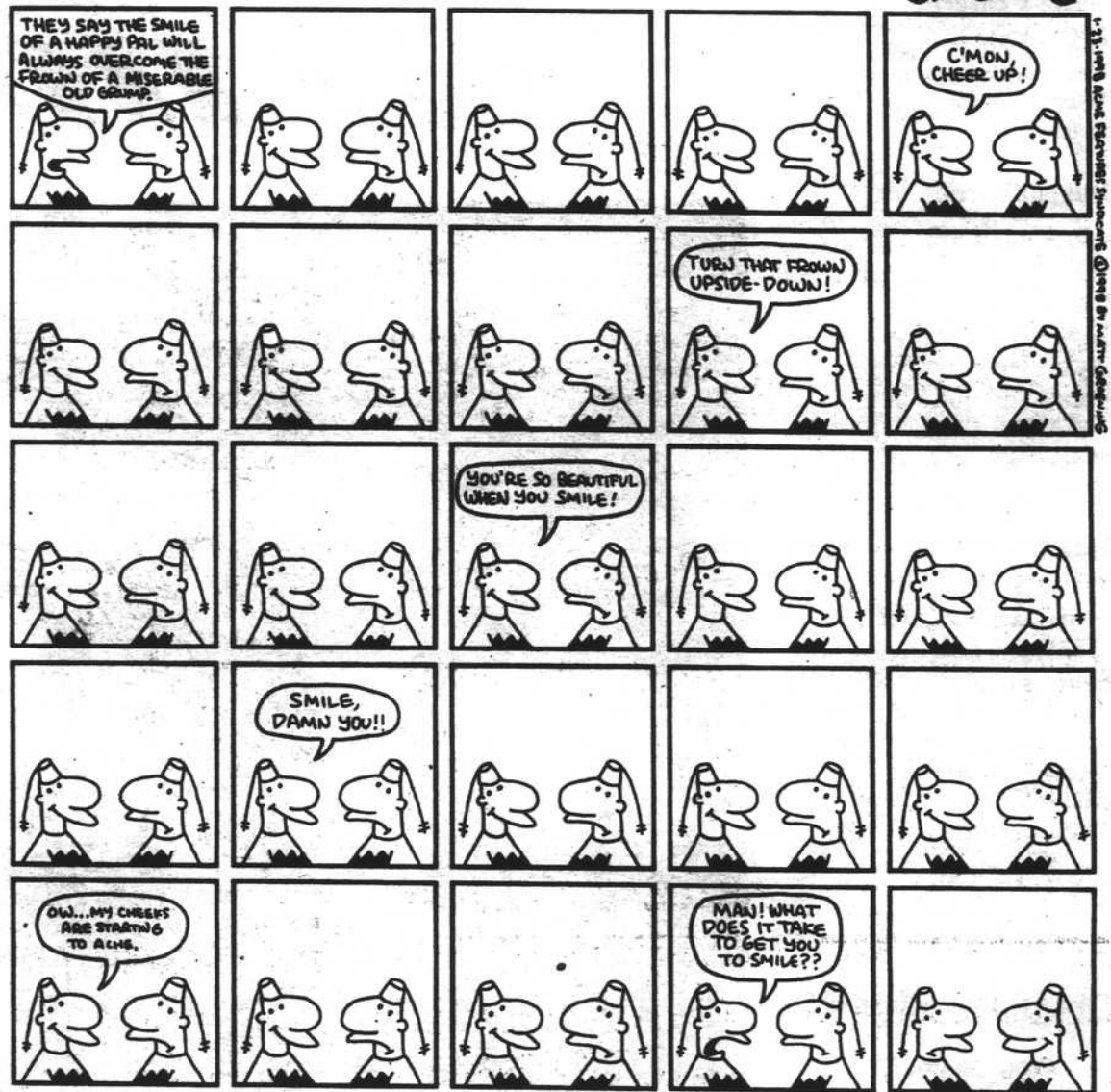
When he will return to the ring is

uncertain, but his dedication to the sport of bullfighting and the life of the rodeo isn't.


"I think he should be a bullfighter," Marcie said as she watched him leap away from a snorting bull. "But that's all he's done and it's made him who he is."

"I wouldn't ever want to change that."

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