

Rodeoing is one of America's roughest sports

By DANA McNABB

Take a handful of cowboys and cowgirls, their diligently-trained horses, an arena and a couple of officials to run the show and you have got yourself one of the most popular and roughest sports America has ever claimed.

It's the sport of rodeo. Rodeo has come a long way from its beginnings in the days of the cattle drive. Cowboys would seek entertainment during the long cattle hauls between cities and bet on which cowboy could ride a certain bronc the longest or which hand could better an already established time record in roping a calf.

The adventure, the boastfulness and the freedom linked with rodeo still exist, but, like the West the sport began in, rodeo has refined and organized to its present-day form.

Rodeo is organized in three national associations of rodeo: The Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association, The International Rodeo Association and the National Intercollegiate Rodeo Association (NIRA), the latter being a college-ranking association.

The NIRA is divided into ten regions representing the United States, with Texas A&M in the Southern Region. Each school represented in the NIRA has a rodeo team consisting of at least six men and three women, one for each event in rodeo.

The nine events in NIRA rodeo include the six men's events of steer wrestling (bulldogging), team roping, calf roping, bullriding, saddle bronc riding and bareback bronc riding; and the three women's events of barrel racing goat tying and break-away roping.

These collegiate teams compete in regional rodeos throughout the season and accumulate points from each rodeo, for both individual status in all events and for the women's teams and men's teams from each school. At the end of the season, the top two men's teams, the top two women's teams, the top two individual winners in each event and the all-around winners from each region participate in the NIRA finals in Bozeman, Montana.

Sam Houston State University and Texas A&M, number one and two respectively in the Southern Region in 1975-76, traveled to Bozeman this summer where the Aggie men's team placed eighth nationally and Sam Houston's women

team captured third nationally. This was the fourth consecutive year that A&M has competed in the national finals, taking fourth place in 1973 and tenth in 1975.

The A&M team was composed of Daryl Atkins, Johnny Powell, Cody Dutton, Mike Cox, Jerry Hayes, Rodney Jones, John Truchitt, Pete Gaston, Kay McMullan, Linda Fletcher and Marilyn Chesser. Cox was the region champion this year in bullriding. Hayes, the president of the rodeo club, placed third in the region in steer wrestling in 1973 and fourth in 1976.

These cowboys and cowgirls are the top A&M entries of the nine events of NIRA rodeo. These events differ little from rodeo in the other associations, but a few rules are changed to better fit the college situation.

Calf Roping

Calf roping requires a cowboy, a horse, a rope and a calf. The cowboy sets his horse up in a box or a fenced-in area with the open side facing the arena. A calf is in the pen alongside the rope's box. Upon signal from the judge, the calf is let out of the chute by another cowboy. Mounted on his horse, the cowboy proceeds to rope the calf. If the barrier is broken, the cowboy gets no time. The barrier is a device which gives the calf a pre-determined headstart. It is a light rope held tight by a coil spring and is latched across in front of the roper and his horse. When the calf crosses the line marking the headstart, it releases the barrier. If the roper rides through the barrier before it is released, he is assessed a ten-second penalty.

The roper may catch the calf any way he can—over the head, around the middle, even by a leg. However, he must let go of the loop when he throws it and rope must hold on the calf until the cowboy can get his hands on him.

The cowboy must cross and tie any three legs, with any knot he likes, then snap his hands away from the tie string to signal for time. The mounted field judge's flag then drops down to signal time to stop. The calf must remain tied for about six seconds after the cowboy has remounted his horse. If the calf struggles free during that time, that cowboy goes home with no time. This is a game of quickness with a good start out of the box and a fast horse being important.

Team Roping

Like calf roping, team roping requires skill and good team work because two ropers have the chore in this sport of roping a steer around the horns and heels. One cowboy is called the header (and, as you might guess, ropes the head of his specialty) and the other is the heeler. The header must first rope the steer's head before the heeler can get his shot at the heels. If the rope is too far up on the legs or upon the back of the calf, or if the heeler ropes only one leg, then the contestants are awarded no time. If the header hangs only one horn or his rope goes back past the calf's front legs the team has no time.

Bareback Bronc Riding

Bareback bronc riding consists of a cowboy, a bronc and the bareback rigging (a smooth surcingle, or band of leather with a handhold in the center). The cowboy has no reins, no stirrups—just the handle.

The rigging is cinched to the horse and the contestant is allowed to rub his handhold with resin to improve his grip. On the bronc's first jump out of the chute, the cowboy must "mark him out," by spurring the horse over the points of the shoulders until the animal's front hooves hit the ground. If he fails to do this, he is disqualified. The rider is also disqualified if he bucks off before the signal sound or if he touches the bronc with his free hand.

Both the horse and rider are judged—the horse on how hard he bucks and the rider on how well he keeps in spurring control. In this event, the cowboy gets credit only for spurring over the points of the shoulders. This is done by the jerking motion with the knees, leaning back off the handhold.

Saddle Bronc Riding

As in bareback bronc riding, in saddle bronc riding the cowboy and horse are judged separately, and the scores of the two are added together to get the score for the ride.

The cowboy earns his marking in saddle bronc riding for his command of the action and how well he spurs. In time with the leaps of the horse, he spurs forward against the horse's shoulders, then back to his saddle (looking as if he were spurring the back of the saddle). If he fails to keep his spurs over the point of the horse's shoulders through the first jump out of the chute, he is disqualified. He is also disqualified if he changes hands on the rein, loses a stirrup or touches the horse, the rein or the saddle with his free hand.

Bull Riding

Because bull riding requires a matching of one cowboy against a ton of heaving dynamite, the bullriders have the simplest set of rules to follow. All the cowboy can use to hang on the bull is a loose rope without knots or hitches, held around the bull simply by the pressure of the rider's grip. The rider is not required to spur the animal at all, but if he is able to spur, it will earn him extra points on his ride. The ride must be made with one hand; the other is held free. The ride is a qualified one as long as the riding hand is on any part of the bull rope—and the cow-

boy hasn't hit the ground—when the whistle blows to stop the time.

Bulldogging

Bulldogging, or steer wrestling, is done with a cowboy, his horse, a steer and a hazer (a mounted cowboy who guides the steer against the side of the contestant). The "dogger" leans to the side of his horse on which the steer is and grabs the horns while still mounted and running. He slides off his horse, holding onto the horns, and stops the steer. He then twists the neck, forcing the steer down. The animal is considered down only when it is lying flat on its side on the ground with all four feet and head straight.

Barrel Racing

The women's barrel racing is a sport of timeliness and intricacy as the cowgirl races her horse around a cloverleaf pattern with three barrels outlining the pattern. The cowgirl must follow the set path and she is disqualified if she breaks the pattern. She is also disqualified if she knocks over one of the barrels. After completing the pattern, the cowgirl "brings her horse home" by racing to the end of the arena where she began her pattern.

Goat Tying

In the sport of goat tying, a goat is tied around the neck with a rope and staked a minimum of 50 yards from the starting point. The cowgirl rides her horse to a point near the goat, dismounts, throws the goat to the ground and ties any three feet of the animal. A leather string or a pigging string (the same as used in calf roping) is used to tie the goat. The cowgirl must then stand back three feet from the goat before the judge will start the five second time limit in which the goat's legs must remain tied. Should the contestant's horse contact the goat or rope, the cowgirl will be fined ten seconds; if the goat should break away because of the fault of the horse, she will also be disqualified.

Break-away Roping

Break-away roping uses the same format as calf roping, but the cowgirl's rope is not knotted to the saddle horn. The rope is tied to the saddle horn with a string or ribbon and once the rope is around the calf's head, the pull instantly breaks the string and the rope flies free. This signals the judge to stop the time for that cowgirl.

These nine events aren't all a rodeo has to offer. There are ever-famous rodeo clowns who serve a multi-purpose of entertaining an audience, but more importantly serve as a life-saver to an emboldened bull rider who might need them. There are also many officials, announcers, secretaries, clockers (whose job is to run the time and calves), and there might even be a country and western band with out steel guitar and fiddle. Anyone that has ever been to a rodeo remembers the way each traditionally begins — the grand entry playing all the contestants and horses; the Pledge of Allegiance; the silent arena with "A Cowboy's Prayer."

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Limited use plan studied for parks

AUSTIN — With an estimated six million people expected to visit Texas state parks this summer, parks personnel of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department have prepared for overcrowded conditions and the possibility of turning away visitors.

Altogether, some 15 million people will visit Texas state parks this fiscal year, according to P&WD projections. Inherent problems in coping with overcrowded camping grounds at many parks during the summer have resulted in the implementation of controlled and limited visitation at many units of the state park system.

Not many years ago, it would have seemed inconceivable to deny people access to a state park because of overcrowding. That is no longer the case.

Overuse of both facilities and natural resources in parks has led to a procedure to limit and control the number of vehicle and/or camping units to the number of designated campsites.

This summer parks division personnel instituted such controls at some of the parks where use exceeds capacity. Included are Pedernales Falls, Inks Lake, McKinney Falls, Galveston Island, Huntsville, Stephen F. Austin and portions of Bastrop State Parks.

Maintenance and operation problems resulting from facility overuse include: partial failure of sewer systems each summer from overloading, electrical failures, water shortages, solid waste disposal problems and abnormal decline in the condition of the facilities.

Environmental degradation has increased proportionately with the extensive damage to ground level vegetation — herbs, shrubs, tree seedlings and other low-growing plants. Soil compaction and erosion in some cases has shortened greatly the life span of mature trees.

A renovation project at Inks Lake State Park has included the sectioning off and delineating of individual camp sites.

"We installed control barriers and delineated each site in an effort to limit and control the number of people and vehicles to correspond to the carrying capacity of the facilities," says Johnny Buck, park operations and maintenance chief.

Buck noted this type of system gradually will be installed at other parks around the state. Summer-time and weekend holiday periods, beginning with Easter and running through Labor Day, are the heaviest visitation periods, Buck said.

"We are attempting to design parks to let people enjoy the facilities, whether they stay in a motor home or a one-man pup tent, while still preserving the park's integrity," Buck said.

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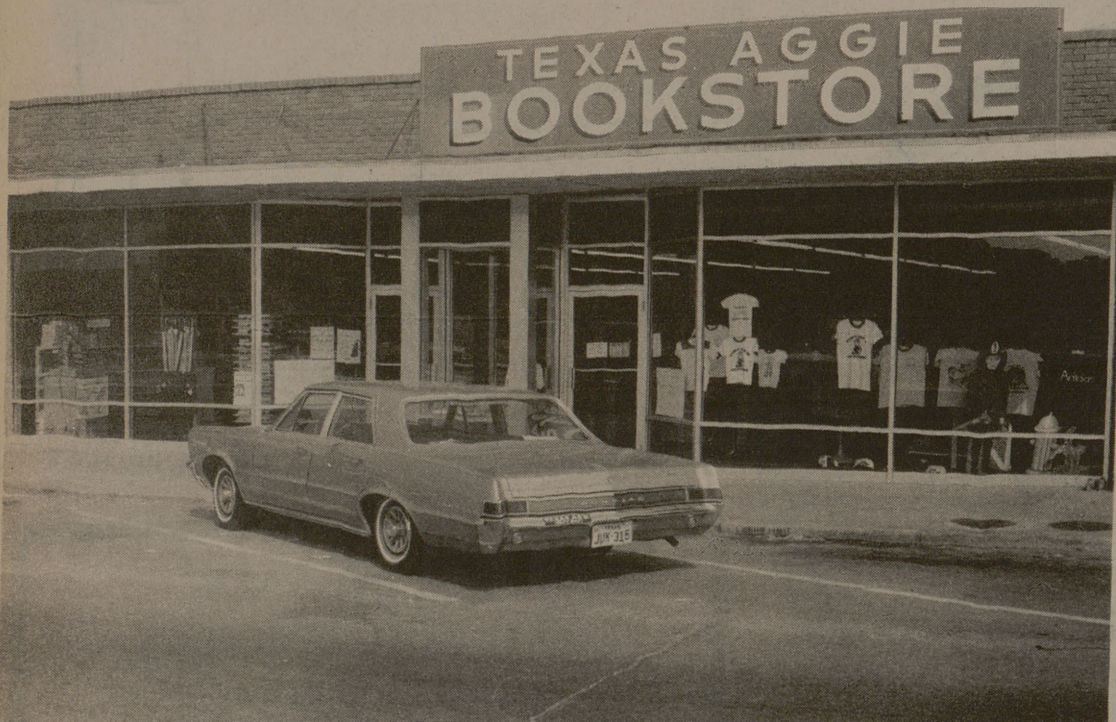


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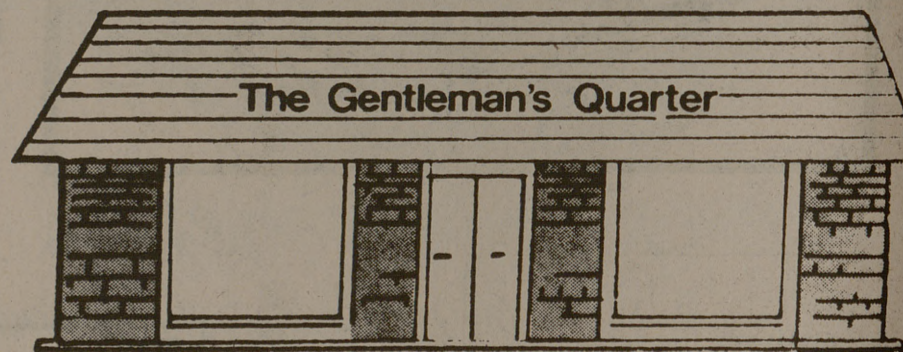
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