

the sports

Renk risks life in bullring

Houston youth's life full of bull

United Press International
MEXICO CITY — It is amazing to watch the change that comes over a 25-year-old David John Renk when he faces a 700-pound wild bull doing its best to jab its sharp horns into his body.

On the street, the blond, Houston youth walks in a permanent slouch, his gangly 6-foot, 130-pound frame bent over like a parenthesis while his face breaks into the shy and easy smile of an average American high school junior.

But in a bullring, in his glittering arena's "traje de luces," his body goes elegantly stiff and his face becomes a mass of harsh angles, his square jaw jutting out as his eyelids hood light blue eyes.

His feet planted together in the blood-stained sand, David sets a heavy hand gracefully on his left hip and arches out his stomach to trigger the charge by the black bull in front of him, a "runt" at 700 pounds.

Twisting his thin body like a piece of licorice, David leads the bull past him with a classically drawn-out sweep of the red cloth in his right hand, finishing the series of passes with a blinding swirl of the cape.

With the haughtiness that most Spanish and Mexican bullfighters show with but which few Americans ever muster, David turns a stiff back on the bull and struts to center ring to acknowledge the crowd's applause.

"I don't know why I change in the arena," David says later. "Bullfighting is an art. You can't explain what it feels like to get out there in front of a bull."

From his conversation, it's obvious David has never questioned his love for bullfighting. It has made him the youngest American admitted to the Mexican union of professional novilleros — those who fight and kill bulls younger than the four years required for full "matadores."

With a gentle shove from dad Fred, a Houston businessman who in his youth fought in a few novilladas and now writes for a bullfighting magazine, David is well on his way to his "alternativa," the ceremony where he earns the right to kill full-grown bulls, his "doctorate in tauromachy."

Fred Renk took his son to his first bullfights when David was 2 years old and the boy grew up around bulls and the men who kill them "like other American kids grew up around football and baseball."

"When he'd go to grammar school, he didn't take cap guns or stuff like that. He had a little red muleta and a wooden sword and during recess he'd get the other kids to charge," Fred said.

Since his first professional novillada in 1977, David has appeared in 14 corridas and cut 12 ears as rewards while missing only a few days at Cypress Fairbanks High School in a Houston suburb.

His last novillada was in a tiny ring before a small crowd in Chimalhuacan, a town of ruddy ruts and a cornfield away from Nezahualcoyotl, Mexico City's worst slum.

David appeared unnaturally calm as he snaked his limbs into his skin-tight green matador's suit with heavy gold embroidery, even joking that

the small crowd was all right because "there'll be no hail of rocks."

But his face hardened slowly as he paraded into the ring flanked by the three other novilleros of the day, including Tracy Biser, a 19-year-old Houston youth making his first appearance as a professional killer of novillos.

The face broke into a grimace momentarily as David's one bull of the afternoon sauntered into the ring — a jumpy black animal that was obviously cowardly and had learned in a previous caping to charge not cloth but man.

His jaw jutting out another quarter-inch, David walked to center ring and calmly called to the bull, shuffling slowly toward it on stiff, spindly legs while shaking the cloth on his right hand to provoke a charge.

Again and again the bull charged, each time following the cloth David swept gracefully from left to right

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and then toward his back in an elegant twist to bring the animal into position for the next charge.

A couple of show-off stunts, two more series of well done passes and a perfect kill with one sword thrust to the hilt earned him an ear and the "Golden Ear" trophy awarded to the best novillero of the day.

And the blood? The red river that gushed out of where the bull's body had been pricked with lances, ban-

derillas and swords?

"The blood is part of the art," David said. "We give the animal a chance to live. If he's noble enough, we give him an 'indulto,' literally a pardon to remain alive and breed more brave bulls."

"These animals that they raise for beef have no choice. They are raised for beef and when their time comes, that's it. We give the bull a chance to live and make an art form out of it."

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Washington's punch 'like a two-by-four,' doctor says

United Press International
HOUSTON — The severe facial injuries Rudy Tomjanovich suffered from a punch by a former Los Angeles Lakers' player resembled those sustained by someone hit in the face "by a two-by-four," a surgeon testified Tuesday.

"I see it in barroom brawls where a person is hit by a two-by-four (board) or by a flashlight," Dr. Daniel G. Walker said. "It is hard to imagine that an injury of this severity could be caused by a fist."

"It wasn't just a break. It was like an eggshell shattering. You put it back together like a jigsaw puzzle," Walker testified at the trial of a \$4 million damage suit by Tomjanovich and the Houston Rockets against the Lakers, whom the plain-

tim held responsible for the punch during the Kermit Washington during a Feb. 9, 1977, game at Los Angeles.

The surgeon testified Tomjanovich, who missed the rest of the 1977-78 season but returned to play in 1978-79, will suffer lingering effects of the injury throughout his life.

"When he lies, he's going to feel pain in his sinuses, in his cheeks and possibly between his eyes from the pressure effects," Walker said.

"We don't have proof positive that a leak (of spinal fluid) from his brain has been sealed off. It could open up 30 years from now."

Walker said the leak from the hole — caused by a facial bone forced through the skull by the force of the punch — increases the risk of infection, of meningitis, in Tomjanovich's nervous system.

Washington has said he hit Tomjanovich because he thought the Rockets' captain was rushing to hit him. Tomjanovich has said he was

moving to break up a fight between Washington and the Rockets' Kevin Kunnert.

As a result of the punch, Washington was fined \$10,000 and suspended for 60 days by NBA Commissioner Lawrence O'Brien. Washington currently plays for the San Diego Clippers.

Both the Rockets' and Tomjanovich's lawsuits, being tried simultaneously, are against the Lakers. Both hold the team responsible for Washington's action. Tomjanovich seeks \$2.6 million damages, the Rockets \$1.8 million.

Walker said during the three months he treated Tomjanovich that his patient showed courage.

"It started to bother me when he didn't report any pain over a long time," Walker said. "He was really a stoic and I confirmed that in talking with other doctors."



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