

FOCUS

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Convict cowboys have nothing to lose

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It's been said that inmates ride broncs and bulls with a recklessness born of desperation: they don't have anything to lose. But they still run when an angry bull or bucking bronc tries to stomp on them.

Being in prison is still better than being dead.

Many of the cowboys are long-term inmates who've been in the

rodeo before. They're the ones that usually walk away. It's the rookies that get hurt.

But there's more to the Texas Prison Rodeo than a bunch of cons messing around with livestock.

Just stepping into the Walls Unit in Hunstville gives you an eerie feeling. You can walk out if you want to — but the faces in the windows can't.

Security is tight. Prison guards

in grey uniforms are everywhere. They check visitors' purses and camera bags to make sure they "don't have a gun or anything."

Once inside, even though a whole grandstand is full of inmates in white uniforms, it doesn't feel as intimidating.

The Prison Band, in the middle of the arena, is playing C&W tunes and a special brand of prison song — "That's Alright, I Will Soon Be Free."

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