WILD WEST SHOWS

In the late 1800’s, Wild West Shows began traveling throughout the eastern states and did so for about 50 years. Today’s rodeos are an offspring of these early shows that featured great cowboys such as Buffalo Bill Cody and Bill Pickett, who invented bulldogging. The early 1900’s marked the introduction of the Wild West Show overseas, with performances in England and Africa. Casey Tibbs took a Wild West Show to the World’s Fair in Brussels, Belgium in 1958. The cowboys in these shows were paid performers and it was not a contest like modern rodeos.

EARLY RODEOS

It is very hard to trace the first rodeo in America. Many places make this claim including: Deer Trail, Colo., in 1869; North Platte, Neb., in 1882; Pecos, Texas, in 1883 and Payson, Ariz., in 1884. All early rodeos varied greatly by events and most were free to the public. Prescott, Ariz. held its first rodeo on July 4, 1888. Much of what we know today in the sport of rodeo grew from their first rodeo on July 4, 1888. Much of what we know today in the sport of rodeo grew from the Prescott Rodeo. The committee established the following that still hold true today: prizes awarded, rules for competition, admission charged, cowboys invited to compete and a committee to organize. The events included bronc riding, steer roping and cow pony races. In 1889, the first steer riding competition was held, later this event evolved into modern bull riding. By 1917, calf roping was added to the list of events at Prescott.

Spanish Roots

Rodeo as we know it did not exist until the late 1800’s, but its roots in North America are traced back to the Spanish settling California and becoming cattle ranchers.

The definition of “rodeo” is a Spanish word meaning roundup.

The skills of the early Spanish vaqueros were eventually passed along to the American Cowboy after the civil war when the frontier territories were heavily expanding. The difference between Spanish rodeo and American rodeo is that the Spanish version focuses on style, while the American version focuses on speed.
By 1936, the cowboys decided to form their own organization after striking at the Boston Garden Rodeo. The organization was named the Cowboys Turtle Association because they were slow to organize, but eventually “stuck their neck out.” The organization wanted to ensure fair prize money, equality in judging and honest advertising of the sport. In 1945, the name was changed to the Rodeo Cowboys Association. By 1955, the International Rodeo Association recognized the Rodeo Cowboys Association as superior and closed down.

**RODEO ORGANIZATIONS**

In the 1920’s, rodeo began to organize to combat problems of the rapid expansion of the sport. The Rodeo Association of America, made up of rodeo committees and producers, was formed in 1929. World Champions were to be selected in the following events: bronc riding, bull riding, bareback riding, calf roping, steer roping, bulldogging, team roping and wild cow milking. The name was changed in 1946 to the International Rodeo Association.

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**THE PRCA**

1974 marked the inception of the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association when the Rodeo Cowboys Association added professional to the name. Today, the PRCA is the largest sanctioning organization with over 600 rodeos sanctioned yearly.

**PRCA FAST FACTS:**

- Total prize money awarded at PRCA sanctioned rodeos in 2014 was $41,102,501.
- The PRCA has over 7,000 members (card and permit).
- Most PRCA rodeos are produced by local volunteer committees who donate proceeds to charity. Over $25 million a year is donated from PRCA rodeos to charity.
- Over 127 PRCA cowboys have surpassed the million dollar mark in career prize money at PRCA rodeos.
- Over 21 PRCA cowboys have surpassed the two million dollar mark in career prize money at PRCA rodeos.
RODEO TERMS

**ADDED MONEY** - purse money supplied by the rodeo committee. It is added to entry fees to make up the total prize money.

**BARRIER** - a rope stretched across the front of the box from which the roper or steer wrestler’s horse emerges. This rope is attached to the steer or calf and allows the animal a head start.

**BRONC REIN** - rein attached to the horse’s halter for balance while riding a saddle bronc.

**CHUTE** - the pen that holds the animal in order for the rider to get on and prepare for his ride.

**DALLY** - a turn at the end of the rope around the saddle horn after the animal is caught.

**HAZER** - a cowboy who rides beside a steer on the opposite side of the steer wrestler. His job is to keep the steer running straight and close to the contestant’s horse.

**PICKUP MAN** - a mounted cowboy who helps the rider off of a bronc when the ride is completed. The pickup man also removes the flank strap from the bronc and leads it out of the arena.

**RE-RIDE** - another ride given to a bronc or bull rider when the first ride is ruled by judges as unsatisfactory. Reasons for granting a re-ride: being “fouled” on the chutes or the horse failing to buck hard enough to give the rider a fair chance.

**RANK** - a bull or bronc that is hard to ride.

**ROWEL** - circular, notched portion of a spur. To be used in rodeo competition, the rowel must be dull. In the bareback and saddle bronc riding, rowels must be loose in order to roll over the horse’s hide. In the bull riding, the rowels are loosely locked to help the bull rider stay on.

**SCORE** - the length of the head start given to the steer or calf in the timed events.

**SLACK** - a time, usually late at night or early in the morning, other than during the performance when the “extra” contestants compete in the rodeo. There are only 8 - 12 slots in each rodeo performance for each event, when more contestants enter than can compete in the performances; they compete in the “slack”.

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**ProRodeo Hall of Fame & Museum of the American Cowboy**

Professional rodeo is the only major competitive sport that has evolved from a working lifestyle, and its development over the years is brought to life in the Pro Rodeo Hall of Fame and Museum of the American Cowboy in Colorado Springs, Colo. The Hall, located adjacent to the National Headquarters of the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association, is the only heritage center in the world devoted exclusively to professional rodeo — America’s original sport. [www.prorodeohalloffame.com](http://www.prorodeohalloffame.com)

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**For more information about the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association and the sport of rodeo on the Internet, visit these sites:**

- **Prorodeokids.com** – PRCA’s kids website.
- **ProRodeo.com** - the official site of the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association.
- **WPRA.com** - the official site of the Women’s Professional Rodeo Association.
- **NHRA.org** - the official site of the National Intercollegiate Rodeo Association.
- **NLBRA.org** - the official site of the National Little Britches Rodeo Association.
- **collegerodeo.com** - the official site of the National Intercollegiate Rodeo Association.

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WRANGLER NATIONAL FINALS RODEO

Each year, the top 15 money-earning cowboys qualify for the Wrangler National Finals Rodeo (Wrangler NFR) held in Las Vegas, Nevada. The 10-day long event culminates in the crowning of the World Champions.

MISS RODEO AMERICA

Lauren Heaton
Oklahoma

State titleholders gather each year in Las Vegas to vie for the coveted Miss Rodeo America title. Miss Rodeo America travels the United States during her reign and serves as the official spokesperson for the sport of professional rodeo, educating the public and creating awareness about the sport, its sponsors and its opportunities.

Young ladies who participate in the Miss Rodeo America pageant system gain knowledge that will assist them in all endeavors. In addition, the Miss Rodeo America organization offers many scholarship opportunities to its winners. For more information: www.missrodeoamerica.com

SADDLE BRONC RIDING

Rodeo’s “classic” event, saddle bronc riding, has roots that run deep in the history of the Old West. Ranch hands would often gather and compete among themselves to see who could display the best style while riding untrained horses. It was from this early competition that today’s event was born. Each rider must begin his ride with his feet over the bronc’s shoulders to give the horse the advantage. A rider who synchronizes his spurring action with the animal’s bucking efforts will receive a high score. Other factors considered in the scoring are the cowboy’s control throughout the ride, the length of the spurring stroke and how hard the horse bucks.

Disqualification results if, prior to the buzzer which sounds after eight seconds, the rider touches the animal, himself or his equipment with his free hand; if either foot slips out of a stirrup; if he drops the bronc rein; he fails to have his feet in the proper “mark out” position at the beginning of the ride; or he bucks off.

BAREBACK RIDING

Bareback riding, developed in the rodeo arena many years ago, consistently produces some of the wildest action in the sport. A bareback rider begins his ride with his feet placed above the break of the horse’s shoulder. If the cowboy’s feet are not in the correct position when the horse hits the ground on its first jump out of the chute, the cowboy has failed to “mark out” the horse properly and is disqualified. Throughout the eight-second ride, the rider is judged on his control and his spurring technique.

The score also is based on the rider’s “exposure” to the strength of the horse. In addition, the horse’s performance accounts for half the potential score.

WRANGLER NFR FACTS

- The 2014 NFR boasted $6.37 million in prize money.
- Over 177,000 rodeo fans attend the NFR at the Thomas and Mack Center each year.
- The first NFR was held in Dallas, Texas before moving to Los Angeles, California and Oklahoma City, Oklahoma then finally to Las Vegas, Nevada.
Cowboy Gear

The traditional dress of the cowboy has not changed much over the years. You will find most cowboys dressed in a Cowboy Hat, Justin Cowboy Boots, Wrangler Jeans and a western belt sporting a trophy buckle. This gear originally served as very useful out on the range.

COWBOY HAT - can be made of straw or felt. The cowboy hat served cowboys on the range very well as a sun shade, rain protection and was also useful in watering their horses if needed.

CHAPS - these leg coverings made of thick leather protected the cowboys on the range from brush and other hazards. You will see roughstock riders wearing them in today's rodeo. They continue to serve as a protection device for cowboys.

PROTECTIVE VEST - this piece of equipment is modern and is designed to protect roughstock riders from horns and hooves. This vest has saved many contestants lives.

WRANGLER JEANS - Wrangler blue jeans are made to take the wear and tear of the life of a professional cowboy. The material is extra heavy-duty and the seams are reinforced. Wrangler even made a special jean called "Cowboy Cut" patterned to fit rodeo cowboys.

COWBOY BOOTS - made of sturdy leather with thick soles. The leather protects the cowboy from brush, snake bites and other hazards.

TROPHY BELT BUCKLE - this belt buckle will tell a lot about a cowboy. Many individual rodeos and championship events award silver belt buckles to the winners. These buckles will often be engraved with a picture of the cowboy’s event, his name, and the rodeo where the buckle was awarded. The most coveted buckle is the World Champion Gold Buckle awarded to the world champions in the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association each year.
STEER WRESTLING

Wrestling a steer requires more than brute strength. The successful steer wrestler, or bulldogger, is strong but he also understands the principles of leverage. The steer wrestler on horseback starts behind a barrier, and begins his chase after the steer has been given a head start. If the bulldogger leaves too soon and breaks the barrier, he receives a 10-second penalty.

When the bulldogger’s horse pulls even with the steer, he eases down the right side of the horse and reaches for the steer’s horns. After grasping the horns, he digs his heels into the dirt. As the steer slows, the cowboy turns the animal, lifts up on its right horn and pushes down with his left hand in an effort to tip the steer over. After the catch, the steer wrestler must either bring the steer to a stop or change the direction of the animal’s body before the throw or is disqualified. The clock stops when the steer is on his side with all four legs pointing the same direction.

TEAM ROPING

Team roping is unique in that two cowboys work together for a shared time. The first cowboy, known as the “header,” ropes the steer either by the horns, around the neck, or “half head” which is one horn and the neck. After this catch is made, the header wraps his rope around the saddle horn, commonly known as dallying, and turns the steer in a wide arc to the left. The second cowboy is known as the “heeler.” He trails along beside the steer until the header turns the steer, then moves in behind the steer and attempts to rope the back feet. If he only manages one hind foot, the team receives a five-second penalty. Time is stopped when both cowboys’ horses are facing each other.

BARREL RACING

In barrel racing, the contestant and her horse enter the arena at full speed. As they start the pattern, the horse and rider trigger an electronic eye that starts the clock. Then the racer rides a cloverleaf pattern around three barrels positioned in the arena, and sprints back out of the arena, tripping the eye and stopping the clock as she leaves. The contestant can touch or even move the barrels, but receives a five-second penalty for each barrel that is overturned. With the margin of victory measured in hundredths of a second, knocking over one barrel spells disaster.

Although many of the skills are the same as ranch hands of the old west performed, today’s cowboy has a very different lifestyle. Modern cowboys travel thousands of miles to compete in up to 125 rodeos per year in an effort to qualify for the richest rodeo in the world, the National Finals Rodeo. Unlike other professional athletes, cowboys are not guaranteed a paycheck. Cowboys pick which rodeos they want to enter, then pay their travel expenses and an entry fee in order to compete. Only if they perform well will they get a paycheck.

Roughstock riders, or cowboys who compete in the saddle bronc riding, bareback riding and bull riding, can travel more lightly than timed event cowboys, who compete in the steer wrestling, calf roping and team roping. A roughstock cowboy only needs his clothing and “gear bag.” A roughstock cowboy’s gear bag will contain all of his equipment such as a bull rope, rosin to treat the bull rope, riding glove used in the bull riding and bareback riding, chaps, jeans, spurs and other necessary equipment. Roughstock contestants can fly to rodeos or assemble “traveling partners” to travel in a car or van and share expenses.

Timed event contestants must have a horse to ride when they arrive at the rodeo. Many will haul their own calf roping horse, team roping horse, or team of bull dogging horses. These contestants must have a heavy duty RAM truck and horse trailer to transport the horses, saddles and other tack as well as feed for the horses. Many timed event contestants will also team up with trailers built to haul two or more horses.

Whether roughstock or timed event contestant, traveling is a big part of being a professional cowboy.
The bucking bulls and horses at PRCA events are some of the best athletes in professional rodeo. These remarkable animals are owned by stock contractors who, from breeding livestock to loading animals up after a rodeo, ensure that the livestock is healthy, well-fed, cared-for and fit to perform. Bucking bulls can cost as much as $500,000 and bucking horses as much as $200,000. Stock contractors put the care and treatment of these valuable animals at the top of their list of priorities. Only healthy animals will perform up to their potential.

The PRCA shares in the responsibility of the care and treatment of livestock with rules and regulations that govern their care. Professional judges are on hand at each PRCA-sanctioned event to inspect each animal. If any animal is not in tip-top shape, it will be taken out of the roster for that competition.

PRCA rules also require a veterinarian to be on-site at all PRCA-sanctioned rodeos. This allows quick treatment of any injury to the livestock. The PRCA has utilized these on-site veterinarians to conduct injury studies. These studies have shown an injury rate of less than five-hundredths of one percent, very low indeed.

ASSOCIATION SADDLE - used in the saddle bronc riding. This is a bronc saddle that meets all of the specifications of the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association.

BAREBACK RIGGING - this is the only equipment a bareback rider has to help him ride. It is made of leather and resembles a suitcase handle on a strap. It is held on the horse’s back with a cinch, just like a saddle.

BULL ROPE - a flat braided rope used in the bull riding as the only hand hold for the bull rider. The rope is wrapped around the bull and then around the rider’s hand.

FLANK STRAP - a fleece-lined leather strap that is placed behind the horse’s rib cage in the flank area. A soft cotton rope is used in the bull riding event. Flank straps are not fastened tightly and do not hurt the animals. If this strap is tightened too tight, the animal will refuse to buck.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED?
1. Today’s rodeo can be traced to the __________________ settlers in California.
2. ___________________ is the mounted cowboy who helps the rider off of the bronc at the conclusion of the ride.
3. ___________________ is considered rodeo’s “classic” event.
4. ½ the score comes from the rider’s ability and ½ from the __________________ ability in the bareback riding, saddle bronc riding and bull riding.