

## Rodeo History: A Legendary Event That Inspires Lives

Every sport is special to someone for some reason. For many, instead of fighting to achieve greatness in a sport, the sport begins to inspire greatness within the athlete. It begins to drive, empower, and support the competitor. It's no longer a mere sport, but a lifestyle. Equestrian sports are no exception to this rule. It has forever been part of these legendary events found in rodeo history. If you want to know the history of rodeo and facts, you can find that here; but first, a personal story illustrates how rodeo plays a powerful part in a person's life. One might say this passion spared a life.

CMSA is a new twist on rodeo that certainly keeps the spirit of the West alive. However, as is usually the case, it's the people behind the sport that are even more amazing than the event itself. Cheryl McLane, a rider for CMSA, is definitely no exception to this rule. As a young girl, she found solace in animals. Although they didn't have much, her parents found a way to purchase a little pony. McLane's father would haul the horse in a tired trailer, barely able to carry an animal. For her, it didn't matter how beautiful or shiny the package was; she just wanted to have a horse to love. She wanted for nothing more, and this passion never changed. As a newlywed, McLane worked hard training new horses. While raising her children and supporting her husband in his work, this gave McLane a special outlet in life.

For this athlete, however, it was quickly realized that equestrian sports would become her saving grace. It was in 1997 when things begin to change rapidly for this family. Cheryl McLane was diagnosed with breast cancer, and for those familiar with cancer, they know it's not something that is easily eliminated. This disruption in her life started a domino affect. While McLane is very aware of the blessings she has in her life, she is also acutely aware of its disappointment and challenges.

McLane accounts, "We have a great life. We have wonderful kids, a wonderful family. But like every family, everybody has their challenges. I was diagnosed first with breast cancer, five years later breast cancer . . . another five years later breast, and then thyroid cancer. About five years later, [I] was diagnosed with a small tumor that they had to go in and remove in a chest cavity, followed up with chemo."

She represents many that have struggled through hard times. However, the doctors always believed it was her powerful mindset that saved her life. McLane attributes it to her horses and the passion she found in rodeo.

"The horses, besides my family, were a great distraction and perhaps maybe saved my life many times especially during chemo treatment and radiation. I was determined that this was not going to stop what I loved doing," says McLane.

However, McLane didn't fight this battle alone. Her family stood by her side. Her husband knew of the great comfort that her animals brought into her life history.

"Even though she might be emotionally down, she knew, physically, she had to get up and go and deal with her children and deal with her horses. The horses gave her a lot of peace of mind and gave her a lot of comfort," said Todd McLane.

Cheryl McLane knew how to channel something negative into positive energy. She's always had a competitive spirit—this didn't change in the way she competed in Cowboy Mounted Shooting. Women have made a huge affect on rodeo. McLane knew she wanted to compete in CMSA, but in the earlier days of the sport, things were different for this Texas cowgirl. However, she decided to leave her footprints and contribute to the history of rodeo. Cheryl McLane, during the early 2000s, was one of the first Texas cowgirls to promote and inspire this equestrian sport. To this day, Cheryl is known as the Founder and Chairman of Gulf Coast Mounted Shooters, Texas Lady High Point Champion, Olympic CMSA Match Qualifier, Western South Central Regional Lady Champion, and Chairman of the American Paint Horse Exhibition<sup>1</sup>. Cheryl McLane is a regular modern Annie Oakley. After years of experiencing other equestrian sports, she found CMSA to be the most exhilarating. The sport does come with its challenges. The rider must fully train the horse in order to compete in such an atmosphere. Cheryl McLane spent hours training horses on agility and resistance to sounds—many of her horses even wore earplugs. During the early days, she was the one driving CMSA's success as a woman. In the later years, it inspired her. As for many athletes, a sport is more than mere competition—it's a relief and provides an outlet. To McLane, it became so for her. With all the cancers, surgeries, and recoveries she dealt with, McLane let her horses and CMSA be the healing power she needed to survive. Like the women of the Old West, she didn't let anything knock her down. For those in rodeo, it often means a lot of physical exertion. By herself, she would load up her horse trail, drive across states, and compete in events. McLane would do all of this during chemo treatments. As she blazed through competitions, spectators could see a tough woman rider with a bandana under her hat, hiding her bold head. No matter the circumstance, she was out in the arena. After the match, it was her and the horse—woman's best friend. Once, she gave to the sport—now the sport was giving back to her.

Like most sports, rodeo and equestrian sports often drive people towards success. More than success, it's the passion that one has during competitions. It's the reason some have to get up in the morning and try harder. For McLane, failure was not an option. Whether it was competing for the win, or fighting for her life, she never gave up. "It's interesting. Mentally, the more you push and the more you say you can do something, the more you realize that you really can," said McLane.

Cheryl McLane's story is just one example of how rodeo is more than a sport—it's a lifestyle. Rodeo is much more to others because of the connection they have with the animals, the friends they gain, or the crowds they please.

## Legends Found in Rodeo History

Today, millions of people attend rodeo events each year. Each year more rodeo directors [sell rodeo tickets online](#). In fact, there is an impressive number within the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo alone. Here are some fun facts according to KHOU11, "Among the highlights: More than 2 million people attended the rodeo; over 365,000 Oreos were fried; 14,000 people rode camels, and more than \$26 million was raised for scholarships and education."<sup>2</sup> That's a lot of Oreos. Even more, that's a lot of people coming to one city. This was the rodeo's most recent event--fun-filled rodeo events spanning 20 days. People come from all over to enjoy a good time, sit down to eat, and be entertained. Other than the actual participants, a lot of people come to experience rodeo for themselves. For instance, there was 61,000 people scheduled for a school tour and 19,000 children riding ponies. That's a lot of children. And, if you think that's a lot, check out the Houston Rodeo's food intake. "More than 365,000 Oreos were fried, and more than 125,000 turkey legs, more than 80,000 funnel cakes, nearly 30,000 barbecue sandwiches, and more than 45,000 tamales were purchased."<sup>2</sup> That's a lot of people having a real good time at the rodeo—and this is just one city, one time a year. If people are coming in by the truck loads to see and be a part of such events, it must be something

pretty special. But why? For most people, it's more than just a good time. Rodeo is something that connects people back to the legendary days of the West. Rodeo is a celebration of the past, and what has helped to build the very fabric of our modern-day society. A special and magical thing happens when historic and modern day blend together. By remembering who we are and what has shaped our future, we are able to live life to the fullest. It makes very little difference what we do, however, if we do not know how it all began.

Back in the 1800s, raw country was developed and run by ranchers.<sup>3</sup> This is something that most are aware of, but there is one fact that many are unaware of. The word "rodeo" was never an Americanized term. In fact, it comes from the Spanish word, meaning "to surround." The National Geographic does an overview of the rancher's past.<sup>4</sup> Although common ranching practices were held in the Middle Ages, it wasn't until 1000 CE in Spain and Portugal that we saw livestock being raised and tended to in masses. In fact, the early practices of ranching stems from these early days in Spain and Portugal: herding, round-ups, cattle drives, and branding. The reason for the connection between the Americas and Spain has to do with Spain's involvement with American land and Spanish missionaries. With this generation, in the 1700s-1800s, Spain was sending missionaries to the Americas. Out of necessity, the missionaries needed to obtain cows and learn ranching skills. With this influx in population, the expertise of cattle-raising really came from the Spanish explorers. However, the culture that we find in American ranching stems from the vaquero culture. This came specifically by Northern Mexico's influence.<sup>4</sup> This was the ball that got the ranching business going. From here, we see how the craft of horsemanship comes into play.

## **The Historical Rancher**

Next come the ranchers. This makes the first point- in order to understand rodeo, you must understand ranchers. After the Civil War ended, the commencement of the cowboy era began. "Later, when the lands were converted into private ranches, cowboys found work by running cattle and managing land. It wasn't until after the Civil War that cattle herds became spread out, and the rise of the American cowboy followed."

These ranchers have been known as cowboys in Western society, but have differing names in other regions.<sup>4</sup> In Mexico and South America, the title of vaqueros are commonly known, as well as jackaroos for ranchers in Australia and New Zealand. Being a rancher is no easy task. In the past, as well as today, cowboys are expected to participate in round-ups, cattle drives, branding, and herding over vast amounts of land. In the early days, ranchers were heavily committed to keeping the land safe. For instance, cowboys would spend a whole year on horseback to drive cattle thousands of kilometers. This would allow the cattle to move from the ranch site to slaughterhouses and other transportation stations.

## **Adjustments for the Cowboys**

During the late 1800's, ranchers were facing a transition out of the open range practice. Contributors to this change included the invention of barbed wire, overgrazing and conflict over land rights. For instance, ranchers needed to fence off land because animals were destroying fields. The quality of land also decreased because of overgrazing. A large reason as to why the land was struggling had to do with the type of animal roaming the Americas. Another interesting fact—the cattle dealt with by the cowboys were not native to the Americas. The bison and other native animals clashed with the cattle. The land could not reproduce the amount of grass necessary for unfamiliar and native animals. With this conflict, ranchers went to work. They found ways to fence off lands and keep sections of land safe from overgrazing.<sup>4</sup>

From here, we start finding common cultures and themes that are associated with the lives of cowboys. The idea of rodeo spun out of the animals used out of necessity. For instance, the horse was a central part to ranching. Horses allowed them to work with the cattle in a safer and faster manner. With this, the sport of rodeo came to be. The National Geographic explains it in this manner: “Informal competitions among ranchers and cowboys tested their speed, agility, and endurance. Today, events such as roping, barrel racing, and bull riding demonstrate those same qualities among professional athletes.” <sup>4</sup>

The Wasatch Academy comments on the rise of cowboys and transition to modern-day rodeos. After a long day on the ranch, there was left a huge group of highly talented, skilled horsemen. In addition, cowboys found themselves in smaller circles due to the transition to private ranches. Small town competitions then developed from the early ranching years. A common event included stock shows. In connection to these events, the cowboys would have multiple contests. This sparked the excitement and legend of the “Wild West.” <sup>3</sup>

## Why Rodeo is Celebrated Throughout History

Today, we celebrate this great accomplishment of the early American days, with the mixed influence of Mexican and Spanish culture. A blend of rich culture has affected the very celebrations that are held nationwide. Before the modern-day’s take on rodeo, the ranchers developed their own reason for this kind of fun. “Impromptu competitions became commonplace as cowboys competed for their share of the prize pot, or at other times simply “just for the hell or glory of it.”<sup>5</sup> A study on contemporary American rodeo states that “rodeo is one of American’s fastest growing sports.”<sup>6</sup> All 50 states now hold varying types of rodeo events. Rodeo, within the PRCA, doesn’t hurt for competition either. In 1994, there were 782 rodeos sanctioned with 9,761 card and permit holders competing for \$23,063,793. In addition, millions of spectators gather each year to buy a [rodeo ticket](#) all across the nation in American and Canadian states. For example, International Professional Rodeo Association held over 1,000 rodeos with 18 million spectators. In comparison to the olden days, rodeo has come a long way—all because of the legend of the great “Wild West.” We celebrate the hard work, labor, life and mixed cultures brought to the nation by ranching alone.

## The Faces of Rodeo

Before talking about the different types of rodeos and competition levels, a few people can’t go unnamed. William F. Cody was an unapparelled contributor of the Wild West legend. The father of rodeo, William F. Cody, is known today as Buffalo Bill. He introduced a new type of entertainment.<sup>7</sup> Here’s the backstory on Cody. He was startled that nothing had been planned for Independence Day. After returning to his hometown in North Platte, Nebraska in 1882, he decided that something needed to change. On the Fourth of July, he developed the “Old Glory Blowout.” This didn’t just extend to local cowboys, but to business owners as well. Throughout history, he urged them to sponsor events such as roping, shooting, riding, and bronco break exhibitions. The fire was lit. For the first event, Cody thought he would only get a max of 100 entrants, but the number grew to 10 times that amount. Later, Cody planned an event that gained 8,000 spectators on the first open day for ticketing. Following on the heels of the success of these Wild West events, he gained the support of many U.S. and European audiences.

Wild West rodeo shows historically weren’t just for the men, though. Phoebe Ann Moses Butler has a legend that surpasses that of most cowboys. Butler was the hunter and provider for her poor family in Ohio after her father died. Out of necessity, she gained the skills of a sharpshooter. Her name is known today as Annie Oakley. Cody, known as Buffalo Bill, quickly saw the talents of Butler. She became the very first woman in his Wild West Show. Not only did she make a big impact on the show, but she influenced the lives of many

women. She empowered over 15,000 women to defend themselves with their own guns. Butler knew it wasn't just a man's job. <sup>6</sup>

Besides the great Annie Oakley, there are a few others that can't go without a mention within the history of rodeo. Mabel Strickland Woodward was another woman with incredible influence on the world of rodeo. As a trick rider at the Walla Walla, she participated in saddle bronc riding, steer roping, and relay racing. Woodward was also unique in the fact that she competed with both women and men. Another, Tad Lucas, was another cowgirl with great influence. She became a founding member of the Girls Rodeo Association in 1948. She rose from the bottom up as a young girl helping her brothers break colts, and then became a professional. Wanda Harper Bush is another example of women in rodeo. More recently, she enjoys reining horses full-time. However, her younger days were spent with heavy equestrian competitions. Up until 1985, she was champion of 29 barrel racing events, and gained 33 world championships. Mildred Farris accomplished much as both a rodeo secretary for the Girls Rodeo Association and barrel racer. Under her influence, barrel racing was included in the ProRodeo events in 1967. She stands as a trailblazer for the women in rodeo because of this. Barrel racing has become one of the greatest sports for cowgirls. Another example of this is with Charmayne James. James dominated the barrel racing scene for 10 years after the age of 14 as the World Champion. According to *The American Cowboy*, "She also holds the record for the most consecutive NFR qualifications—more than any other competitor, male or female." <sup>7</sup>

With these examples from strong women, it's easy to see how rodeo isn't just a man's game. The women from the earlier years of rodeo gives the modern-day cowgirls a reason to celebrate, with the legacy of hard-working, talented women. It's a celebration all around, for both women and men.

## Historical Types of Rodeo

Because of these great women and men, we have the rodeo as it is today. There are many off-shoots of the old rodeo days. These include, but are not limited to, barrel racing, breakaway calf roping, goat tying, bareback bronc riding, saddle bronc riding, bull riding, calf roping, steer wrestling, and team roping. <sup>8</sup> Besides rodeo itself, equestrian sports are broad and diverse. These include Olympic disciplines such as Dressage, Eventing, and Show jumping. Other disciplines include Combined Driving, Endurance Riding, Horseball, Reining, Tent Pegging, and Vaulting. For the racing world, there are a few different kinds of sports as well: Flat racing, Harness racing, Point-to-point, Steeplechase, and Thoroughbred Horse. English Riding includes Classical dressage, Dressage, English Pleasure, Eventing, Field Hunter, Foxhunting, Hymkhana, Hunt Seat, Saddle Seat, Show Hunter, Show Jumping, Show Hack, Team Chasing, and Quadrille. The Western riding world includes Cowboy Mounted Shooting, Cowboy Polo, O-Mok-See, Reining, Trail, Western Pleasure, and Western Riding. Stock Handling includes Campdrafting, Cutting, Ranch Sorting, Team Penning, and Working Cow Horse. The Rodeo itself includes Australian Rodeo, Charreada, Chilean Rodeo, Barrel Racing, Breakaway Roping, Calf Roping, Goat Tying, Pole Bending, Saddle Bronc and Bareback Riding, Steer Wrestling, and Team roping. The Harness section includes Combined Driving, Draft Horse Showing, Fine Harness, Pleasure Driving, Roadster, and Scurry Driving. The team sports arena includes Horseball, Pato, Polo, and Polocrosse. Defined Area includes Buzhashi, Jousting, Mounted Archery, Mounted Games, and Tent pegging. <sup>9</sup>

It's easy to see how equestrian sports are not only limited to rodeo, but extend beyond this as well. It's all about how people connect with legacies, animals, and competitions. Among the other equestrian sports, rodeo invites the competitive spirit of sports. As well as being competitive, it is highly dynamic. There are many iconic



aspects of rodeo that cannot be replaced. Spectators are not just intrigued by the riders, but by the many other attractions. Through modern history, a fan favorite is the rodeo clowns.

## Rodeo Clowns

These rodeo participants are known by the names comedy clowns, bullfighters, or barrelmen. The bullfighter's main role is to defend and protect the cowboy. This job comes at a high risk. The barrelman's job is primarily for hiding in the barrel, while popping out to distract the bull occasionally. Whereas for the comedy clowns, they are mostly there for entertaining the crowd. The attendees are then more likely to stay seated with long pauses filled with amusing performances.<sup>9</sup>

Their contribution to the rodeo can't be overstated enough. Not only do they serve as entertainment during breaks in rides, but they also keep rodeos safe for the cowboys. This is a big job!

Here's the backstory of the rodeo history for the barrelmen. Rodeoing can be a dangerous and overwhelming task— it especially became so as rodeo grew in popularity. Barrelmen are directly tied to the safety of the cowboys and the spectators in the seats. During the earlier days of rodeo, events were paused due to injuries. With this, many fans would leave the event. So, they got smart. They turned those long pauses into entertainment. It quickly became another way for cowboys to earn money on the side by entertaining the crowd. During the 1920s-1930s, the rodeo clown started to fill the roles of a modern-day rodeo clown. In the 20s, the clothing style of oversized pants and painted faces came into play so that they were more recognizable. During the 30s, the clowns became heavily involved with the bulls. With Brahma bulls in bull riding, the clowns had to risk their safety in order to help the cowboy. Jasbo Fulkerson was one rodeo clown that initiated the use of the barrel. "In the late 1930s, Jasbo Fulkerson got "tired of being run over", so he rolled out a wooden barrel reinforced on the outside with old car tire casings."<sup>10</sup> This is why we get the name, barrelman. Because of this, the legend and tradition has been kept up for entertainment and safety.

Holly Hollman commented on the character of the rodeo clown, "It's a job that requires a man to be a buffoon and a hero."<sup>11</sup> What started as making fun of themselves, by riding backwards or performing other stunts, turned into a huge service for the cowboys. As mentioned above, the introduction of the Brahma bulls was an enormous task in the 1920s. Bull fighting for the clowns was no easy task. "Imagine shooing a 1,600-pound or heavier enraged bull away from a thrown cowboy, and doing it without protection," said Hollman.<sup>11</sup> Although they entertained the crowd and helped the cowboys, this job did come at a cost. A clown was even knocked out, hiding in the barrel. This gave one bullfighter an idea for barrels. One clown had an idea for a new design. Instead of an open-closed barrel, he decided to create an open barrel on both sides. For him, this allowed easy access to slip out of the barrel before a bull would hurt him in the barrel.

Rodeo clowns, though, are fully aware of their job and what it means to them in terms of safety and risks. One article describes this through the eyes of one professional rodeo clown, Scooter Culbertson: "Getting hit by a bull is like getting hit by a car going 20 mph. It's not if you are going to get hurt. It's when and how bad."<sup>9</sup>

Expounding on Culbertson's experience as a rodeo clown, an article reported that he had "24 broken bones, three concussions, a dislocated jaw, internal injuries, and a torn-off ear."<sup>9</sup> Because of this, rodeo clowns are often geared with protection equipment. This is similar to football players' gear. For clowns, they are often affected in the chest, ankles, shins, ribs, thighs, tailbone, etc. For the modern-day rodeo clowns, the Professional Rodeo Cowboy Association has helped to develop the rodeo clown into a very serious role. They must now have a PRCA membership to work under the title of rodeo clown.<sup>10</sup> However, the rodeo doesn't

mess around when it comes to employment. Some work about 10 months out of the year, with a pay of about \$1,200-\$2,000 for a weekend performance.<sup>11</sup> With a pay like this, it helps to compensate for the risk. More than that, the rodeo clowns have the satisfaction of living out the legend of the history of rodeo. It's a dream worth achieving.

## The Bull's Role in Rodeo History

One cannot overlook the major role that bulls play in rodeo history. Many rodeo clowns' performances are tied to the bulls, and have mastered a technique with the bull. More importantly, though, the cowboy depends heavily upon the skillset of the bull. Without the bull, the bull rider is left with underscored points and an underchallenged ride. Andrew Connor comments on the importance of the bull, "In rodeo, points are split, 50/50, between rider and bull. The bull's tenacity, spirit and elegance are judged each ride, just as the rider's skills are assessed."<sup>12</sup> Connor made an excellent point, saying that the athletes aren't just the cowboys—it's the animal too. A few bulls have gone down in history for their extraordinary talent as an athlete. Tornado, Oscar, Red Rock, Bodacious, Little Yellow Jacket, Blueberry Wine, and Bushwacker are among some of the most famous bulls. For Tornado, it was during 1960's when he gained his fame. Something outstanding about this bull was that he didn't tolerate any rider for too long. With a six-year long ride and 220 outs, this bull threw off every rider under the eight second limit. He was so frightening that many riders dodged this bull over and over again. As a highly muscular bull, he was able to swing his body at every angle to quickly throw off the rider. For Oscar, many riders tried to stay on, but many failed. About 100 cowboys were unable to stay on this athlete. The surprising detail about this bull was that he only weighed 1,300 pounds, an amount that was considerably smaller than most bulls. With this feature, however, he was mighty fast. After Oscar's competitive days were over, in 1979, this bull became part of the Hall of Fame. Red Rock was another amazing athlete. For nearly four years, no rider was able to stay on this bull. An interesting point was made about this bull—its intelligence. It was almost as if he knew the rider, and how the rider would approach Red Rock would change the bull's strategy. For Bodacious, his unique performance has been famously known among many bull riders. From the moment he bolted out of the gate, he would blast with movement, thrashing his head. It was a scary sight. He sent one rider, Tuff Hedeman, to the hospital with almost every bone in his face broken. He was a feared bull. Little Yellow Jacket—another legend for the history of rodeo. For many cowboys, this could have been the perfect bull. He was known for his almost consideration of the cowboy. He never caused injury to a rider, and would make sure to avoid the fallen rider. In addition, this bull was known for his agility and speedy turns. For most riders, this was the ideal bull—high point bull with little fear of injury. However, he was unforgiving when it came to rider performance. The average for a rider to stay on this bull was mere 2.6 seconds. Blueberry Wine was another one of the greats. Although he wasn't ever able to win a championship, as a 10-year-old bull, he bucked off rider after rider due to speed. Sometimes tricks, bells, and whistles are unnecessary. He used his speed alone to buck off the best riders. Bushwacker, another legend. For starters, only two riders have ever ridden him for the full eight second round, with an average of 3.3 seconds for a seated rider. The reason for this could have something to do with his angered temper and unpredictable strategies. With Bushwacker, you never knew what kind of move you'd be handed. One thing was consistent, though—you'd have one heck of a ride.

## The Treatment of the Bull

For many spectators, the thought of animal treatment is a huge discussion. Some are unsure what goes on behind the scenes. What some see are the bulls being abused out on the arena. The Standard with Missouri State University clears some of this up. Katie Haynes stated, "Professional Bull Riders say it is very strict with animal welfare and makes sure to treat the bulls with respect."<sup>13</sup> She goes on to clear up some of the

uncertainties. Unlike how some might view ownership, PBR itself does not own the bulls. Stick contractors—businessmen—are the ones responsible for tending to the bulls. Since these bulls are regarded as highly professional athletes, they demand the best treatment and service. Haynes comments, “Giangola says these bulls are treated essentially like rockstars, and are essential to the sport. With bull riding in the PBR, there is a lot of information that people aren’t aware of when it comes to the way they treat their bulls.” While the main point is to have a bucking bull, you cannot force a bull to buck. It will either have the right temperament for the job or it won’t. Some bulls appear to understand that their “job” is to throw the rider; they learned not to buck when in the chute and buck far less once the rider is thrown. These bulls are being tended to 24/7 in order to get the care they need. No mistreatment is tolerated within the PBR. Haynes said, “If electro-shock or genital mutilation happens, those people associated with the PBR will get kicked out.”<sup>13</sup>

PBR also describes a few of the benefits that the bulls experience. First, the bulls are riding in air-ride suspensions in order to prevent possible injuries during travel. There’s also a set amount of time for transportation. Instead of sitting the bulls in the trailer for a full day’s worth of travel, it’s required that every 10 hours they are given time to rest. For the stalls, each space is spacious enough for each bull. The organization, as a well, knew that transportation can be a risk for the animals. Normally, for an event overseas, the animals would be shipped by sea. However, PBR was prepared to spend more for air travel. “. . . it invested nearly \$350,000, compared to less than \$100,000 if shipped by sea, to fly the necessary bulls to Hawaii for the event in special, customized containers.”<sup>14</sup>

## The Bull Riders

While these bulls can stand on their own legs for fame, it’s also the bull riders that add to their glory. These cowboys put their life on the line for competition, entertainment, and legendary thrill. Every rider has a story and works their hardest in order to ride these contentious bulls. So many have fought hard to last the time and stay seated—these are the people that make rodeo history. Among the many acclaimed riders, there’s a few that need recognition for their impeccable skills. PBR describes a few of the riders and competitors. Chris Shivers is one that has been the “career leader in 90-point rides.”<sup>15</sup> J.B. Mauney is known for his ability to win the PBR Final average, and has won the 2006 PBR Rookie of the Year. Ty Murray is another athlete of high standing. He is known as the “greatest all-around cowboy who has ever lived.”<sup>16</sup> Jerome Davis is known for his success as a 1995 World Champion.<sup>15</sup> Today, though, he is now the highest breeder for bulls. Jim Sharp is another one of the greats. He holds an amazing record of 23 bulls, consecutively. Not once was he bucked off during those 23 rides in a row. He was also the first to handle and ride all 10 bulls for the NFR event. For Kody Lostroh, his name is not lost in rodeo history. He is the “reigning PBR World champion.” Although he had an elbow injury, he rode triumphantly on the bull. He is considered to be the most technically correct rider. With this skill, he has been able to keep his reigning title as the world champion. Tuff Hedeman was known for his victories during mid-late 1980s. His winnings earned him the title of PBR World Champion in 1995. The amazing thing for Hedeman was that his winnings arose from the most competitive times of bull riding. Owen Washburn was known for his consistency in the PBR. He also earned over \$1 million, and gained world title in 1996. Adriano Moraes has a unique title as the first to win the World Champion title under the PBR. He also stands as the only man to have gained three world championship titles. Terry Don West is another rider that has amazed many audiences and viewers. He was voted by fans into the bracket, and has won the PRCA world title. He known for his consistency when it comes to staying on the bull. Cody Hart was another great that set high records—90-point rides, and gained six event titles that led to World Champion. Like other riders, he also earned the significant amount of \$1 million. Guilherme Marchi was well known for his consistency within PBR, eventually leading up to his winning the World Championship title in 2008. It’s a victory for highly competitive consistency for this cowboy. Troy Dunn holds a unique winning title as the only man to have won



two World Finals. Also, he is the only Australian to win these titles. With his experiences and winnings, he helped to form the first PBR for Australia. Michael Gaffney was famous for his ability to ride Little Yellow Jacket. He not only had a single victory with this athletic bull, but had two victories riding the full time on the Little Yellow Jacket. Justin McBride settled his career with \$5 million on winning earnings. He did this by setting and holding many records, including wins of 32, and being the two-time World Champion. Mike Lee holds a unique title. He is known for his fame in 2005. During this riding season, he became the only cowboy to win both World Finals title and World overall title.

Rodeo for a cowboy historically isn't a bad life. There's always risk, but these believe in high risk with high reward. It's a life worth living. For many, there are failures and many injuries. For those that have made it to the top, they've won world championships, and earned millions. It's the passion behind their success that drives their winnings, though. Among the many listed above for their success, Justin McBride is one with a great story. This is just an example of how unnerving a start with this career can be. If one is up for the challenge, there you find victory.

## McBride's Story

PBR does a short article, giving a brief on his career. For McBride, his start was a humble beginning. Top riders like Murray, Dunn, Curry, and others were there in the early days for McBride. As the article mentioned, this was an intimidating start. Being surrounded by men such as these would be nerve-racking for anyone, even in the early days of their fame. One famous cowboy, Curry, had ridden a bull that McBride has drawn one week later. Curry's advice to McBride was an easy and cool comment—Curry had mentioned he shouldn't worry. However, McBride knew differently, but was glad to hear calming news from someone. "I always thought that was nice of him to come lie to me that," McBride said, "because there was nothing easy about that bull. But he went out of his way to at least make me think I wasn't going to die that day."<sup>16</sup> There's a big risk in this sport, and McBride knew it. After Curry's ride, there must have been an expectation for McBride. To follow in Curry's footsteps could have been a rocky start. However, he overcame this bull, Hollywood, and rode with confidence and a winning spirit. "McBride rode the bull for 93 points, winning the first of his record-setting 32 career events wins."<sup>16</sup> For some, a win like this was huge. For McBride, he knew that he had to gain "stickers" and the support of many sponsors. For years other riders have gained sponsors (aka stickers) on their chest. This meant you had made it. The proudest moment for McBride, he said, was the day when he finally gained a supporter. "That's when you knew you had arrived, when you got stickers on your vest," McBride said. "For me, it was such a huge deal. I remember I was so proud I had stickers on my vest and they were the real stickers."<sup>16</sup> For a guy who's earned more than most in this career, he recognized what was highly important in his early days—to win and gain support. He was quickly introduced to many of his heroes, and listened to their council. The number one take away from all of them was that winning was most important in the game. He knew he had to step up his game. It wasn't any secret that being good wasn't enough. For McBride, he saw many riders walk into the locker room with much embarrassment after being bucked off. No matter the circumstance for McBride, he had an attitude of accountability. To make an excuse was not an option. He would say, "He learned early on that the greats didn't allow others to blame their shortcomings on bad bulls."<sup>16</sup> He quickly discovered, by example, that "crybabies" were not allowed. If anyone made a fuss or blamed the draw for a bad ride, the other riders would let him have it—there's no tolerance for bad losers in the field. This wasn't McBride's style. He made sure to hang around the greats, and toughen up. According to PBR, he had won five events in his third season. For McBride, he made a slight change in his later years. Before, he would hang around the guys and watch their strategies and daily habits. If one would drink a beer after a ride, so would he. However, he made a change later in his career. He became more reclusive. As he progressed in his career, and gained his millions, he stepped away in his prime. To this day, he has no regrets

for this decision. One thing he does know is that he will forever share a camaraderie with great men in the arena.

## The Announcers

There are things you just can't take out of the arena when you think of the history of rodeo—like barrel racers, bull riders, and other entertainers. However, there's another thing you can't leave out that has nothing to do with seeing a show—it's what you hear. The voices of rodeo are just as important as the show itself. A person's voice can be the face of the organization. A trusted face and voice are almost as necessary as good riders. Bob Tallman is one of those voices. "For 33 years he has been 'The Voice' of the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo. His itinerary stretches from coast to coast with stops at the Texas Stampede in Dallas, Fort Worth Stock Show and Rodeo, and the Canadian Finals (CFR)."<sup>17</sup> A short biography from Priefert goes on to explain his close association with rodeo and the fans. For eight years, he has been nominated as the official announcer of the Professional Rodeo Cowboy's Association. For Texas fans, he speaks to over three million people. Beyond the state of Texas, he reaches more than 60 million people a year. In addition to being trusted by the people, he is viewed more as a mentor and teacher to some. He has been inducted into The Professional Rodeo Cowboy Association, The National Cowboy Hall of Fame, and The Texas Cowboy Hall of Fame. "His ability to educate people about the spirit of the West."<sup>17</sup> This is what has elevated his fame. Besides his own fame gained from his fan base, he also believes in the honor that he gains from his God. "His greatest honor is using what he calls his "priceless gift from God" to capture the attention of a crowd of thousands or touch one person's life with his unmistakable timbre."<sup>17</sup> It's who he is, and what he believes in that radiates through the speakers and into the ears of many listeners. Writer Frank J. Buckman, of the Kansas AG Network, also writes on the important role of the announcer. Buckman stated, "The sport of rodeo grows, as contestants, contractors, committee and all benefit, thanks to The Rodeo Announcer."<sup>18</sup> Going back to Bob Tallman, it's all about the consistency and trust. When spectators [buy rodeo tickets](#), they want a familiar, entertaining, and trusting voice.

## Terminology of Rodeo

For the announcers, it can be a big job to keep track of the scores, participants, and other happenings at the rodeo. Another part of rodeo history includes terminology. For newcomers, some fans may not understand all that's being said. Bronc reign, box, barrier, etc. are all terminologies that have a specific meaning. Besides the announcer, it might be a good idea for some of the spectators to keep track of lingo. The Hot Fair gives a pretty good overview of some of the rodeo language. Here's a quick list: average, bronc reign, bulldogger, bullfighter, box, chute, barrelman, barrier, calf roper, judges, hoey, flank strap, header/heeler, crossfire penalty, left (or right) delivery, flags, mark out, slack, flankman, gold card member and life member, score, try, spurs, standings, triple crown winner, roughstock, stock contractors, timed events, reride, permit holder, drop, rank, ropes, draw, pigtail, hazer, nodding, turn out, go-round, pickup men, dally, riggin', hung up, piggin' string, and penalty.

Giving a quick rundown of rodeo language will be eye-opening for some attending future events. After reading over a few key words, a fan could easily turn into an involved spectator. Average is used to refer to a cowboy that has ridden more than once—a label attached to the score. A Bronc rein is specifically tailored to fit the bronc rider's horse in order to check and gauge the style of the horse. Bulldogger is just one that wrestles a steer. A bullfighter is less of a fighter and more of a protector. Their job includes keeping the cowboys safe and directing the bull out of the arena—a nerve-wracking task for sure. The box is a checking point before the rider and the animal darts out. If the rider leaves the contained area—the box—too quickly, then there will be a 10-

second penalty to their score. The chute is the holding place for just the animal in the rodeo. A barrelman is similarly known as the rodeo clown. Their job is to keep the bull occupied after the rider is finished. This is also similar to the bullfighter. The barrier is another term that singles whether or not a rider makes an illegal move in the rodeo. When the announcer states that the rider has crossed the barrier before the steer exists, you know that this is an illegal action. The barrier is also an actual line across the arena. For those practicing as a tie-down roper, they are known as a calf roper. The riders also heavily rely upon the judges. A judge's job is to make sure each rider obeys all PRCA rules. They also check over the arena to insure nothing is out of order. The buck stops with the judge. For the cowboys, they also have a certain way in which calf tying is done. Hooley is the official name for the knot that is used to tie up the calf's legs during their performance. A flank strap is used to control a horse's movement, specifically the kick. Ultimately, this means a safer, easier ride for the cowboy. The terms, header and heeler, describe two different cowboys. The header is teamed up with the heeler in order to throw the first rope of the animal's front. The heeler is there to toss the second rope in order to catch the hind legs. Both legs need to be caught. This rodeo role is mostly focused on teamwork, accuracy, and agility. Going along with steer competitions, there's a penalty for not changing the direction of the animal before the second rider gets to the rear of the steer. This action is called a crossfire penalty. Left or right delivery refers to the way in which the animal stands in the chute before it exits. After a ride exits the chute and rides, this process quickly passes before one's eyes. The judges have to be on their toes and alert the timers to end the clock. The flags enable the judges to communicate to the timers. A mark out is another way to regulate the cowboy's movement during the ride. In order to stay qualified, the rider's feet must stay above the horse's shoulders as soon as the horse reaches the ground. For some events, there's an overflow of riders. For this reason, the rodeo has a "slack." This enables the non-official contestants to compete before the actual event opens. It's a better way to include all riders, even though they weren't included in the grand rodeo event. Before the cowboy or cowgirl exits the chute, a few technicalities must be taken care of. The flankman attend to this matter. A good flankman is usually well familiarized with the animal, and is able to adjust the straps on the animal before the rider begins. The gold card member and life member just refer to those who have paid his or her way through the PRCA—another way to be recognized within the association. When someone scores well, this also means that they have thoroughly followed each rule in the event. The phrase, try, is a noun that refers to the cowboy's resilience during the ride or performance. The attire is also an essential element to the performance of the animal. A dulled piece of rowels of the boot is used to advance agility for competition. According to the review, this piece is about seven times thicker than human skin; because of this, it does not penetrate into the animal. When an announcer refers to the rank of a cowboy, he would refer to his standing in the event. Thus, "standings" would give a clear indication of the rider's earnings and winnings. For those that have won three world championships within the same given year, the title of "triple crown winner" is given to the rider. For the animals that are raised for bareback riding, bull riding, and saddle bronc riding, this is referred to as roughstock. This group is highly important for the cowboys that compete in these types of events. The transportation of the bucking horses, bulls, steers, and calves depend heavily on the stock contractors. The stock contractor is part of a larger company that helps to facilitate the roughstock. After the animals are safely transported to the event, they are then ready for the timed events. A timed event refers to team roping, tie-down roping, steer roping, and steer wrestling. The rider is expected to complete the job in a timely manner—the faster runs get the wins. Sometimes, during a ride, there are malfunctions. Sitting in the stands, a fan might hear the announcer call for a "reride." A reride is applied to the rider if equipment or animal failure occurs that affects the overall ride. This can be a merciful, but nerve-wracking experience for the rider if they are not prepared mentally. Often, they are given a clean-slate start over. For those competing at a lower level, they are a contestant that needs to be a "permit holder." They must have the permit if their winnings have not reached one thousand in PRCA yet. While the rider is competing in the arena, an animal may "drop" its front. For the bull, it's when they lower the front while kicking. For the steer, it's a drop when it lowers the head to avoid a catch. This raises the difficulty level for the participant. For fan in the stands, the announcer may exclaim that the bull is pretty "rank." This means that the bull or other roughstock is a very difficult animal.

It raises the bar for the rider. There are certain terms that get mixed up with the roping tool. Some call it lasso, lariat, or riata. The term, rope, is the correct one. This tool is not to be over-looked. It's important to invest in a rope that is both strong and flexible enough to handle the roughstock. It's often made with nylon and poly materials. Also, one does not always use the same rope for each competition. A change in weather or competition can influence the rider's decision making on the type of rope used. Sisal and other poly materials are also used for bronc reins. Before any event can take place, there must be a "draw." It's important for all workers of the event to stay as unbiased as possible—this is why there is a random draw for each animal and cowboy. The following is how the draw works for the PRCA, before it reaches the actual participant. Three days before the event, the PRCA participates in a random draw for the bucking horse or bull. Then, when the cowboy is on site, there is a random draw for his roughstock. Once the draw is done, each contestant knows what the assigned bull or bucking is shortly after the drawing. While there's a barrier in place for the timers, there's also something called "pigtall" that keeps things in check if something goes wrong. For the cowboy exiting out of the shoot, there's a string connected with the barrier. If this attached string is broken, then the cowboy will be flagged. A pigtail is there in order to let the steer or calf have enough time to leave the shoot. For the steer wrestling, the team of cowboys need to ride on different sides of the steer in order to capture the animal better. When an announcer talks about one cowboy being the "hazer," it refers to the rider on the right side of the animal. This strategy keeps the steer going straight, instead of swerving off. When the rider approaches the gate, the audience might also see the cowboy slightly tilt his head. Historically, the terminology for this in rodeo is "nodding." Think of it like driving on street. We use hand singles and lights to show what we need. In rodeo, it's no different. The lingo used is almost its own language. If you're going to try to navigate through the performance, you need to be well versed in the language. For those in the stands, it's also necessary to know what's going on. Another terminology is "turn out." As opposed to "doctor-releasing" for medical injuries, turn out is used when there is a lesser, but still valid excuse. This is used when there are scheduling issues and other conflicts. For cowboys entering into a competition, there is a specific name used for each event. This event name is called "go-round." There are usually a few go-arounds in each rodeo event. However, if the participant is entering into a semi-final, there is only one event. For this event, there are no "go-round" titles used. While the cowboys and other have a tough job, it also takes a crew to help the rider out. For instance, when a cowboy is riding his bucking horse, he needs to get off safely at one point. This is what "pickup men" are for. Two riders go along each side of the cowboy and snatch him off the horse, sometimes as the horse is still bucking. Then, when the cowboy is safely off on the ground and heading to the gate, the two riders unlatch the soft flank strap, and lead the horse or bull back to the gate. For the term "dally," this also refers to the two riders in a team roping competition. After the rope is released, and the other is reading, the rope is looped behind the saddle horn. As the two teammates slowly back up and face each other, their time comes to a close. In order to keep the horse comfortable with the right gear and keep the rider safe, a riggin' is used to secure both of them. A riggin' refers to a type of leather that is specifically molded in a way that fits the horse's girth comfortably. It is a soft pad that is also inserted within the leather piece. When a rider is performing during their timed event, sometimes things do not go as smoothly as planned. This is why the pickup men or bullfighters are so essential. They swoop in when a cowboy is "hung up." When an announcer states that a rider is hung up, you know it's because their hands are caught on the rope or handle. This is a very dangerous situation. Often, it can lead being bucked around excessively or even dragged. Luckily, many are trained and ready to help in this situation before things escalate. Apart from the performers, the type of equipment used is essential. It's not enough to have a one-size-fits-all kind of rope or saddle. For example, calf roping requires its own type of equipment. Cowboys are to use "piggin' string." It's smart, specifically designed to tie the animal's legs. For the overall event, the general term for breaking a rule is "penalty." Every time an announcer states that there's a penalty, you can assume that it is for breaking the barrier. When one breaks the barrier in general rodeo events like bull riding, the cowboy gets 10 seconds added on to their score. For other events like team roping, if a one-hind-leg catch, you get five seconds added on to your overall score.<sup>19</sup>

As one can see, there's a lot to learn before you go to a rodeo event. When an announcer shoots words like box, chute, or piggin', a fan doesn't want to sit in the dark. Once a spectator has a few of the terms down, the event comes alive. It's like this—if someone attends a football game without knowing what the word “touchdown” meant, that moment might be anticlimactic to that fan when it comes. Letting rodeo be much more than a show means knowing what's going on in the background--this helps maintain the true history of rodeo.

## Faces of Rodeo and Ranching

At the end of the day, when you remove all the bells and whistles of the history of rodeo, you are left with the people. It's the people like Cheryl McLane, McBride, Annie Oakley, and many more that keep the spirit of rodeo alive. In fact, it's the ranchers that truly support the legendary rodeos. Without our ranchers, we wouldn't have rodeo in the first place. As mentioned before, there are many faces to rodeo. Some are the participants shocking the crowds in the stands, others are the timer technicians in the back, the rodeo clowns risking their life in a barrel, announcers moving the crowd as they update them on the event, and so on. But when you think of it, rodeo is simply built by hard working people with a passion. Just like in the early days, people's livelihood is heavily dependent upon ranchers. We have so many to thank for the history of rodeo. A statistic through the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) found that “there were approximately 2.1 million farms in the U.S. in 2013. Of this total, 98% of them are owned and operated by families.”<sup>20</sup> (<https://www.quora.com/How-many-ranchers-not-farmers-are-there-in-the-United-States>) No matter the type of farming, this represents the farmers of the early days. As mentioned above, hardworking ranchers were what inevitability inspired rodeo. They would be outside working hard all day, but would find fun through competition at the end of the work day. This is why we celebrate rodeo. Yes, people come to see the Wild West, pet a pony, and eat some good food. However, it's much more than that. People are coming to keep the history of rodeo alive. Aside from the crowds attending the stands, the cowboys participating in the rodeos are getting a boost from the stands. Going back to McLane's story, imagine what it must be like to fight for your life, but find a passion through rodeo. Every time McLane entered the gate into the arena, she felt the support of her friends, and love in the stands. Rodeo, for her, is a rush she experiences every time she competes. It almost gives you momentum to keep going. Just like any sport with any athlete, there's a special force that drives a person when they work hard, and put their mind to doing something. This magic doesn't just happen in the arena. Athletes spend hours upon hours each week training themselves, and more importantly, the animal. For McLane, she treated cancer much like training a new horse. It was a challenge, but it was well worth it. Everyday she knew she had to get up, tend to the horses, and keep their lives going—this meant she had to keep herself healthy, and ready to be active. After her horses had been fed, she would wait for a few hours, and then head outside to start the day. A young horse, unbroken, trying to learn a new sport is difficult—especially when there's loud sounds involved. For hours McLane would fire off a toy gun to ease the animal into the sounds of CMSA. Then, after a few weeks, she would introduce the cult 45 single action gun, filled with blanks. Eventually, the horse became familiar with the sounds, and was no longer spooked. Then, she'd spend hours riding, working out the kinks. Every horse is a little stubborn—and the good ones are especially stubborn. Training these type “A” personality animals can be a big challenge, but athletes like McLane are always up for it. It can sometimes take up to several years to get a horse seasoned enough to ride on. Once the training is over, though, you have got a praised horse that can work magic in the arena.

Thinking back to the Old West, it's these ranchers that spent hours tending to the land that made such a difference in rodeo history, and continue to affect the way we live today. Their hard work is the reason we enjoy rodeo—they were the trailblazers. Some may not know the true history behind why we celebrate rodeo, and others may not even know about rodeos. However, it doesn't take away from the fact that we have



benefited greatly from the early days of ranchers and rodeo competitors. Rodeo through history has entertained people—more importantly, it will forever inspire people.

<https://www.rodeoticket.com/rodeo-history>

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