



Indian National Finals Rodeo

Rodeo is a term still used by modern cowboys and events that came from the Spanish 'rodear,' which means round-up and requires skills for effective cattle ranching. The skills the Spanish used for rodear or round-up date back to the traditions of vaquero, or cattle herding [1,2]. The origination of rodeo is uncertain; however, it is known that the Indigenous Mexican Vaqueros inspired the American cowboy and rodeo with Mexican events of 'charreadas' and their legendary lassos and roping competitions. The early American southwest rodeo competitions were held at Mexican and American ranches [2]. The ropes carried on saddles in a coil were called 'la riata,' by the Mexicans, which was termed lariat by American cowboys. The lasso or 'lazo' is Spanish for slip knot [6]. Working cowboys on ranches require similar skills as the historical Spanish and Mexican round-up to manage cattle and horses in addition to the need of adapting to the regional variations of terrain and climate. The sharing of round-up techniques by ranchers began the competition of rodeo events in 1945 to demonstrate a cowboy's skills [2].



The First Nations people have used horses since the Spanish arrived and trained the native Mexican cattle ranchers who became competitors in rodeo events [2]. The first formal American rodeo was held in July of 1888 in Prescott, Arizona. Thereafter, rodeos were founded in the Cheyenne Frontier Days in 1897, the Pendleton Round-Up in 1910, and the Calgary Stampede in 1912 [2]. Jackson Sundown from the Northern Great Plains and Tom Three Persons from the Blood Reserve in Cardston, Alberta, Canada were both legendary native cowboys at the turn of the nineteenth century. At the Calgary Stampede in 1912, Tom Three Persons won the World's Bronc Riding Title. He was remembered as the cowboy who tamed the notorious Cyclone, a bucking bronco that had bucked off 2000 riders and had never been ridden, until Tom Three Persons stayed on him that day. This was an important event at that time as it proved that Indians could be cowboys and included into rodeo competitions. There has been a strong American Indian presence at the Cheyenne Frontier Days in Wyoming to include the Shoshone, Aparaho, Lakota, and Sioux bands beginning in 1897 [3].

A number of Indigenous regions of Canada and the American states founded the regional Indian Rodeo Association to form the Indian National Finals Rodeo competitions beginning in 1976. There are presently almost 700 rodeos nationwide offering annual prize money exceeding one million dollars and is known as the oldest Indian Rodeo Organization in the world. Athletes begin training in their youth and climb the ranks to college rodeo and professional rodeo. The Indian National Finals Rodeo is an international corporation with "a purpose to encourage, promote, showcase, and

advance the growth of Indian professional rodeo level for the educational, economic, social, and cultural advancement of North American Indian peoples” [4].

The 2023 rodeo tour began at the Blood Tribe Agricultural Society Spring Tour Rodeo in Standoff, Alberta. The spring tour consisted of two days and included events of bareback riding, steer wrestling, ladies breakaway roping, seniors breakaway roping, saddle bronc riding, tie down roping, junior breakaway roping, team roping, senior team roping, and ladies barrel racing.

At the beginning of each rodeo,



Contestants and horses warm up prior to competing in their chosen event in the rodeo.



The National Anthem is played along with a horse and rider holding a flag for each representative country entered in the rodeo.

The rules of rodeo as a sport are considered to have been fashioned and evolved from experience with its roots in cattle ranching that continues to evolve today. Two classifications define the events of rodeo: 1) rough stock events that involve riding a “rough” horse or bull with an eight-second ride before hitting the ground, and 2) timed events to include steer wrestling, team roping, tie down roping, ladies barrel racing, and breakaway roping [5]. Both animal performances and contestant performances are judged in rough stock events and contestants compete against a clock to earn the best time they can in timed events [11]. A brief description of events are as follows:

Rough Stock Events

Bareback Riding (horse and bull)



From IFNR 2018



Riding bareback does not have the advantage of having safety equipment in place for contestants and it is essential for riders to have good communication skills with their horses, as well as proper riding techniques of forward and backward leaning that prevents harm to riders and the horses; thus, horses also need to be well-trained for these events [7]. During competitions, adult riders must maintain a position on a horse, or a bull, while it charges, bucks, and runs around the arena for eight seconds. The only thing a rider can grasp is a customized bareback rigging made of leather with one hand. With a strong grip the rider must bring his spurs over the break of the shoulders of a horse until the first jump out of the chute, then try to spur the horse after each jump bringing their ankles forward to the rigging. In bull riding, contestants are not required to spur the bull, however, will receive more marks if they do [5]. Bulls must also have a bell on their rope that sits under their belly [4]. Disqualification of contestants include: if they are bucked off during the eight second ride, if they touch the horse or bull, equipment, or themselves with their other hand, use sharp spurs or chaps, and for not having a bell on the rope that sits under the bull's belly [4].

Saddle Bronc Riding



Judges look for balance and good coordination for maintaining good rhythm during saddle bronc riding. A saddle is used along with only one rein attached to a halter [6]. The horses are saddled while in the chute and riders sit on their horses just prior to opening the chute [4]. Similar to bareback riding, the rider must have his spurs over the shoulders of the horse as they complete the first jump out of the chute. Riders are disqualified if they change hands on a rein, lose or drop the rein, wrap the rein around their hand, lose a stirrup, touch the animal, equipment, or themselves with their free hand, or get bucked off before the eight second ride [4,6].

Timed Events

Steer Wrestling

The key to steer wrestling is to catch the steer charging out of the gate by the horns while contestants are still riding their horse within a 30-second time limit. This requires reaching with the right hand to grab the nearest horn then to tuck the horn into their elbow. Their left hand then pushes down the other horn as the horse rides to the left. Then at a 45-degree angle to the steer's direction, the wrestler's heels drop ahead to dig into the ground and tip the steers head, twisting it to the center of a left-hand turn. Along the other side of the steer is another rider, the "hazer" whose job it is to keep the steer running straight. The task is complete when the steer is lying down flat with all four feet and head straight and the wrestler has a hand on the steer when it is flagged. After the completion of a wrestle and time scored, the contestants are required to turn the steers head so it can stand up. Only one attempt at the steer is permitted. [4,6].



Ladies Breakaway Roping

Rider and horse need to become a 'single working unit' for successful calf roping. Roping was one of the earliest cowboy/cowgirl associations with their horse. Once the calf has left the box, riders attempt to rope its neck then stop the horse. A nylon string at the other end of the rope is attached to the saddle that tightens and breaks as the calf runs away. This "breakaway" marks the end of the run [11].



Ladies have been competing in rodeo since the turn of the twentieth century, in events of calf roping, bronc riding, trick riding and barrel racing [6].

Tie Down Roping



Tie down roping is considered "the most technical event in rodeo." There are more technical maneuvers between the rider and horse while rating the speed of the calf during attempts of dismounting the horse, tying the legs, raising arms in the air, and re-mounting the horse [8].

During competitions of calf roping, once the calf has crossed the score line riders can break through their chute barriers to rope the calf [4]. When the calf is roped, contestants dismount their horses, throw the calf by hand and cross and tie any three legs. There also must be least one wrap around all three legs with a half-hitch. The calves' legs must be tied for six seconds, as determined by the judge [4].

The contestants must not touch the calf after signaling completion of the tie-down and ropes must remain slack until the field judge approves the tie. Contestants are disqualified if a rope is removed from the calf after signaling for time. If the calf kicks off the rope or gets to its feet before the tie has been approved by the judge, the contestants receive no time for their run. Roping a calf after the 30-second time limit is considered a mistreatment of animals and any dragging or jerking of calf results in fines [4].

Team Roping

Team roping combines speed, skill, and agility as two riders work in succession to capture a calf or steer, roping both the horns and the feet in a 30-second time limit [9]. Horn wraps are placed over the calves or steers horns to prevent injury. The “header” of the team lassos the horns, while the “heeler” lassos the hind legs. Riders are on horses on each side of the steer with the header roping the horns followed by the heeler roping the feet. The steer must be moving in a different direction for the heeler to throw their rope, and thereafter, must be moving forward for the loop to be legal [4].



Ladies Barrel Racing



Similar to calf roping, barrel racing requires having a close cooperation and teamwork between the rider and horse. It is a precision event, where competitors compete against an electronic timer while racing at top speed. Riders must circle three barrels in a cloverleaf pattern that requires making 180 degree, or 360 degree turns around each barrel before returning back to the start/finish line [5]. Contestants are allowed a running start to their race and timing begins once the horse's nose reaches the starting line and ends when its nose reaches the finish line.

Three markers are set up in the arena to center the barrels and the measured pattern for the barrels are posted for each rodeo. Time is added for each contestant if a barrel is knocked over or was set up on its other end. Judges determine interference if a person or animal enters the arena during each trial. A minimum of 60 seconds is set



between runs. Flag judges stand directly behind electronic eyes and flags each contestant at the start and finish of each run [4].

Contestants are disqualified if they are not ready when their name is called, if they break the cloverleaf pattern, or if they are not mounted on their horses when crossing the finish line [4].

Junior and Senior Events

Junior events include boys and girls in bull riding and in breakaway roping. Junior girls may also enter barrel racing. Senior events include team roping and break away roping. The age range for juniors is 15 years or younger and for seniors, 50 years and older. The rules are adapted for junior events, such that all bull (steer) riders are required to wear helmets and mouth pieces in addition to specially designed safety vests during competitions. The bulls used for riding are miniature bulls, younger bulls, or cows. Juniors are also required to use only one hand to hold onto the bull rope and must ride for six seconds. Seniors use standard equipment [4].



The rules of the Indian National Finals Rodeo are numerous; from arena requirements, equipment used by contestants, contestant sportsmanship, dress code, judges, maintaining event requirements, and the humane treatment of animals. Horses and cattle are not to be dragged, exposed to misuse of equipment such as spurs, or used twice in one day of rodeo.

Sentiments from a Rodeo Mom

A rodeo mother claims “the rodeo lifestyle exposes children to situations that will help them to develop the skills to be a productive and well-rounded member of society” [10]. Not only do children develop stronger physically they also need to learn good work ethic as a cowboy or cowgirl that builds self-confidence and commitment to their lifestyle. Critical thinking is necessary with learning all skills and safety necessary for rodeo and ranching. Children who begin rodeo competition at an early age develop healthy social skills, leadership skills and respect for their human and animal relationships. The moral ethics of “Cowboy Code” include always look out for your people, always be grateful for what you have, always be fair, honest, and considerate to others, and always help someone in need [10].

Building Brains Together graciously thanks staff at the Indian National Finals Rodeo in Standoff Alberta for their courteous allowance of filming and documenting such a great event.

Indian National Finals Rodeo



Created by Larry Hanna at Las Vegas Nevada

References

1. Rodeo Heritage Foundation. Retrieved online May, 2023 from: [History of Rodeo - Rodeo Heritage Foundation Rodeo Heritage Foundation - Rodeo 101](#).
2. How Mexican Vaqueros Inspired the American Cowboy. Retrieved online May, 2023 from: [How Mexican Vaqueros Inspired the American Cowboy \(history.com\)](#).
3. Mellis, A.,F. (2003). Riding Buffalos and Broncos: Rodeo and Native Traditions in the Northern Great Plains. University of Oklahoma Press: Norman Publishing Division, U.S.A. (pg. 30-35).
4. Indian National Finals Rodeo. Retrieved online April, 2023 from: [Indian National Finals Rodeo \(infr.org\)](#).
5. Gunderson, H. (1996). The Linder Legend. The Story of Rodeo and its Champion (pg. 135- 139). Sagebrush Publishing; Calgary, Alberta.
6. Byers, C. (1966). Cowboy Roping and Rope Tricks. (pg. 74). Dover Publications, Inc.: New York, New York.
7. Bare Horseback Riding. Retrieved online April 2023 from [Bare Horseback Riding \(Tips that Actually Work!\) – Horse Riding HQ](#).
8. Tie Down Roping. Canadian Finals Rodeo. Retrieved online June 2023 from [TIE DOWN ROPING - Canadian Finals Rodeo \(cfrreddeer.ca\)](#).
9. Thigpen, N. (2023). All about team roping. Retrieved online June 2023 from [Team Roping: Origin, History & Rules \(theropingpen.com\)](#).
10. My Life as a Rodeo Mom. Benefits of raising a rodeo kid. Retrieved online April 2023 from [Benefits of Raising a Rodeo Kid – My Life As A Rodeo Mom \(wordpress.com\)](#).
11. The 8 Official Rodeo Events: What They are and How They're Done. Retrieved online July 2023 from [The 8 official pro rodeo events: What they are & how they're done - Rodeo Scottsdale - The Best in the West, Arizona](#).