

Rodeo – The Sport of the Beef Business

by Ryan Holota

The Saskatchewan Rodeo Industry

Rodeo is a sport with a large following on the prairies, and a major source of revenue for rural community groups. The Canadian Cowboys Association holds approximately 70 semi-pro events every year across Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Ontario, and attendance has held fairly steady over the past several years.

Participation by contestants has been relatively steady as well. "We have seen a decline in the number of cowboys who are participating in rough stock events," says Jarid Berglund, the calf-roping director of the CCA, "but there are still a lot of cowboys who participate in other events."

Between the events produced by the CCA, other associations, and events that are not affiliated with any organization, there are more than 100 rodeos in the province every year.

The Saskatchewan High School Rodeo Association is introducing the sport to young adults, passing on and preserving the important skills and life lessons that rodeo can teach. Rodeo offers a level of responsibility that many sports can not match. Competitors learn to manage finances, maintain good grades in school, learn to care for animals, and still obtain the benefits that other, more mainstream sports offer.

Rodeo can also provide opportunities to young competitors. US colleges offer many scholarships for rodeo athletes, and many of those dollars end up in the hands of Canadian students. Because of the high levels of competition in Canada, our students are highly successful as they have developed great skills and a great work ethic. Because the SHSRA mandates that school grades must meet certain standards, the competitors have a solid educational base on which to build future learning and careers.



Major Rodeo Events

The Canadian Cowboys Association is the largest organizer of rodeos in Saskatchewan. Their events culminate in November with the CCA Finals rodeo which is held in conjunction with the

Canadian Western Agribition showcasing some of the best rodeo talent available. Jason Pollock, CEO and General Manager of the Agribition and a CCA competitor says that "...many of these competitors are capable of competing in the professional circuit but choose not to because of time, financial, or family obligations."

Last year, more than 250,000 people attended a CCA sanctioned rodeo event, including the 5 day Finals at Agribition. CCA rodeos include 7 major events and 4 optional junior events, and feature significant prize money.

continued on page 22

NORAC
Mobile Group Animal Scale
A simple solution to animal weighing.

Legal-For-Trade
PATENTED

The Mobile Group Animal Scale's low profile weighing platform and rubberized deck makes loading and unloading animals quick, easy and safe.

- Eliminate shrink losses and increase profit
- Easy "one man" operation
- Buy or sell from your own farm
- Fully independent, self-contained scale

Visit us at Agribition! We are located in the Credit Union EventPlex.

NORAC | 800 667 3921 | www.norac.ca | **IS INDUSTRIAL SCALE** | 800 661 1588 | www.industrialscale.ca

Rodeo - Sport of Beef Business
continued from page 21

The Canadian Professional Rodeo Association also holds several professional events in Saskatchewan each year, bringing elite athletes into Saskatchewan communities and raising the profile of the sport not only in small communities, but also in major centers.

A Sport Dependant On Producers

It comes as no surprise that producers are an integral part of the rodeo business. After all, the skills performed during an event are based on the skills that one needs to operate a ranch, and the animals are just as much a part of the event as the cowboys. Most of the competitors hail from a ranching or farming background because they have access to the animals that are needed for practice and learning. Ranchers also play an important role by supplying contractors with the non-human competitors critical to the sport.

Stock contractors and promoters have an important role in making rodeo fun to watch and fair to the competitors. It is important that the contractors provide animals that are evenly matched to each other and to the skill levels of the competitors." Muriel Barrett of Prairie Rodeo, a stock contractor for more than 25 years continues, "You can't just back your trailer up to a pen and load the first animals that walk up. There is a lot more to it."

The Rodeo Lifestyle

It has often been said that the family that rodeos together stays together. Rodeo has always played an important role in the lifestyle of rural people, and will continue to do so into the future. Many of the events in rodeo mimic the day to day activities of ranch life. "Especially for people with large ranches or using provincial and Community Pasture land, the safest and easiest way to handle cattle

is still with a rope on the back of a horse. These skills are still very relevant today," says Berglund.

Rodeo has always been a family activity. From the time children are old enough to ride a sheep, family supports and cheers on the competitors. Families usually travel together to events, and the atmosphere is one of inclusion and community. Competitors have a sense of family between them as well. "Everybody wants everybody else to do well. Buddies share information about the animals, even when they are competing against each other," comments Berglund.

The Future of Rodeo

"Interest in rodeo is still high," says famed pick-up man, Wade Rempel "especially in events like team roping. It may be that young people are getting more involved because they see it as safer than the rough-stock events. There are fewer participants in the rough-stock events, but those who are in it seem to be taking it a lot more seriously."

Rodeo can involve a lot of travel, and with entry fees climbing, fuel prices going up, and urban employers being less tolerant about travel for rodeo competition, it faces challenges. Rodeo is a valuable community activity, but adaptation will be needed in the future. Rule changes will be needed going forward to ensure the safety of both animals and competitors. The Calgary Stampede and the high profile it receives often champions many of these rule changes, and often they are adopted by the rest of the rodeo community.

Access to competitors is another area in which rodeo faces obstacles. "As we lose more rural people in Saskatchewan, we lose our seed stock of competitors. As an industry, we must reach out to a growing

urban audience to find new people. One of the biggest changes that we face is where our competitors are going to come from," says Pollock. "In addition, we need to come together to communicate our values and benefits to the overall population."

Wade Rempel adds, "I know guys that are city raised that participate in rodeo. They may have friends in the ranching community, or they may just decide that they want to participate, go to a school to learn, and start rodeoing that way."

"The future of rodeo all depends on the people who are doing it," says Jaid Berglund. "If we get a good group of people working together to keep it alive, it will continue to thrive. We need to promote our sport to those people who do not understand it, and get a young crowd to come out and give it a try."

"We need the rodeo industry to approach rodeo with a little more professionalism," adds Muriel Barrett. "The increase in television coverage has been great for the sport; the coverage shows competitors traveling the world and making large sums of money and in my opinion interest in the sport is on an upswing. Now, we need to make an effort to produce a show as opposed to a lineup of events, and to do a better job of offering something for all ages to attract more families. Rodeos are undersold, and we do not do a good enough job of telling our story. Rodeo has competitors that are bankers, dentists, and CEOs, but most viewers only think of them as cowboys. They don't get the recognition that they deserve. If we promote those facts better, we can attract a wider variety of people." ^{BH}