

Fredriksson, Kristine. *American Rodeo: From Buffalo Bill to Big Business*. College Station, Texas A&M University Press, 1985. Pp. xiii, 255. Index, bibliography, notes, appendixes, pictures. \$18.95.

*American Rodeo* is a very significant publication, one of only three scholarly books about rodeo. While cowboys and the west have been well researched for many years, rodeo cowboys have only recently been taken seriously either as professional athletes or subjects for scholarly inquiry (p. 6). While Fredriksson clearly intended to help rectify this situation, her emphasis is much more on rodeo as an organized professional sport than on the rodeo cowboy as a professional athlete. In fact, organizations rather than individuals dominate the book, which is largely about the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association (PRCA), making scant mention of Little Britches, high school, college or other kinds of rodeo.

Kristine Fredriksson was uniquely qualified to undertake this study. Now Assistant professor and Curator of History at The Museum of Texas Tech University, she was in 1975 and 1976 Assistant Executive Director of the South Dakota Cowboy and Western Heritage Hall of Fame, and from 1981 through 1983, Registrar of Collections and Research at the Prorodeo Hall of Champions and Museum of the American Cowboy. She also attended rodeo school for six years and was a production assistant for the television western "Gunsmoke" before receiving her Ph.D. in history from the University of California at Santa Barbara in 1982.

*American Rodeo*, an edited version of Fredriksson's dissertation, relies heavily on archival materials from the Prorodeo Hall of Champions and the Westemeir Papers at the University of Colorado. Interviews and various rodeo periodicals are also used to bring together invaluable data never before available in coherent form. Some chapters do still bear marks of their dissertation origins, but the sometimes stiff wording also results from the fact that English is not Fredriksson's first language. In any case, the book is easy if not exciting reading, and is well documented and indexed.

The first chapter presents a very brief survey of rodeo from the 1880's to World War I, wherein Buffalo Bill's significance to the sport and to the book's title remains unclear. The real action begins in Chapter Two with the chaotic era following the demise of Wild West shows when unregulated and sometimes dishonest rodeos multiplied rapidly. Failed efforts to organize the sport and protect the contestants, producers and fans also multiplied until 1929 when producers established the Rodeo Association of America (RAA). Contestants finally founded the Cowboys Turtle Association (CTA) in 1936.

Popular works on rodeo generally suggest that the founding of the CTA

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I. The others are: Clifford P. Westemeir, Man. Beast, *Dust-The Story of Rodeo* (Denver: World Press, 1947), which is quite flawed and out of date, and Elizabeth Atwood Lawrence, *Rodeo: An Anthropologist Looks at The Wild and The Tame* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1981), reviewed in the Summer 1983 *Journal of Sport History*, pp. 64-5.

brought an end to the chaos, but Fredriksson shows quite clearly that this was not the case. Instead there was a long and uneasy truce between the RAA and the CTA, broken by strikes and threats of disruption. There was much bitterness along with some cooperation before the final triumph of the CTA, now the all powerful PRCA.

As this story is told, Frederiksson also describes the introduction of commercial sponsors, training methods, and sports medicine, along with the increase of prizes from belt buckles and commemorative items to hundreds of thousands of dollars. The long battle between rodeo organizations and humane societies is discussed at length, thereby filling in some of the details of early rodeo history omitted from the first chapter.

Throughout, Fredriksson notes efforts to improve rodeo's image and obtain better media coverage. In the final chapter, "The Making of the Cowboy Plutocrat," she describes the impact of recent innovations like electronic scoreboards and commercial sponsorship on rodeo's popularity and the cowboys' pocketbooks. Despite her optimistic tone, it is readily apparent that rodeo remains light years behind other professional sports in both remuneration and technological sophistication.

With all its outstanding features, *American Rodeo* does have some shortcomings. Unlike virtually all other books on the sport, *American Rodeo* never goes to the rodeo. There is neither roping nor riding, thrill nor spill. Whatever glamour and excitement attracts millions of rodeo fans annually is not reflected in this book. There is not even a list of standard rodeo events and the rules that govern them.

Fredriksson never really explains what a rodeo was or is like. Therefore when she states that in 1929 the RAA published the first list of sanctioned events (p. 22), there is no indication of what other choices they might have made. Also not explained is why, for example, the RAA chose to include competition in wild cow milking, while omitting such popular crowd pleasers as trick and fancy roping and trick riding from their list. Whose interests were served by these decisions and how did they influence the sport?

In a similar vein, Fredriksson points out several times that whereas bronc riding is now limited to eight seconds per contestant, it was once terminated only after the rider was thrown or the horse tamed, sometimes more than fifteen minutes. What she fails to mention is that not only did this make a radical change in the contest itself, it virtually eliminated any possibility of interaction between spectators and contestants. When and why this dramatic shift occurred and its impact would seem important parts of the story.

Finally, there are the cowboys themselves. As for the cowgirls, only in the most indirect way is it even revealed that women ever participated in big time rodeo, much less that they were once among the top money winners and biggest stars. The major unanswered question is: when and why were the women's events discontinued? Similarly missing is any discussion of black, Hispanic or native American contestants. Once headliners, they too have nearly vanished from the arena.

Although these and other questions remain, *American Rodeo* is an excellent and invaluable book which should be part of any serious collection on American sport. Sport historians, heretofore prevented from including much about rodeo in their publications or classes can now find the information they have needed for so long. Fredriksson's landmark work should do much toward establishing rodeo's place in American sport and social history.

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