

Buffalo Pawnee Bill Mulhall's First Annual World's Championship Wild West Stampede, Roundup, Cowboy Reunion, Vaquero Tournament, Goat Roping, Fourth of July Fiesta, and State Fair

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The title of this paper includes some of the many colorful names by which rodeos were known before they were called rodeos. The word rodeo was rarely used in conjunction with cowboy, contests until the 1920's. Prior to 1936, there were no standard rules, no governing agency, and in the minds of many, no sport.

Beginning in 1883, cowboy contests were sometimes included at state and local fairs, community festivals, and horse races. Simultaneously contests and exhibitions of cowboy skills both real and contrived became an important part of the programs of Wild West shows. Hundreds of these shows, employing thousands of performers, toured the United States, Canada, Mexico, Europe and Australia between 1883 and 1916.

Wild West shows at their best were highly professional, expensive, outdoor extravaganzas with casts of thousands. Their polish and popularity led the organizers of western community festivals to incorporate many of their more spectacular features. Cowboy contests thus became the central features of events called roundups, stampedes, frontier days, and over fifty other names.

These colorful outdoor programs were not limited to eight contests as are Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association (PRCA) rodeos today. Over seventy different contests were included at one time or another. Cowboys, cowgirls, charms, vaqueros and Indians competed in the two most popular events, bronc riding and steer roping; Hispanic contests such as *correr el gallo* and *sortijas*; and Wild West show adaptations such as pony express and stage coach races, trick and fancy roping, and trick riding.

Wild West shows and cowboy contests became nearly identical, and the same performers starred in both. With the demise of the major touring Wild West shows in 1916, these performers were dependent on contests for their livelihood. Promoters and producers of contests were unregulated, and fraud and abuse spread. More than ever, in the public mind, rodeo was less a competitive sport than a part of the seamy entertainment world of circus and carnival.

Changes came slowly as indoor rodeos were introduced and championship contests staged in Madison Square Garden between 1917 and 1922. Other eastern arenas also hosted cowboy events during the twenties and thirties. In 1936 Boston Garden was the site of a cowboy strike which led to the formation of the Cowboys Turtle Association (CTA), and modern rodeo was born. The number of events was greatly limited, rules standardized, and contests sanctioned. Since then, rodeo has grown in popularity and respectability.

However, the CTA was an organization of Anglo males. After its inception, blacks, Hispanics, Indians and women, all of whom populated both the real west and the Wild West-contest west, were effectively eliminated from big time rodeo. The spectator also lost, for more than the ethnic makeup of rodeo changed. The color, excitement, and authenticity of the great outdoor festivals is missing from the regulated, indoor rodeos of today.



The session on the rodeo in North America included John Dewar, Kristine Fredrickson, and Mary Lou LeCompte as speakers.