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Bareback Bronc Riding Versus Bull Riding

There are many different events in the sport of rodeo. Two of the best-known events, bareback bronc riding and bull riding, might seem quite similar to the casual onlooker; however, although they are both rough-stock events, they are quite different in the equipment required, riding technique, animal size, and bucking style.

Bareback bronc riding requires a vast assortment of equipment to have a safe and successful ride. The bareback rigging is probably the most important piece of equipment. It is a combination of wood and leather, molded into a suitcase-type handle for the rider to wedge his hand in while wearing a thick leather glove. Another piece of equipment that is extremely important is the neck roll, which is simply a thick pad attached to the back of the neck with long straps to prevent whiplash or fractures during the ride and dismount. Bareback riders are also required to wear straight-shanked, free-spinning spurs with rounded rowels to keep from cutting the horse. A vest and chaps are optional safety features that are frequently used for the legs and torso.

Bareback riding also entails a very unnatural technique. In this event, the rider positions himself on the horse almost completely reclined with his head near the flanks and his feet at the shoulders. Once the gate is opened, the rider is required to "mark out" the horse. This means that the rider must reach up with his legs and mash his spurs into the horse's neck before the first buck is made. The rider is then judged on his spurring ability, which is done by pulling his feet in an

upward motion and into an almost spread-eagle position.

Size and bucking style are also important features of bareback riding. An average bucking horse weighs between 1200 and 1500 pounds and is approximately five and one-half feet tall at the top of the shoulder. These horses are extremely quick and generally buck straight down the arena.

Unlike bareback riding, bull riding does not require a rigging. Instead, a woven grass rope and a thin leather glove are used. The protective vest is a requirement in this event due to the rather aggressive nature of the bulls. No neck roll is needed in this event because there is little strain on the neck. The spurs in bull riding have fixed rowels with sharp ends, and the shanks are angled inward at a forty-five degree angle to make gripping easy. Helmets and facemasks are optional safety features for this event.

The bull riding technique is fairly natural. The rider sits in the upright position, straddling the bull just behind the shoulders. There is no mark out requirement in bull riding, and spurring is just a scoring bonus. Usually only the most experienced riders practice spurring.

The average weight of a bull is somewhere between 1500 and 2100 pounds. Most bulls are approximately five feet tall at the top of the shoulders. Bulls buck fairly slowly; however, they are very powerful and very aggressive. Bulls seldom buck straight down the arena. They often fade from side to side, spin, and twist.

In short, there are many differences between bareback bronc riding and bull riding. The primary elements that set these events apart are the variations in equipment, riding technique, size, and bucking style.