



Bull Riding



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About the Tutorial

Bull riding is a rodeo sport which involves the rider riding a bull and trying to mount on it for a specific duration of time, while the bull tries to buck-off the rider. According to the American tradition, the rider has to stay mounted on the bull for eight seconds, which is also called as the most dangerous eight seconds in sports.

It is termed as one of the most hazardous rodeo sports as the injury rate of the bull fighters is really high when compared to other rodeo sport players.

Audience

This sport can be ideal for those who have a penchant for rodeo sports. For a layman who has no idea about bull riding but still has the passion and enthusiasm to learn it, this tutorial will be helpful in providing enough details about the game. This tutorial explains the gaming process through a detailed description and pictorial illustrations, wherever required.

Prerequisites

Before appearing in any of the bull riding events, a player has to take care of a lot of stuff as it is one of the most dangerous games and a small mistake might result in life risking injuries. Bull riding is a sport of perfect balance as well as adaptability. The players have to practice proper riding techniques in order to balance themselves while changing their position on the tamed bull.

In this game, a player requires brute strength in order to hold onto that aggressive bull. Great balance and coordination between physical and mental strength is required for the player to ride a bull.

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1. Bull Riding – Overview

Bull riding is the most recognized as well as exciting rodeo game where riders have to maintain their balance on a tamed bull for a specific duration of time. Considered as one of the most dangerous rodeo sports, where injuries are a part and parcel of the game, it requires flexibility, coordination, courage and high spirit to compete.



In this game, the rider needs to mount on the bull for eight seconds while maintaining his balance on it, while the bull constantly tries to knock-off the rider during that period. If the rider successfully holds onto the bull for eight seconds, he will get points based on his riding skills and the hurdles faced during the ride by a group of judges. The highest scorer will be declared as the winner.

History of Bull Riding

Bull riding is a very old game and has its direct origin in the Mexican ranching skill contests, which is known as **Charreada**. Previously known as **Jaripeo**, which was a kind of bull fighting that involved riders riding the bull to death, it evolved into simple riding where the bull was ridden until it got tired and stopped bucking.

In 1936, Rodeo Cowboy Association (RCA) was founded which later became the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association (PRCA). After that the popularity of the game started rising and by mid-19th century, it was very famous around Texas and California cattle ranches.



Slowly many bull riders started breaking away from the traditional rodeo rules by creating their own rules and organizations. In 1992, The Professional Bull Riders (**PBR**) was conjointly founded by 21 professional bull riders. Similarly, another organization named **Championship Bull Riding (CBR)** was founded in 2002. Both PBR and CBR promote and produce bull riding shows at different places.

Participating Countries

Bull riding is the most favourite rodeo sport in America. Although, it is termed as a very dangerous game for the riders, that hasn't affected anyway in its soaring popularity. While it continues to gain more popularity, it is also spreading to other countries. Besides United States, it is also becoming famous in Mexico, Canada, Brazil, Argentina, Australia, New Zealand, etc.



The countries with strong bull riding traditions and histories are USA, Mexico, Canada, Brazil, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Panama, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa.

2. Bull Riding – Equipment

In this chapter, we will discuss about the different types of equipment that a bull rider needs.

Rider Equipment

Bull riders use quite a few equipment's meant for their protection to avoid injuries and maximum safety for them and for the animal involved. The different types of equipment used by a rider are explained in the following subheads.

Bull Rope – The bull rope is considered as the primary equipment in bull riding. It is mostly tied around the bull's girth area behind its front legs. It is mostly made of Nylon, grass and a combination of some other materials. A handle is braided at the centre of the rope which is further stiffened by leather.



The side of the rope that is tied to the bull is tied in an adjustable knot in order to allow adjustment based on the bull's size. The other side of the rope has a flat braid and is coated with rosin which allows the rope to keep on sliding from the rider's hand in order to avoid injuries.

The handle is partially made of leather and is the only support for the rider during the ride. A bell is strapped to the knot which allows the rope to fall off the bull once the rider has been dismounted from the bull.

Chaps – Chaps are the most visible part among all of the rider's equipment. They are mostly made of leather and often printed with the sponsor's name. They may look

decorative and flashy, but they are a part of the rider's armour and provide protection for the rider's thigh and leg parts against the bull's horns and hooves.

Gloves – Riders use only one glove on the hand which is used to grip the rope during the ride. These gloves are mainly made of leather and are used to prevent rope burns and provide protection to the hands and fingers. The gloves are also used as a good grip over the rope. Some riders use rosin on the gloves which allows additional grip over the rope.

Cowboy hats and helmets – The flashiest and most distinguished part of a bull rider's equipment is the cowboy hat. It is mostly used in order to provide protection from head injuries and maintaining the balance. Now a days some riders are using helmets and protective masks for additional protection.

Some professional riders still prefer cowboy hats over helmets as they believe that the helmet affects their balance during the ride. While the helmet provides additional protection to some vulnerable parts of head, the face mask is mostly used for providing protection to face and jaw areas.

Boots – The cowboy boots are specially designed for bull riding. They have a special spur ridge on the heel which helps the spurs stay on the place. The loosely locked spurs are used to maintain balance during the ride and are considered as one of the most crucial equipment.



Protective vests – The protective vests used by the bull riders prevents blow to the body and protects the rider's torso part against the direct contact with the bull's horn and hooves part. Only PBR bull riders use these vests for additional protection.

Bull Equipment

Flank strap – A flank strap is a rope that is made of soft cotton of around 5 to 8 inches in dimension and is tied to the bull's flank area. Contrary to the rumours, a flank strap is

not tied to the bull's testicles. It is mostly used to encourage the bull to use its hind legs more during bucking.

As the bulls are very ticklish at the flank area, tying the flank strap enables them to buck more without any injury. If the flank strap is tied improperly, a rider can apply for a re ride as the bull doesn't buck well if the flank strap is too tight. The flank strap is often tied by a stock contractor or his designates.

3. Bull Riding – Playing Environment

The arenas that are used for bull riding vary from each other. Some arenas are constructed only for bull riding and other rodeo sports, while others are used to play other games besides bull riding. The size of this arena mostly depends on the typical venue. Mostly it is a large area which gives the rider as well as the bull enough space to manoeuvre.



At one end of the arena, bucking chutes are there from which the bulls are released. These chutes are small square shaped places where the rider also mounts on the bull at the beginning and the bull rushes into the arena with the rider mounted on it. Another exit chute is there through which the bulls can exit the arena.

4. Bull Riding – How to Ride?

In this chapter, we will get to know how to mount a bull, to ride and about the basic safety measures of riding.

Riding Basics

Riders and bulls are usually matched up randomly before the beginning of the match itself. However, in some cases, ranked riders are allowed to choose the bull for riding. Each bull has a specific name and number and is selected based on its strength, health, agility, age etc.

Mounting the Bull

First the rider mounts the bull and grips the flat braided rope. Once he has secured a good grip on the rope, he nods which signifies he is ready and the game starts. The arena is fenced up to 6 to 7 feet high in order to protect the audience from the escaped bulls.



Exits

Generally, exits are there at each corner of the arena which allows the riders to get out of the way very quickly. Sometimes, in case of emergency, riders can also hop on to the fence to avoid danger. The bucking chute (a small enclosure where the bull is held) will be open and the bull will storm in to the arena.

Race

The minimum riding time for qualification is 8 seconds according to American rules. The clock starts once the bull breaks the plane of the gate. The rider needs to stay on the bull for the whole time while touching the bull using only his riding hand. the other hand of the rider is free for the rest of the race.

During the race, the bull tries every way to throw off the rider from itself by bucking, jumping, kicking, spinning or twisting itself whereas the rider needs to stay on the bull for 8 seconds. In case of bareback riding and saddle bronc, the riders can't use their free hand to touch the bull as this will result in end of the ride.

The riders usually use rosin, which is a sticky substance, in order to have a firm grip over the rope during the riding period. The riders use their weight for shifting over the bucking bull throughout the ride time in order to hold the bull.



The ride time ends if –

- The rider's hand comes out of the rope.
- The rider touches the ground.
- The free hand of the rider touches the bull (also called as **slap**).

A buzzer or whistle announces the completion of the eight-second ride.

Throughout the game, bull fighters, also known as **rodeo clowns**, stay near the bull in order to help the rider whenever needed. Sometime during time of emergency, the rider can also jump off the fence to escape from the bull whereas the rodeo clowns try to distract the bull.

Scoring

In case of bull riding, the winner is declared based on the judge's score. Both the rider and the bull are awarded scores. Usually there are two judges for the game and each judge provides scores to the bull from 0 to 50 points and to the rider from 0 to 50.

The combined score from each judge is considered as the final score for the rider. Sometimes players score zero points which is quite common in the case where the rider immediately falls off from the bull after leaving the chute itself. Many experienced professionals usually score more than 75.



The score above 80 is considered excellent, above 90 is exceptional and very rare. It's almost impossible for a player to score full points i.e. 100. Till now, in the history of bull riding, it only happened once where a rider has been given full 100 points.

The scores given by the judges are based on many factors. A rider gets score based on his ability to control as well as consistency while mounting on the bull. A rider is only awarded score, if he has stayed on for more than 8 seconds on the bull. Sometimes while on the bull, the riders perform spurring in order to gain additional points. The rider gets disqualified if he touches the bull or the rope or himself using his free arm. The ability to control the bull provides the rider additional extra points.

The bulls used in the game have raw power and different movement styles as compared to other rodeo game animals. Sometimes they perform **sunfishing** or **belly roll**, where the bull jumps and while being completely off the ground, the bull kicks his hind side in a twisting or rolling motion which makes it really hard for the rider to hold onto the bull.

The bull always receives a score even if the rider falls off from it within 8 seconds. For the bull, the judges see its speed, agility and the degree of difficulty it is putting for the rider. Judges mainly look for its front end drops, back end kicks, spins and direction changes. If a bull gives the rider a really hard time, more scores are awarded to it.



Based on the past record points of the bulls, best bulls are brought to the final matches in order to ensure great competition and good score to the riders. Good scores provide "**Bucking Bull of the Year**" award to the bull, which brings prestige to the specific bull's ranch.

5. Bull Riding – Rules

In bull riding, there are not many disqualification rules. Rules are set around the game procedure as well as scorings. Different organizations follow different set of rules and different event organizing methods. Even the minimum ride time differs from one organization to another.



Many of the bull riding competitions involve multiple rounds and spans over two to three nights. A rider is allowed to ride only one bull in one night. The total points at the end of the event are recorded. Mostly after two rounds, based on the total points scored by the riders for the first two days, top 20 players are selected.

Among those top 20 players, another round of competition is organized among them. The final round is called **Short Go** at the end of which the highest scorer wins the competition.

The rider uses spurs to encourage the bull to perform more actions. Modern rodeo rules are very strict about the usage of the spurs. These spurs used in competitions can neither have a fixed rowel nor can they be sharpened. PBR only allows the usage of two types of spurs to ensure the safety of the animal.

If a rider scores low because of the bull's low performance, he can appeal for a re-ride. The judges allow a free re-ride to the rider only if they feel that the bull didn't give its best

or underperformed as compared to other bulls of the event. The judges signal the re-ride by throwing a red flag into the arena.

By taking up the re-ride option, the rider has to give up the scores received and wait till other riders finish off their ride and then he rides again. Sometimes the plan backfires when the rider receives low in the first ride, but receives zero or lower score in the second ride. A rider is also given a re-ride if the bull either stumbles or runs off to the gate.

If the chute countdown time expires before the rider gives his nod, either the bull or the rider gets disqualified by the judges based on the situation. If the bull gets disqualified, the rider gets a re-ride, whereas if a rider gets disqualified the ride gets over.

6. Bull Riding – Champions

The Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association (PRCA) is considered as the governing body for most of the rodeo sports including bull riding. It is the highest paid rodeo organization in the world and sanctions rodeo game events in 37 U.S. states and 3 Canadian states. Its headquarters is at Colorado Springs, Colorado, USA.

The Wrangler National Finals Rodeo is the main championship event organized by PRCA. In this 10 day event, all rodeo sports championships including bull riding are also organized. Except PRCA, many bull riding organizations are there who organize country wise bull riding events. Some of the famous events include PBR World Cup and CBR World Cup.

Bull Riding – Champions

Bull Riding is a dangerous sport but it is still played and there are many champions who have set records in this game. Some of them are as follows:

Guilherme Marchi

Guilherme Marchi is a bull rider from Brazil. He started his career in 2004 where he attained the 41st rank in PBR World Cup. In 2005, Marchi got the second rank in the PBR World Cup and McBride was the winner.

In 2006, he finished second and Adriano Moraes won the game. Same fate was in store for him in year 2007 when he came second and the game was won by Justin McBride. He won for the first time in year 2008 where he rode 75% of his bulls.

Justin McBride

Justin McBride is a bull rider from America, who has won the PBR World Cup in 2005 and 2007. He started his career in 1999 and got to the fourth position in Built Ford Tough Series. Overall, he has won 32 games. In 2001, he won in five events.

In 2002, he could not win any event, but in year 2003, he won the Build Ford Tough Series. In the same year, he was hurt by a bull, but he still played in the finals of PBR World Cup and got the second position. The year 2005 was his year. where he won the PBR World Cup. His second PBR World Cup win came in 2007.

Adriano Moraes

Adriano Moraes is a bull rider from Brazil who has won National Finals Rodeo two times and PBR World Cup three times. Moraes started his career at small rodeos and won Brazilian titles in 1992 and 1993. In 1994, he started taking part in PRCA and PBR events and won the PBR title.

In 2001, he again won the PBR title. Before this, he couldn't take part in any game due to a broken leg. In 2006, he won the PBR World Cup third time. In 2008, he announced his retirement from the game.

Mike Lee

Mike Lee is a bull rider from America who started his career in 2002. The year 2004 brought success for him when he won the PBR World Cup and World Championship simultaneously.

He suffered from many injuries in 2007 which included head injuries. So he started wearing a helmet instead of cowboy cap. In 2003 also he suffered from severe injury which led to his brain surgery.

Chris Shivers

Chris Shivers is an American bull rider who won the PBR World Cup in 2000 and 2003. Besides this, he also won the 22 BFTS events. He has the record of scoring 96.5 points two times and winning Bud Light Cup events three times consecutively.

He also won PBR World Cup two times. In 2012, he announced his retirement after the PBR World Cup. In his entire career he took part in many events and won several championships.