



Indian National Finals Rodeo 2015 READY FOR RELEASE #2

RODEO JUDGES --- THEIR DECISION IS FINAL

by Lee Allen

The bible and bulldogging have something in common outside the pews of a cowboy church --- "Judge not, lest ye be judged," the often misquoted scripture from *Matthew 7:1-5*.

But somebody has to sit in judgment of the cowboys and cowgirls that compete in the Indian National Finals Rodeo and it runs true to form...Native stock contractors, Native stock, Native competitors...that arena judges should also be Natives. Hence the Judge/Secretary/Timer Clinic held March 20-22 in Las Vegas, provided three days of training for those wanting to be a certified judge for INFR sanctioned and tour rodeos.

"We look for judges that have rodeo experience and knowledge," says the Superintendent of INFR judges, Bo Vocu. "They should be familiar with the INFR rulebook and compliance of those requirements. We use a course similar to the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association that teaches judges what to look for in rough stock events and positioning in the timed events."

Although the INFR goal is to be as native as often as possible, the November 2015 rodeo will be the first to use certified all-Native judges. "Our program has been in place going on five years now and we've used INFR-certified judges at all tour rodeos as well as the Junior/Senior Finals," says Vocu. "Our pool of good judges has grown and proven itself...they've earned the right to judge our biggest rodeo, the Finals at South Point Equestrian Center in Las Vegas, November 3-7."

The rationale here is that a properly-trained and certified official will make less errors in judging. "A bad mark in rough stock or a missed flag in timed events can cost a cowboy first place pretty easily, so we need judges that are both ready and consistent in their decisions," says Vocu. "Judges are human and make mistakes, but we want the ones who will make the fewest errors and certification ensures knowledge of the rules and criteria involved in making correct judgment calls. Judges aren't perfect, but these decision-makers are held accountable by members of INFR while non-member, non-certified judges have no one to answer to and no requirements to meet. Any responsible rodeo organization should want the best for their contestants --- best stock, best prizes, and best judges."

Clad in black and white striped vests, judges must maintain constant focus on the mission at hand because when the whistle blows, quick --- and accurate --- scoring decisions are required in seconds.

One long-time judge put it this way: “Our decision is final and you don’t want to make a bad call because you’re determining whether or not these guys make a living.”

Todd Buffalo and Jim Cutler are two of INFR’s experienced judges, regularly requested by contestants to work their finals.

“I’ve cowboied all my life and gone through all the aspects of the rodeo industry starting with bucking horse riding, then all the other events. I’ve been a stock contractor and a rodeo announcer and married a barrel racer. All our kids, heck, all our family have rodeoed. We were raised this way and rodeo is tradition in our family,” says Buffalo of Alberta, Canada.

There are two requirements of a good rodeo judge in Buffalo’s book --- knowing the rule book and having experience in the events. “You mark what you see, and if you’ve seen it or done it before, you’ll be a better judge. If you’ve been on a bucking horse or roped calves, team roped, or bulldogged steers and have been up and down the highway driving to rodeos all your life, you become part of the development of bettering the sport of Indian rodeo,” says the veteran of 30 years in the industry.

“You’re a darn sure better judge if you have personal experience to draw from,” says Idaho-based judge Jim Cutler who did timed events in his cowboy days. “Rodeo judges don’t have the luxury of Slo-Mo or Instant Replay --- you see it, you call it. And if you miss it, you miss it, costing somebody some dollars. When you’re a contestant, you only have to stay in the game for a few seconds, but as a judge, you need to be on your “A” game every minute of every contest and you better be quick about it. By the time the whistle blows, you’ve got to be writing your numbers down because the next contestant will already be on the way.”

Cowboys and judges will put on their best performances at this year’s Indian National Finals Rodeo (the 40th annual) in Las Vegas on November 3-7.

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INFR Judge during the ladies breakaway event

