



July 31, 2009

Things to do: Brahma Drama hits Lee County

Pro bull riders' tour comes to Germain Arena this weekend

By CHARLES RUNNELLS
crunnells@news-press.com

Booger Butt acts just like you'd think. The bull snarls and snorts. He glares. He jumps and bucks and spins like a top.

Yep, he's a mean one, all right (or a rank one, in bull rider lingo).

That's just fine with Billy Robinson.

The ranker, the better.

Robinson has already ridden Booger Butt twice, and he hopes to climb aboard again at this weekend's PBR Copenhagen Bull Riding Challenger Tour. He and the bull racked up 89.5 points out of 100 one time, and 91.5 the next.

"Oh yeah," Robinson says in his molasses Virginia drawl. "That's a reeeeeaaaaaal good bull."

Booger Butt and 54 other bulls appear today and Saturday at Germain Arena, along with 60 riders trying for their 8 seconds of glory.

The Professional Bull Riding-sanctioned tour gives riders the chance to earn points and money - and to qualify for bigger, better-paying competitions later. More than \$24,000 in prize money is at stake - with first place getting about \$3,000.

Booger Butt isn't quite as legendary as Chicken on a Chain, another bull co-owned by Jeff Robinson of Asheville, N.C. (no relation to Bill Robinson). But the bull definitely comes with a reputation.

The 1,500-pounder got his name from redneck comedian Larry the Cable Guy, who also co-owns the bull.

"That's what Larry the Cable Guy calls one of his kids," Jeff Robinson explains. "And that's the perfect name for the bull.

"He's kind of got little man syndrome. He's always trying to pick on things that are bigger than him. He's always growling and bellowing."

If Billy Robinson is lucky, he'll get to ride that rank bull this weekend. Riders get paired with bulls in a random draw.

There's nothing quite like riding a bull and hanging on for dear life, Robinson says. The crowd cheers, the bull bucks and you're always just seconds from possibly getting trampled by a ton of hooves and muscle.

Adrenaline?

You better believe it.

"If you heart's goin' to be beatin'," Billy Robinson says, "it's goin' to be beatin' while you're up there, I'll tell you."

There's a price to pay for that rush, though, and he's got the scars and fractures to prove it: A broken jaw, fractured femurs, you name it.

"I've broken just about everything, really," he says. "It's a dangerous sport."

Both bull and rider compete for points at these events: the bull if it bucks and kicks and generally puts up a fight, and the rider if he stays on a hard-fighting bull long enough - and looks good doing it, too.

The rider's form is important, says event promoter E.C. Hunt. "If he's hanging down off the side of the saddle when the whistle blows, then they're going to deduct points from him."

Two judges award up to 50 points to the bull (25 points per judge), and another 50 to the rider, Hunt says. In all, 100 points are up for grabs.

Getting those points isn't easy, though, and both bull and rider do what they can to get ready for the big event.

Booger Butt's owner says he makes sure the bull stays well-fed and exercised. The bull eats plenty of processed grain feed and alfalfa hay, and once a month, he gets a vitamin shot. For exercise, Jeff and his crew get on horses and guide the bull around a field.

Other than that, there's not much they can do to prepare: Bulls just do what comes naturally. If a rider climbs aboard, Booger Butt's going to get mad and spin around like crazy.

It helps that Booger Butt comes with a sterling pedigree: His father was world champion Panhandle Slim.

"He's a good, top 100 bull," Jeff Robinson says. "He's tough. That's a nice little bull."

Billy Robinson says there's not much he can do to prepare for a bull ride, either. He eats well and stays in shape (running and lifting weights, mostly). But he doesn't study stats or bull riding videos, because he doesn't want to expect one thing from a bull and then get another.

Booger Butt tends to start spinning immediately out of the gate, but sometimes he spins left, sometimes right, and then sometimes he does both.

"It's hard to predict any bull, anyway," Billy Robinson says. "You've gotta be ready.

"You just react."

Additional Facts

If You Go

What: Professional Bull Riding Copenhagen Bull Riding Challenger Tour

When: 8 p.m. today and Saturday

Where: Germain Arena, 11000 Everglades Parkway, Estero

Tickets: \$12 to \$52

Info: Call 948-7825 or go to the Germain box office. You can also get tickets from Ticketmaster by calling 334-3309, going to ticketmaster.com or visiting local Ticketmaster outlets.
