

Our World: 'I just love riding bulls'

By GREG KAHN

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As the lights at Germain Arena dimmed, a red glow of flames emerged from the dirt covering what usually is ice or field turf. As the flames spread, they quickly spelled out three large letters.

P-B-R.

Professional Bull Riding.

The crowd was at full pitch when the spotlight burst through the darkness, panning over the line of bull riders, cowboy hats and boots already caked with dirt. The riders, from as far away as Brazil, looked at each other and gently nodded, knowing what danger awaited them that evening. Another group of males were waiting too.

The bulls.

Stacked shoulder to shoulder in cramped pens, the bulls were as ready for the night to begin as anyone. They didn't seem to care for the pomp and circumstance, they were itching to toss riders from their backs.

After the introductions were finished, riders quickly climbed back over the metal pens housing the bulls. One by one gates flew open and the bulls with riders seemingly attached bounded out, the animal acting as though it were trying to shake off a swarm of mosquitoes.

For their part, the riders hung tough. Josh Faircloth, 20, who has been riding since he was 14, had a couple of rides that last the full eight seconds. As the bull bucked, his right hand flailed into the air, keeping his balance, as he bit down on his mouth-guard.

He also was tossed off once and had the bull's horn brush against his head, leaving a cut. He was midway through his ride when the bull jerked one way leaving Faircloth falling off the side. As he hit the ground, his left hand remained stuck in the bull's reins. While rodeo clowns feverishly tried to untie his hand, the bull noticed him on the ground and lowered his head into Faircloth. Almost immediately after that, Faircloth was set free and he sprinted to the side of the arena, his right hand holding the back of his head and his eyes warily watching the bull exit.

But with blood dripping on his collar, Faircloth wasn't deterred. He grinned and stated "I just love riding bulls."

Faircloth, like the other riders, have nothing but respect for the bulls.

"Bulls are smart, they aren't going to do the same thing twice," he said.

For him, riding was more instinct than thinking. "If you've got time to think, you're already thrown off," Faircloth said.

As the night wrapped up, riders, some now with slight limps, head to the locker room, usually reserved for the Everblades hockey team. They compare battle scars and talk about what went right, and what didn't, some even calling out which bulls were the most aggressive.

But soon the riders are cleaned up, and walking to their vehicles. As they get ready to celebrate their victory over their bovine counterparts, they walk past the truck being loaded with the bulls. Riders briefly make eye contact but continue on their way. They know the bulls will have a second chance the following night.

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