Wildest show in South' gets wilder

Inmates compete in rodeo events

By MARLENE NAANES
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For the first time in "The Wildest Show in the South"'s 38-year history, the cowboys of Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola sat on their bulls and bucking broncos with a little more confidence.

The inmates who signed up for the second spring version of the Angola Prison Rodeo this year got to practice for events like bull riding and the "Wild Horse Race"—once.

The rodeo has become something of a tradition and usually draws large crowds. It is a cooperative effort of the inmates, the prison and the Department of Corrections. All proceeds from the rodeo go to the Inmate Welfare Fund, used to purchase recreational equipment, musical instruments and other items for which legislative funds are not provided.

Various arts and crafts booths were set up outside the rodeo arena, offering oil paintings, hand-crafted jewelry and other craft items made by the inmates.

Rodeo champions and prison personnel trained and critiqued inmates who signed up for this weekend's events about a month ago, said Angola Warden Burl Cain. After the lesson, inmates were able to go through one trial run.

Before then, many Angola Prison Rodeo, fall or spring, contestants' first time sitting on a bull or horse was in the stocks before they participate in the sometimes bone-crunching events.

During "Bust Out," Saturday's first event in which eight bulls with riders were let out of the stocks at the same time, an inmate's leg was broken and paramedics had to carry him from the arena.

James Godwin, a first-timer, competes...
Mitchell Cox flips over a yearling during Saturday's bulldogging event. This spring's rodeo marked Cox's 11th year participating in the 38-year-old Angola Prison Rodeo, which took place only in the fall before 2001.

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in the bulldogging event today but said he plans to compete in bareback riding. He got his first taste of riding a horse at the practice session.

"I've never seen a rodeo before 'til I came here," said Godwin, who came to Angola in 1997. "I just wanted to see what it's like.

Even though his leg was trampled during the practice event, Godwin said he's ready for his event. The pros "from the streets," people not in prison, gave him pointers on how to flip a yearling steer for bulldogging and taught him to relax on a bareback horse if he has a tumble in the future.

He’s still nervous about his event today, though.

"It'll be my second time ever." Of doing just front of a crowd for the first time," he said, "It's going to be more exciting.

The rush of adrenaline in the rodeo is what attracts rodeo participants and spectators every year, said inmate Mitchell Cox, who has participated in the show 11 out of his 15 years at the penitentiary.

Events like "Guts and Glory" makes the rodeo different than any other rodeo," he said. Donald Hardison, the winner of Saturday's event, pucked a poker chip from between a Brahman bull's horns without getting hurt.

Cox, whose "Wild Horse Race" team unofficially placed fourth Saturday, said the rodeo has changed in other ways besides this year's practice run.

Contestants in the bulldogging event, which Cox also participated in Saturday, used to flip calves instead of yearlings.

"That scared some first-timers away," he said.

But the practice, which Cain said may become more common in rodeos to come, has attracted more new-