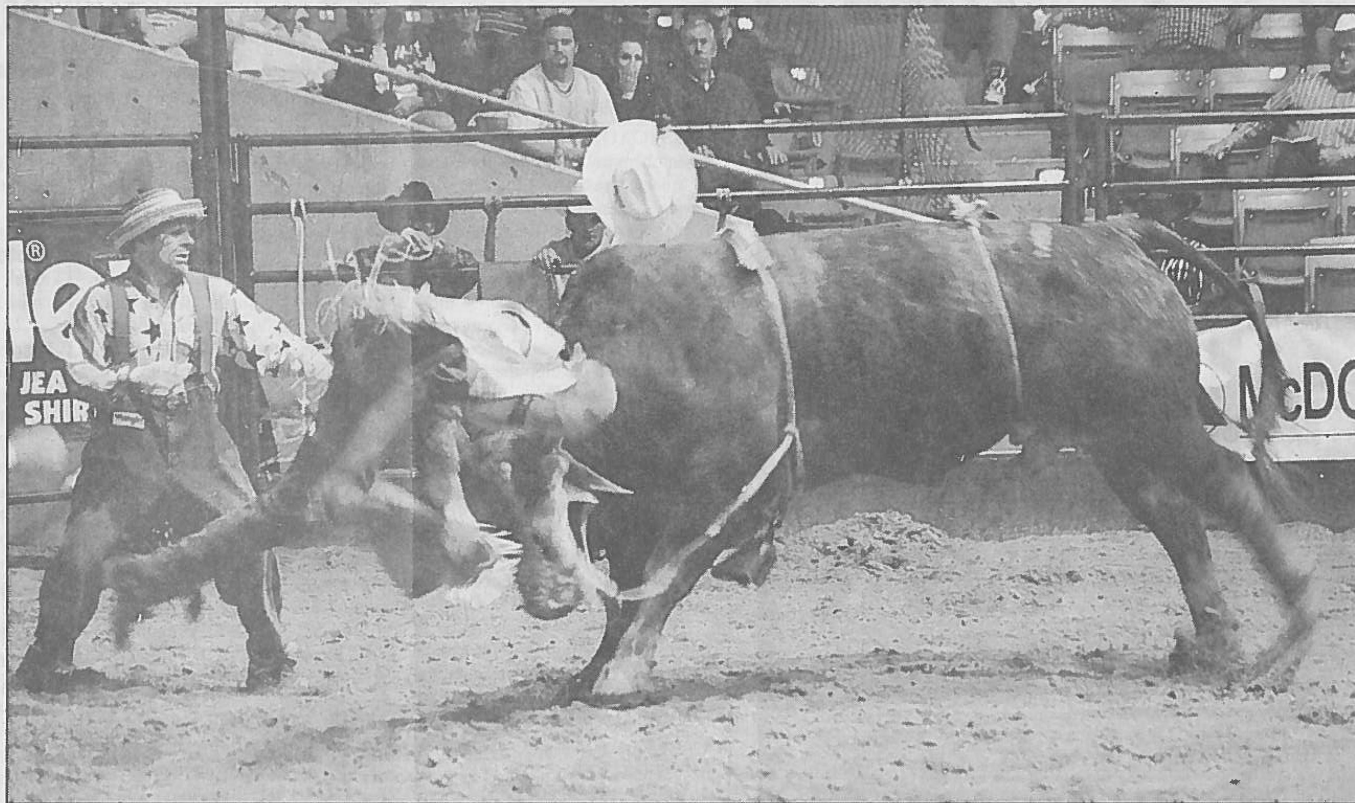


In
St. George
they're doing
*back
flips*



A bull tries to chase down a rodeo clown at the Buckathon in St. George Saturday night.

Spectrum photo / Jud Burkett



Spectrum photo / Jud Burkett

Bull rider Jeff Cole ends up taking his mount by the horns Saturday after being thrown at the Buckathon in St. George.

An old rodeo hand's job: Live and learn and pass it on

By HANS K. MEYER

The Spectrum

ST. GEORGE — Although he ended up second, Bruce Ford knows he had a part in winning first.

"They like to get a little advice from me because I've rodeoed with most of their fathers," Ford said.

Advice from Ford carries a lot of weight because he has been a rodeo cowboy for the last 34 years. He's qualified for 17 National Finals Rodeos and is currently ranked 8th in the world at the ripe old age of 45.

Ford left his home in Kersey, Colo., to participate in his first Buck-a-thon in St. George Friday and Saturday. He placed second in the bareback riding competition.

The top 15 money winners in each of seven events for men and one event for women qualify for the rodeo finals, the most prestigious event in rodeo held

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The Buck-a-thon

each year in Las Vegas the first week of December.

Although Ford's winnings in St. George don't count toward qualifying, he's well on his way to another NFR competition, said Connie Simkins, a Panaca, Nev., resident who traveled to St. George just to see Ford compete.

Even if he doesn't qualify for the NFR, Simkins said Ford will always win in the classiest cowboy category.

"If you watch him, he's always out there helping out the young guys, and that's a big attraction for me," she said. "You don't see that in any other sport."

Helping the "youngsters" of rodeo doesn't compromise his competitive advantage, Ford said.

"Bareback riding is just about the basics," he said. "You just do what you have to do to hang on."

While climbing the rodeo ranks, Ford said he has been able to remain free of injuries. The only major injury he's sustained is a dislocated shoulder a few years ago.

Saturday's festivities kicked off with a "Ring of Death" competition where the participants could have used some of Ford's advice. Seven men stood in two-foot painted rings in the dirt while an angry bull ran amok. Dave Hiatt, 31, of St. George walked away from the competition with \$500 after staying in his ring the longest.

The key to winning, Hiatt said, is controlling his fear.

"If that bull even looked at me, I knew I was dead," he said. "I was the biggest chicken out there, and if that bull was able to smell fear, he would have come right for me."



A bull and a contestant square off against each other in the "Ring of Death" event at the Buck-a-thon Saturday night. The object of the "Ring of Death" is for contestants, each situated within their own rings throughout the arena, to remain in the ring until the bull has chased everyone else from theirs.

Spectrum photo
/ Jud Burkett