

AMERICAN MASSAGE THERAPY ASSOCIATION

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# Massage Therapy

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A full-page photograph of a cowboy in a white shirt and blue pants riding a bucking horse. The horse is white with a blonde mane and tail, and is in mid-air, bucking. The cowboy is wearing a white cowboy hat and has his arms outstretched. The background is a blurred arena setting.

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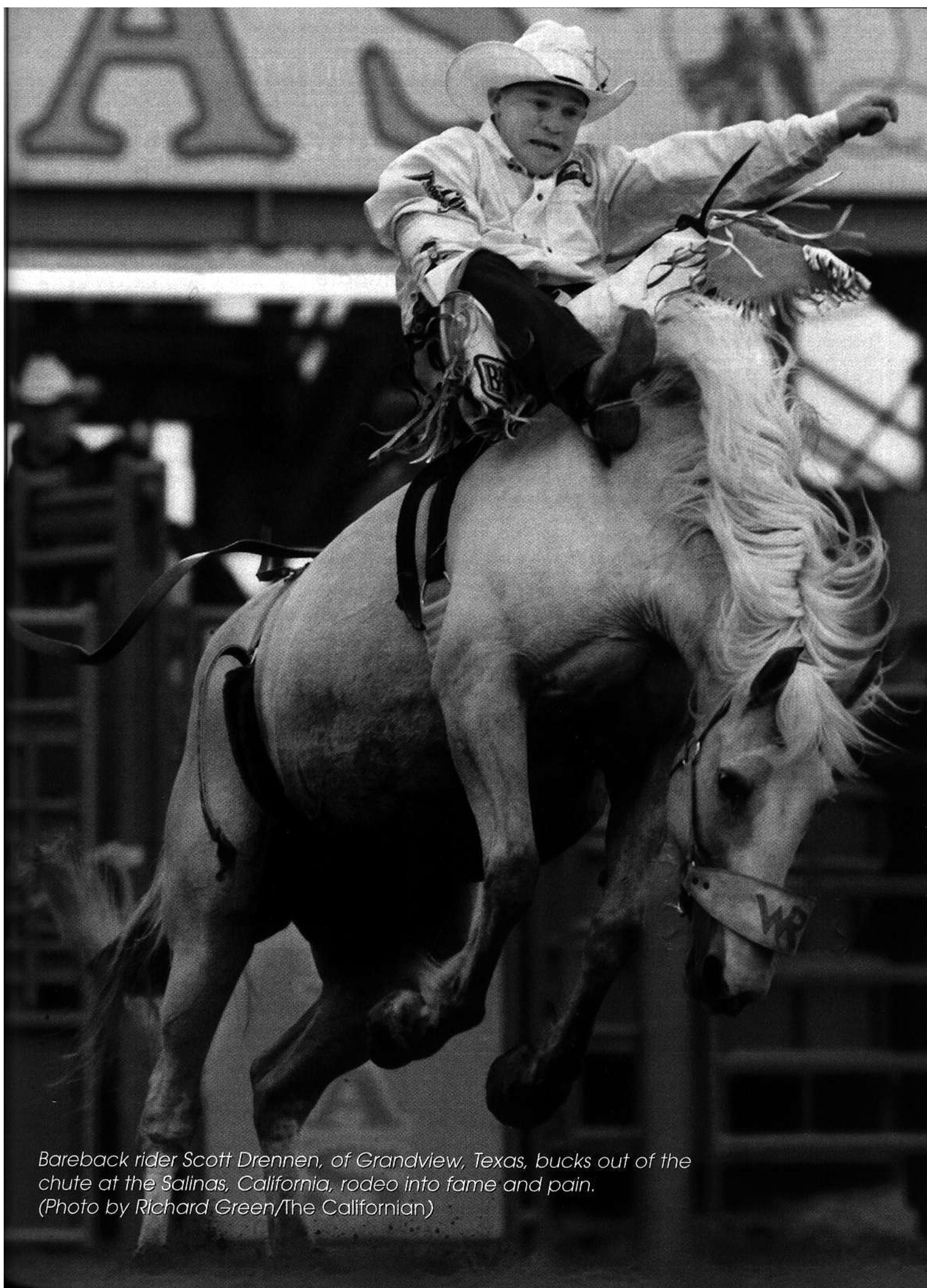


# *Even* Rodeo **Cowboys** *Get* **Massage**

**By Grace Visconti**

**D**uring a rainy week in the Canadian summer, Ponoka, Alberta, was the scene of cramped crowds and high tension as one of the largest rodeos of the year was underway. It was among the elimination competitions that allowed riders to aspire to the Calgary Exhibition and Stampede at summer's end and, ultimately, the Canadian Finals in November.

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*Bareback rider Scott Drennen, of Grandview, Texas, bucks out of the chute at the Salinas, California, rodeo into fame and pain.  
(Photo by Richard Green/The Californian)*

The driving, unrelenting rain soaked the ground into 4 inches of greasy mud through which cowboys and animals trudged and slipped. The spectators who occupied every seat in the stands waited in anticipation for the ultimate challenge and unpredictability the cowboys face in every performance,

exposing the spirit of rodeo as unrelenting as nature.

Some cowboys prepared for their first performances while others walked cautiously towards a small, trailer with bold red and blue letters that spelled out Canadian Pro Rodeo Association Sport Medicine Team. Inside this trailer massage therapists,

athletic therapists, chiropractors, and medical doctors were preparing for a busy day of treating rodeo athletes.

Jason Kawiecki, executive director of the Canadian Pro Rodeo Sport Medicine Team, described its organization. "In terms of who treats what, it's really a collective approach of a multidisciplinary

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### How Canadian & U.S. Rodeo Programs Compare

Compared to the Canadian Pro Rodeo Sport Medicine Program, the United States has the Justin Healer Program. Though each country treats each other's athletes' injuries during competitions, their approaches are different. The Justin Healer Program has no chiropractic care or massage therapists administering their specialized techniques to the cowboy, as they are required to seek out their own. Instead, they have Registered Physical Therapists (RPT's or LPT's), physiotherapists and certified athletic trainers. Their staff consists mainly of certified athletic trainers backed up by medical staff. Since they have limited resources, they have mostly staff with EMS training. Their logic in having this type of staff is the need for a higher level of treatment, due to the force of injury in rodeo.

"Moderation" and "maintenance" on a consistent basis are key. Everything has to be controlled and monitored to promote moderation and a speedy recovery so the riders can get back into the competition. The maintenance part of this approach includes a home therapy program where they teach the cowboy how to take care of themselves by giving them preventive and rehabilitative exercises to do. It may not be as good as having a massage therapist, but there is more consistency when there is home training, resulting in a more 'empowered' cowboy.

Unfortunately, giving home exercises to cowboys did not prove as effective with the Canadian Team. Mavis Wahl explained, "They know what they should do but doing it is

another thing. It's like patients that you have in a clinic. You say, 'Now this is a really good idea that you should try this and do it at home to try to maintain it' but they come back and I ask so how'd you do? They say, 'Well, the kids ... and work ... I didn't get a chance to do it.' Since driving from one rodeo to another takes up a lot of their time, exhaustion gives way and they end up sleeping in their vehicles which is not good for necks, backs, and hips."

Considering that the Justin Healer Program has been in existence longer, Jason Kawiecki added, "It covers more rodeos than ours. They have a deeper financial base to work from, but we have a couple of things they don't offer. I'm not saying that our program is any better or any worse. It's just that our program has a larger, multidisciplinary approach to it. Over the last 10

years, it has worked really well."

Regardless of what methods the Canadian or American sport medicine teams use, the goal is the same, to keep the cowboy in the competition by informing, preparing and having specialized therapists administer their therapies. If it makes rodeo a safer sport, is yet to be determined. "I think it may put people at a level to compete which they may not have been at, which essentially makes it safer because you have bucking stock," reflected Kawiecki, "and that's the entertainment of rodeo."

—Grace Visconti

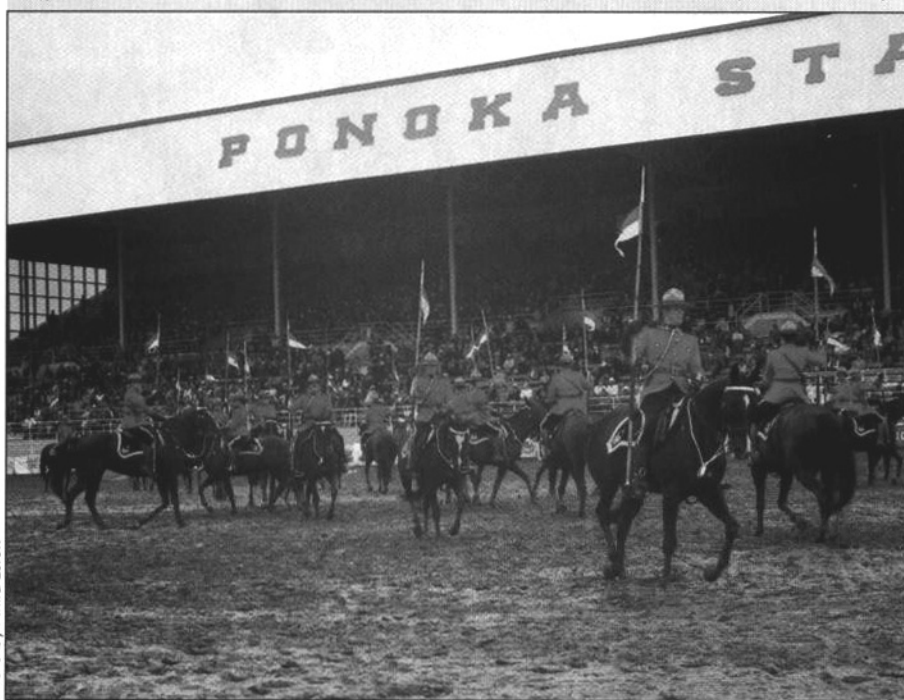


Photo by Attila Estok

The goal of both the Canadian and American sport medicine teams is the same. According to Rick Foster, the program manager for the Justin Sport Medicine Program who sets up clinicians and staffing at different events, all therapists are "valuable." However, the focus of the American therapy program is to give what is most needed at the time of competition to get the athlete back into the field as quickly as possible, which is for the more immediate treatment of injuries.

Certified U.S. trainers use and incorporate all other health-care approaches, ie., strengthening, massage, and nutrition.



## Even Horses Get Massaged

David Reid, a horse bucking rider from British Columbia, explained that horses also get massaged. "Not the bucking horses. A lot of horse injuries are treated with massage and it works very well." Special equestrian techniques are involved in applying massage therapy to a horse. Wahl interjected, "There are some people here who do equestrian work, (but) not everybody. I think you probably find it more with the barrel racers, steer wrestlers, and calf ropers, the guys and girls that have their horses travelling with them all the time. If you get sore and tired and stiff from driving and going on the road all the time, your partner—the horse—does too." While veterinarians treat and check the animals and watch them all the time, there is no sport medicine horse team or bull team that travels around with them. One thing is certain, the four-legged contenders are taken care of, too. —G.V.

nary team. And we're one of the few groups that really have that on-site. Most professional sports will have a physician, an athletic therapist, or other specialist. I don't know of a lot of organizations that have three different disciplines at one event and it's really a collective process in terms of what's the best way to treat the athlete, and that's the most important part of this because each of the caregivers has a different field of expertise. That's the biggest benefit to the professional cowboy that we offer."

### 1984 Beginnings

Professional rodeo sport medicine began in Canada in 1984 when Don Johansen, former Canadian bull-riding champion and Canadian Professional Rodeo Association board member, approached Dexter Nelson, a certified athletic therapist, to provide assistance to rodeo contestants. Nelson provided taping, stretching, and advice to contestants prior to the rodeo, tended to injured contestants in the arena during the rodeo, and gave advice on injuries and rehabilitation as the rodeo ended. During the initial season, treatment was administered out of the trunk of Nelson's car, at his own expense. In 1985, Dale Butterwick, an athletic therapist and Dr. George Kinnear, an exercise physiologist, joined Nelson to create Pro Rodeo Sport Medicine, which became the official sports medicine provider to the Canadian Pro Rodeo Association.

Over the course of the next 14 years, the Pro Rodeo Sport Medicine Team attended approximately fifteen rodeos per season and offered assistance to an average of five hundred rodeo contestants. It became apparent, as Pro Rodeo Sport Medicine provided increased levels of care, that other professional healthcare practitioners were needed to assist injured rodeo contestants.

In 1986, the addition of physicians and orthopedic surgeons from the University of Calgary Sport Medicine Centre became an important addition to the team, providing medical and surgical care for seriously injured rodeo contestants. Three years later, chiropractors were added and in

1994, Mavis Wahl, a massage therapist, joined the team.

### Rodeo Massage Pioneer

After graduating with a Bachelor of Science Degree from the University of Calgary in 1990, Wahl became a registered massage therapist. After that, she took the athletic therapy program at Mount Royal College in Alberta. It was Dexter Nelson, her instructor, who approached her to join the team. Her experience in both fields set a precedent for other massage therapists who seek to be part of Canadian Pro Rodeo Sport Medicine.

All massage therapists have to be certified and most of them have some type of kinesiology or sports background. The reason is simple: the assortment of injuries that rodeo riders get are not normally seen.

"We try to have it so that everyone is really qualified and not to go without, that they're still maintaining their scope," Wahl explained. "Techniques like soft tissue work and craniosacral. Some of our therapists have training in acupressure, some shiatsu...[and] muscles energies. We make sure they're all registered massage therapists, number one, and [that] they've got a lot of sports training, as well. It gives them a

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The Canadian Pro Sport Medicine team travels to 15 rodeos each season.  
(Photo by Attila Estok)

*Mavis Wahl massages bronco buster David Reid, of British Columbia, in the Sports Medicine Team's trailer at the Ponoka, Alberta, rodeo. (Photo by Attila Estok)*







Cowboy David Reid's soft tissues take a beating as he works to stay atop a bucking bronco at Ponoka. (Photo by Attila Estok)

better perspective, a larger scope, to understand rodeo a lot better because it is a really physically-diverse sport."

At present, Wahl works as a massage therapist with teams at the National Training Centre at the University of Calgary and is also a vice president of the Massage Therapy Association of Alberta.

Five registered massage therapists work under her to cover fourteen rodeos from March to November. Most of the massage therapists have full-time practices at clinics during the week, then do massage therapy at the rodeos on the weekends. Everyone who works with sports medicine is under contract and is paid a flat rate of under a hundred dollars per performance. Due to budget constraints, all of the practitioners are paid the same amount—whether they are chiropractors, massage therapists, or athletic therapists.

"There are only so many rodeos that sport medicine will be at," said Wahl, "and there are various people who go to them. It would be nice if we could go to more rodeos throughout the year and have people who are employed full-time doing it but, as it stands right now, we don't have that at all."

Since the massage therapists and other practitioners don't make a lot of money doing the rodeo circuit on a

part-time basis, their reasons for doing it are personal and this makes a difference when they treat riders.

As Kawiecki explained, "They do this because they love it; they can make more money staying home. That's the key to our program. The people who are here really want to be and those are the people you want. It's not a money issue, it's the fact that they want to be here because they enjoy what they do. That's the real reason why the cohesive, multidisciplinary approach works: the people who don't want to be here, won't have the best interests of the athlete. That's the key to our really unique program."

### Planning the Future

A future goal of Canadian Pro Rodeo Sport Medicine is to expand the pro-

gram to cover a rodeo every weekend. That would double the program. The program costs about \$65,000, of which the Canadian Pro Rodeo Association provides \$30,000. So the practitioners would have to raise the balance to keep working. In the next decade they plan to raise \$5 million for an endowment which would allow them to cover more than one rodeo a week. This would also allow the hiring of more practitioners, including massage therapists, and the purchase of a larger trailer.

The trailer now used was donated by the Cowboy Benevolence Fund but because of the growth in the past few years, it no longer serves the needs of the Pro Rodeo Sport Medicine Team. An ideal trailer would be larger, and not have any sleeping capacity or a stove and

fridge which take up too much room. "It is going to be wide so there will be enough for four tables lengthwise—one for massage, two for athletic therapy, and one for chiropractic. So we will have space [and] not be bumping shoulders with everyone," explained Wahl.

### The Present

The cowboys who sporadically filed into the small, crowded trailer did not seem to be concerned about its small size. They cared more about getting comfort from the health practitioners inside. David Reid, a horse bucking rider from British Columbia, explained that massage therapy helped him prior to his performances. What determined whether he got massage therapy or another form of treat-

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## Women Ride in Rodeos, Too

Although rodeo is primarily a male sport, there are some women who perform in the barrel racing and bull riding events. The power of the horse affects them differently in the shoulders and arms due to their physiques. There are more female bull riders emerging in the U.S. competing for prizes. A woman's legs compared to man's are more flexible. For both men and women, bucking is hard on the upper body, since it creates a lot of repetitive strain injury.

All the female riders have to ride with two hands. "I know someone," said Roger Lacasse, "who rides bareback with two hands on a horse who was bucking."

## Massage at California Rodeo

A hundred bronco busters competing at the California Rodeo Salinas were given free massages by local therapists Tammy Crees, Glinda Anderson, and Annette Sand under the sponsorship of local businesses. The four summer days of the Salinas rodeo coincided with those of the Calgary Stampede in Canada. Crees, proprietor of the Rub Your Hide practice, explained, "My goal for the rodeo is for people in such a demanding sport to realize how much benefit there is to massage therapy." This was the first time she gave massages at a rodeo. She realized the need after visiting rodeos elsewhere in the U.S. (but not Canada) and felt its absence.

—Tammy Crees



Glinda Anderson massages a cowboy's aching back at California Rodeo Salinas. (Photo by Adam Gavalla/The Californian)

ment was the type of injury or tension he was experiencing.

"Well, massage seems to work the best for me," said Reid, adding, "Different things work for different people. Massage makes me feel good, and you gotta feel good to do this. You gotta work at it. Massage definitely helps, as does exercise."

Like his cowboy colleagues, Reid does not have a private massage therapist who travels with him, so the addition of massage therapy to the Sport Medicine Team was very beneficial for him. "We don't make very much money, we cowboys. We barely survive," he said, explaining that they travel from one rodeo to another at their own expense.

The type of injuries that occur vary and the reason that massage therapists must have some sport medicine training is that if a massage therapist is the only one in the trailer when a cowboy

walks in with a specific injury requiring attention, at least the massage therapist can identify the injury and assist the cowboy immediately and/or collaborate with the athletic therapist later. This is how the multidisciplinary approach works. All the practitioners have a common knowledge of the type of injuries received in the field.

Monty Ross, a bull rider from British Columbia, agreed. "These guys know what they're doing. They're trained." He limped over to the trailer to be treated for a recurring injury to his ankle but was still determined to perform. Though he had more chiropractic than massage therapy, he admitted "I'd like to do them all if they're paid for. It really helps a lot if it gets done properly."

Another bull rider waiting for a massage was Scott Schiffner, a native Albertan. Obviously in pain, this determined 19-year-old wasn't going to let the bull who fell on him the night

before shatter his dream of staying in pro rodeo until he is 35. He's been riding steers since he was 10 years old and is only in his second year of pro rodeo. Growing up, that's all he wanted to do for a living. He described massage therapy as better at "loosening you up" than chiropractic care, especially if you have to go out there and ride with tension from a previous injury. He felt that chiropractic care helped but it made him sore after an adjustment and that's not what he needed prior to a performance. Just like the other cowboys, the respect for the Pro Rodeo Sport Medicine Team was apparent when he commented, "The other guys don't quite understand rodeo as much as these guys do. Lots of other guys tell you to stop instead of helping you deal with it, doctors in general. That's why we kinda stay with sport medicine 'cause that's what they're here for and they understand it."

### Reducing Risk

An important objective in extending professional rodeo contestants' careers is the collection of data on rodeo injuries that may lead to risk reduction programs. The Centre of Excellence will deal specifically with the collection and evaluation of injury data in an attempt to provide a world-wide authority in rodeo injury, thereby educating the public on rodeo injuries and the role of sports medicine in rodeo. Massage therapy will be part of this objective for years to come, and Wahl, the coordinator of the massage therapy team, will have an important role to play in the future.

The accumulated data showed that all three disciplines, massage therapy, athletic therapy, and chiropractic care, are equally in demand and administered. Kawiecki clarified, "I would say that when you look at the data at the end of the year, taking into account the length of treatments, because treatments are different in all three professions, chiropractic tends to be a shorter treatment period, [whereas] massage tends to be longer. Athletic therapy tends to be in between—or longer or shorter, just in terms of what's going on. It depends on the injury [but] there is definitely a component for soft tissue work inside of our program, and we think it's a real

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benefit. There have been lots of cowboys since massage therapy's been on, [who] find it real beneficial."

The type of cowboys' injuries a massage therapist sees range from spider fractures in the tibia, dislocations, muscle tears, partial tears, to post-surgery applications, abrasions, absolutely anything, Wahl explained. "They may have had surgery a little while ago and it's draining some fluids off, but they've come out to see their friends ride. You're working within your scope, not going beyond."

Wahl, who also has a lot of Russian massage training, explained that elbows and knuckles are used in the trailer on athletes because it's not a "clinical setting." The therapist is working through jeans, and if he or she is a small person doing massage on a big steer-wrestler, using fingers and thumbs would not be adequate enough to create the pressure needed for an effective release. Some

cowboys are more sensitive to elbows and knuckles than others.

Wahl explained, "You gauge it like you would anybody in your clinic to what type of pressure to use. The type of tissue usually dictates what you can do and can't do. It depends on how soon the injury was, if they're in the acute stage or chronic stage." Often, a cowboy goes to a massage therapist before he rides, so more pain is not what the therapist should create. Palm pressure is used with inflammatory conditions to facilitate draining. "If it's something where inflammation is created, you try to calm that down, depending on how long you've got and what the injury is," added Wahl.

Only hypoallergenic creams, which avoid irritation, are used in massage. Wahl recommends that therapists not use heavy oils, especially if the cowboy has to leave right away for another rodeo.

### Cowboys Wear Protective Clothing

As far as the prevention of serious injuries to muscles, bones, and other organs, rodeo riders wear face masks, protective vests, and helmets. Although not many wear helmets because they're not going to look like cowboys. The protective vest was designed by Cody Lambert, a Canadian bullrider, and it was produced in the U.S. There are five to six variations of the vest to suit the cowboys' body types. It's like a bullet-proof vest, and protects the cowboys from getting crushed ribs or collapsed lungs. A lot of performers wear it now. "Six years ago," explained Lacasse, "many kids got killed. They got stepped on and kicked and they were not wearing any vests, and a year (later) this came out. Everyone wears one now. I'm wearing one now when I'm on bucking horses. The horse might kick, but I'm protected."

The unique feature of the vest is that it does not affect the flexibility of the cowboy's muscles during a performance. It is built especially for bending over, moving your arms and shoulders. It is cut on the back of the arms a little more so they have full range of motion when they are jerked backwards.

—G.V.



Photo by Aftia Estok

"You don't want him to have a bunch of oil sitting on his skin clogging pores, or have a rancid smell on his body, or stains on his shirts. You need something light enough that is going to be wiped off," said Wahl. Peanut oil, or any kind of oil from nuts is not recommended, while hypoallergenic oils such as a white flour oil get the smell and effect, but not the organic scents that irritate skin.

The length of a massage treatment for each individual performer varies, depending on the nature of the complaint and if the massage is given before or after a performance. For example, Roger Lacasse, last year's fifty-thousand dollar winner of the professional bareback riding event at the Calgary Stampede, and champion at the Canadian finals and at American rodeos, received his massage treatment from Wahl after his performance. An experienced pro originally from Montréal, Quebec, Lacasse now resides in Edmonton, Alberta. He started doing pro rodeos in Montréal 18 years ago and discovered that massage therapy helps alleviate the stress of rodeo, which he considers "a way of life."

He says, "The massage therapists are really helpful. I always go and sign autographs for them and do anything I could because those guys are doing everything to keep me on the road. Without them, I don't think I could be sitting in my truck driving 12, 14, 18 hours doing rodeo. I was doing it when I was young, but when you're young, your muscles hold up a lot better." Flying everywhere and driving everywhere makes the muscles stiff. "We just get on those horses and get whiplash all the time and shaken up, and muscles get torn and with those guys here. I mean, they just keep me on the road. That's phenomenal."

Everyone who works on the team feels that recognition by the professional rodeo contestants is appreciated. "There's always a thank you for the work they've done," concluded Kawiecki, "whether they win, lose or draw, they always say thank you," and that is the spirit of rodeo. ■

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Grace Visconti, Shiatsu therapist, graphic designer, and freelance writer, has relocated in Canada, from Toronto, Ontario, to Calgary, Alberta, and can be reached at [rafael4@concentric.net](mailto:rafael4@concentric.net)