



Bull riding most dangerous sport: study

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Aaron Roy from Yellow Grass, SK, gets tossed riding Before Dark during the Calgary Stampede Bull Riding Championships at the Calgary Stampede on Wednesday July 13 2011. A new study suggests bull riding is the most dangerous organized sport, with 21 fatalities since 1989. DARREN MAKOWICHUK/CALGARY SUN

Despite wrapping up in eight seconds or less, bull riding is the world's most dangerous organized sport, says a Calgary researcher.

Dale Butterwick of the University of Calgary's Faculty of Kinesiology has been compiling a Catastrophic Injury Registry since 2007 and found bull riding is more than just the riskiest sport in rodeo.

"Comparison of bull riding injury rates with other contact sports confirms bull riding is the most dangerous organized sport in the world," says the study.

SUN+ “catastrophic” for the purpose of the study is defined as an incident resulting in either death or a life-changing injury.

The registry had reports of 49 catastrophic rodeo injuries between 1989 and 2009, including 21 fatalities — more than any other professional sport.

Most of the incidents were the result of rough stock events — bull riding, junior bull riding, steer riding, saddle bronc riding and bareback riding.

Bull riding was deemed much more dangerous than the others as it accounted for more than half of the fatalities.

Participants who suffered rodeo injuries ranged from nine to 49 years old, with one-third of injured competitors being 17 years old or younger.

The majority of injuries happened to males, though two women were killed in barrel racing.

About 70% of fatalities were caused by competitors being struck by animals.

Butterwick said one of the main reasons the registry was created was to determine how much helmets, protective vests and other safety gear help during rodeo events.

He found none of the athletes who died of head injuries were wearing helmets.

Most fatalities stemmed from athletes being struck in the upper body and suffering thoracic compression.

The study said many of the bull riders killed were wearing protective vests, but that’s not necessarily to say the vests are useless, said Butterwick.

“When a cowboy is pinned between the ground or the arena and struck by a 900 kg bull, I very much doubt there’s any protective equipment that could make a difference,” he said.

The vests may protect athletes from glancing blows, but that’s something yet to be researched, said Butterwick.

Data continues to be compiled at sportmed.ucalgary.ca/rodeo

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