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Book Review: College Rodeo: From Show to Sport

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College Rodeo: From Show to Sport. By Sylvia Gann Mahoney. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004. xviii + 350 pp. Photographs, appendices, notes, index. \$29.95.

Clearly, college rodeo has meant much to the life of Sylvia Gann Mahoney. She was a college rodeo coach herself. She married a rodeo coach. She is a founder of an intercollegiate Rodeo alumni group. Perhaps her close association with college rodeo and her obvious love for the sport is the reason she should *not* have written this book.

Mahoney chronicles in slightly more than two hundred pages the history of college rodeo and its participants, one chapter devoted to each decade beginning with the 1950s. Most of the remaining pages are appendices of past individual and school championship winners. The author's choice of this chronological structure makes for an unclear focus and a difficult read. Describing, as best she can, the accomplishments of the winning individuals, teams, and coaches over the years, she seems more

intent on making sure no worthy individual is left out than on tackling some of the significant issues college rodeo faced over its history.

Among these is the question of why college rodeo was started, and why it should continue to exist. Her best attempt at a justification is that it is a sport for country kids because city kids have football, tennis, and golf. She points with great pride at the fact that many college rodeo champions have gone on to highly successful professional rodeo careers without wondering whether serving as a minor league for professional rodeo justifies its being. She boasts of the high academic standards enforced by the National Intercollegiate Rodeo Association while ignoring the fact that college rodeo's greatest institutional representation is from junior and technical colleges, many of whose students take courses with limited academic content. She ignores the fact that academic standards to compete are well below even the modest requirements of NCAA athletes.

Mahoney notes that the Association was begun on a shoestring and never has had the financial resources to grow in the fashion that "big time" college sports have prospered. She notes with apparent approval that college rodeo's longest and largest advertising donor is the U.S. Tobacco Company, seeming to see this sponsorship as an act of great generosity rather than a highly successful marketing effort, and never questioning whether hustling its products to youth is appropriate.

College rodeo alumni will value this book as they relive old friendships and past successes and failures. Those wishing for a critical, penetrating analysis of college rodeo, however, will not find it here.

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