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Ride 'em, cowboys

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One Mississippi.

Larry Holmes grips the rope firmly.

"Two Mississippi."

He balances through each buck.

Three Mississippi.

He absorbs one kick -- and then another.

Four Mississippi.

He has been training for this moment.

Five Mississippi.

He has overcome numerous injuries.

Six Mississippi.

He has endured countless weekends on the road.

Seven Mississippi.

All for the sound of the buzzer.

Eight Mississippi.

All for a shot at glory.

Holmes started riding bulls competitively a year ago -- after doctors told him he might have cancer.

He would, he decided, live life to the fullest.

Their diagnosis ended up being wrong.

Climbing onto the back of a bull felt right.

"This relaxes me," he said.

He makes his living jumping out of airplanes.

He is a soldier.

So a 1,600-pound animal is nothing.

Holmes was one of 10 who took to the ring Monday evening during the Wicked Bulls show at the Wayne Regional Agricultural Fair -- a show that will thrill crowds for a second time tonight.

Rodeo clown Daniel Lanier doesn't think too much about the big picture.

"Eight seconds is the name of the game," he said.

Wicked Bulls producer Coty Brown has been around bull riding since the 1980s -- when his grandparents ran a rodeo.

"It's not the horns you have to worry about," he said. "It's the feet."

A perfect score would net a participant 100 points -- 50 points for handling of the bull and 50 points for the bull itself, which is judged on its bucks and jumps.

But to even receive a mark, competitors have to stay on for eight seconds.



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Chad VanAmburg holds on for the longest bull ride of the night during the Wicked Bulls show at the Wayne Regional Agricultural Fair on Monday. The Wicked Bulls return to the grandstand arena tonight for another performance at 7.

Holmes took third place with a score of 73.

But Brown is just as impressed with the animals as he is with the cowboys.

"The bulls are as much of an athlete as the guys are," he said.

And he has a deep love for them -- assuring the crowd that they are in no pain when they take to the ring.

Brown breeds his animals for their rodeo abilities.

Some, he said, perform for up to 16 years.

"They're like children -- each with their own personality," he said.

Dustin Beck has been riding bulls for eight years.

He describes the sport as "rough, hard and painful," but that doesn't stop him from mounting up every weekend.

"I always wanted to do it as a kid," he said.

Beck taught his roommate, Dustin Gooding, to ride as well.

Lanier said their bull, True Blood, is the most spirited of the bunch.

"He's a hostile critter," Lanier laughed.

But the men are not deterred.

And neither is Holmes.

Tonight, he will be back on his bull -- again, hoping his count reaches eight.

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