

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Great Plains Quarterly

Great Plains Studies, Center for

1996

Review of *Cowgirls of the Rodeo: Professional Athletes* By Mary Lou LeCompte

Joan Wells

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly>



Part of the [Other International and Area Studies Commons](#)

Wells, Joan, "Review of *Cowgirls of the Rodeo: Professional Athletes* By Mary Lou LeCompte" (1996). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 1145.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/1145>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Quarterly by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

of their culture, these cowgirls exhibited athleticism, ranching skills, competitive spirit, and perseverance. Historical chapters relate the quest of rodeo women to compete as equals in the exhibition of their athletic ability.

Early promoters recognized and supported the appearance of women in the sport of rodeo, admitting that their glamour, costuming, and skilled performances were necessary in selling rodeo as family entertainment. Cowgirls like Tad Lucas, Alice and Maggie Greenough, Lucille Mulhall, Florence Randolph, Mabel Strickland, Ruth Roach, and Bea Kirnan, rode rough stock, roped, and performed trick roping and riding before crowds of 100,000. Later in the 1940s women pulled together and organized a Girls Rodeo Association to ensure fair play, competition, and compensation for athletes.

LeCompte's text, when it draws heavily on the archives of the National Cowgirl Hall of Fame, the Cowboy Hall of Fame, and the Pro Rodeo Hall of Fame, sometimes becomes cumbersome and inconsistent. Its claim, for example, that rodeo events resulted from ranch skills (riding, breaking horses, roping cattle, caring for livestock), while largely true, does not account for contemporary barrel racing. More consistent accounts of women's lives emerge from LeCompte's interviews with actual Cowgirl Hall of Fame honorees.

Although the book suggests that opportunity for rodeo women to compete is wide open, only ten per cent participate in such events as tie down calf roping, break-a-way calf roping, bareback bronc riding, bull riding, and team roping, while most women participate in barrel racing.

TNN television's broadcasts of the Women's National Rodeo Finals each year to over 50 million viewers indicate the sport's growing popularity, as does Charmayne James Rodman's barrel racing earnings of \$152,000 as a result of her participation in Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association Rodeos and the National Finals Rodeo.

Cowgirls of the Rodeo establishes how hard generations of women have fought to achieve

Cowgirls of the Rodeo: Professional Athletes. By Mary Lou LeCompte. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993. Introduction, black and white photographs, tables, appendix, notes, bibliographical essay, index. xii + 252 pp. \$22.50.

This book sets out to describe the lives and achievements of women wild west show and rodeo contestants from 1896 to 1992. Offspring

their current status. One tribute to their efforts is the fact that the Women's Professional Rodeo Association and Professional Women's Rodeo Association remains the oldest organization of women athletes in America governed solely by women.

JOAN WELLS
Lincoln, Nebraska