

The YMBL Rodeo – Sixty-one Years of Fun

1945 - 2006

The first seven years of the Young Men's Business League-sponsored YMBL World Championship Rodeo is sketchy, as there were no formal Rodeo Committees during those early years.

In 1945, World War II was on the wane - the Italian Fascist government had fallen, Nazi leader Adolph Hitler was gone and Japan was on the road to defeat in its bid to take over the far east - and our boys were returning home after four long years of battle.

The YMBL had already assumed sponsorship of the South Texas State Fair having taken over the big project in 1942. The Rodeo would not present any problems to the organization and its hundreds of volunteers.

Reese Martin, veteran of the Fair and many other YMBL projects, was president of the YMBL in 1945, and in those early days of the Rodeo, the president was also chairman of the Rodeo.

From dusty files and records, we find that the first YMBL Rodeo was held at the Beaumont Exporters' Stuart Stadium on Avenue A which went unused during the War.

Rodeos in those days were still rather unorganized and due to the War, stock was not that easy to find. There were no professional stock contractors or cowboys - just a few farmers and ranchers who had some steers, calves and horses and who liked to stage an annual western roundup and invite the townfolk to attend.

Gene Autry, the singing cowboy of western movies, just home from service in the U.S. Air Force, and anxious to get back into the public spotlight, was guest star at the first YMBL Rodeo in Stuart Stadium.

There is no written report concerning attendance or how much the YMBL was able to bank, but we can imagine with Reese Martin at the helm and with the help of YMBL stalwarts Speedy Blakeman, Herman Iles, Elmo Beard, W.D. Norwood, Moodye Williamson and Cliff H. LeBlanc, Sr., the show was a huge success.

The following year Paul Bullington was YMBL president and chairman of the Rodeo which fell on hard times when baseball was resumed at Stuart Stadium and the Rodeo had no place to go. The YMBL Rodeo closed up shop for a one-year breather until an arena could be found.

The Rodeo continued to be held on a limited basis during the next few years using corrals and pens at local and area farms and ranches. In 1952, the YMBL got back into the Rodeo business in a big way under President Louis R. Pietzsch and Chairman H.A. Travis. They held the First Annual 4th of July YMBL Rodeo and they donated proceeds to the Camp Fire Girls.

From 1954 until 1957, the Rodeo struggled to gain acceptance with cowboys who were starting to make a career of rodeoin' and in '57 the YMBL applied with the Rodeo Cowboys Association - RCA (forerunner of the Professional Cowboys Association - PRCA) to bring the event into the big time. Charlie Schmucker was Rodeo Chairman under the direction of President Gus Becker. A truly old time western trek led by Liberty's Gov. Bill Daniel, attracted hundreds of riders, horses and wagons the week before the rodeo and winding up as a huge parade through downtown Beaumont.

In 1958 President Al Tatum and Rodeo Chairman Cleo Creamer staged a record-breaking Rodeo with advance ticket sales totaling \$5,000. Dollinger Steel had

donated seating removed from the old Stuart Stadium and constructed a fine outdoor arena at the Fairgrounds on Gulf St.

The year 1963 saw the cancellation of the Big Thicket Trek under trail boss Bill Daniel. President Fred Tenholder's Board made a paramount decision and the Rodeo continued its climb to fame and fortune under the direction of Lee Roy Myers, chairman.

The YMBL broke ties in 1965 with the Beaumont Chamber of Commerce becoming an independent civic group with more than 1,000 members. Judge George D. Taylor was president and James Broussard, Sr. was Rodeo chairman. In 1968, Billy Byant, III was chairman and the Rodeo constructed new arena fencing and a new announcer's stand. Bill Kimbrough was YMBL President.

In 1974, when Larry Porter was chairman and Ed Collins was President, the YMBL Rodeo brought to town Walt Garrison, running back for the Dallas Cowboys and a real cowboy in his own right. Walt signed a jillion autographs, made appearances on radio and TV and visited children's hospital wards, and each evening bulldogged the meanest, orneriest critter the stock producer could find - all to the chagrin of Cowboys' Coach Tom Landry.

The last big rain out for the Rodeo in the old Fairgrounds arena was in 1975 and Chairman Dan Vezina wore hip boots instead of the usual cowboy footwear. Don Thompson, Sr. was president. Construction on the Fair Park Coliseum would begin the following year.

Bruce Allred was named Rodeo chairman in 1976 by President Joe Harris and the Board voted to continue the Rodeo while the Coliseum was under construction. Allred moved the event to Highway 90 Speedway, brought in some big name talent and undertook an amateur horseback rescue race that nearly hospitalized half the Rodeo Committee.

In 1977, the Rodeo saw co-chairmen named when Bruce Allred was promoted to be YMBL President. He appointed Willie Burford and Tom Stripling to take on the orphaned Rodeo, still without a home. Willie and Tom rented the Lion's Club Arena in Lumberton and staged the 32nd Rodeo in the June dust and heat - but no rain! Despite many problems, the Rodeo was a success.

The City of Beaumont's Fair Park Coliseum, built with the help of a million-dollar bond issue, opened in 1978 with Tommy Hinote as YMBL Rodeo chairman and Ed Burks as President. The 3,200-seat facility was made to order for a rodeo - and it was rainproof! The YMBL Rodeo REALLY hit the Big Time!

In 1994 permanent bleacher seating was constructed in the north end of the Coliseum bringing total seating up to more than 4,100. Billy Kinney was Rodeo Chairman and Ron Cunningham was YMBL President.

In 1998 for the first time in YMBL Rodeo History the son of a former Rodeo Chairman, Don Thompson, Jr., served as rodeo chairman. Don followed in the footsteps of his father, Don Thompson, Sr., who was chairman in 1970. In 2005 the YMBL Board of Directors made another paramount decision by moving the Rodeo to the Jefferson County owned Ford Arena. Under the direction of Harvey Zernial, 2006 Rodeo Chairman the future looks even brighter for the event. With the tutelage of the past Presidents and former Rodeo Chairmen, and with the hard work of

hundreds of YMBL volunteers over the past 60 years, the dreams of those early-day YMBLers - when Gene Autry sang his heart out while performing in that first YMBL Rodeo held in old Stuart Stadium - their dreams have come to full realization.

Chairmen of the YMBL Rodeo and YMBL Presidents 1945 - 2006

Rodeo Chairmen	Presidents
1945* **Reese Martin	**Reese Martin
1946 (No Rodeo)	**Paul Bullington
1947* **Cliff LeBlanc, Sr.	**Cliff LeBlanc, Sr.
1948* Moodye Williamson	Moodye Williamson
1949* **R.O. Jackson	**R.O. Jackson
1950* **Buel N. Kiker	**Buel N. Kiker
1951* **Percy Wallace	**Percy Wallace
1952 **H.A. Travis	**Louis R. Pietzsch
1953 **H.A. Travis	**Claude Owens
1954 **Randy McAlpine	**George E. Beard
1955 **Gus Becker	**Charlie Schmucker
1956 **Gus Becker and **Charlie Schmucker	**Randy McAlpine
1957 **Charlie Schmucker	**Gus Becker
1958 **Cleo Creamer	**W. Al Tatum
1959 **Cleo Creamer	**Ralph Grantham
1960 **Cleo Creamer	**George Camp
1961 **Charlie Schmucker	**H.C. Galloway
1962 **Elmer Badders	**R.J. (Bob) Castille
1963 **Lee Roy Myers	**Fred Tenholder
1964 Tommy LeBlanc	**Charlie French
1965 James Broussard	**Judge Geo. D. Taylor
1966 John Neil	H.M. Nix
1967 John Neil	**Larry Polk
1968 **Billy Bryant, III	Bill Kimbrough
1969 Clinton Harris	**W.L. Pate
1970 **Don Thompson, Sr.	**Ed Van Zandt
1971 Ed Burks	Clinton Harris
1972 J.E. Sherman	Jdg Richard LeBlanc
1973 **Joe Harris	Emil Weaver
1974 Larry Porter	**Ed Collins
1975 Dan Vezina	**Don Thompson, Sr.
1976 **Bruce Allred	**Joe Harris
1977 Willie Burford, Chmn Tom Stripling, Co-Chmn	**Bruce Allred
1978 Tommy Hinote	Ed Burks
1979 Tommy Leicht	Tommy Hinote
1980 Tom Stripling	Albert Williamson
1981 Arthur (Buzz) Kiker	Tommy Leicht
1982 Herb Courville	Jess Fuller
1983 **L.T. Armstrong	Herb Courville
1984 Pat Anderson	Tom Stripling
1985 Dr. Richard LeBlanc	Ken Spidle
1986 Johnny Norwood	**Jdg Harold Engstrom
1987 Mike Frank	Dan Rogas
1988 Mel Wright	Dr. Richard LeBlanc
1989 Thurman Bobo	Pat Anderson
1990 **Jdg Harold Engstrom	Buzz Kiker
1991 Jon Cesari	Johnny Norwood
1992 Ron Cunningham	Billy Kinney
1993 Larry Easley	Mike Frank
1994 Billy Kinney	Ron Cunningham
1995 Jerry Taucer	Mel Wright
1996 Gene Fears	Larry Easley
1997 Don Hansen	Jim Miles
1998 Don Thompson, Jr.	Thurman Bobo
1999 Shawn Walker	Mark Theobald
2000 Malcom Ray	Hugh Hawkins
2001 Donnie Warner	David Barrows
2002 Butch Rhymes	Kent Fuller
2003 Kerry Abney	Don Hansen
2004 Mike Amy	Jim Ferrell
2005 David Barrows	Don Thompson, Jr.
2006 Harvey Zernial	Paul Helegda

*YMBL Presidents were Rodeo Chairmen - 1945- 1951

**Deceased