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TIP SHEET #3



Introduction to College Rodeo

Today's college rodeo athlete may be tomorrow's professional rodeo participant. The National Intercollegiate Rodeo Association (NIRA) website proudly announces the names of famous professional rodeo cowboys who were once college rodeo champions.

Tobacco companies use sponsorship of college rodeos to market their products to young adults. Spit tobacco use, with its potential for lifetime addiction and deadly diseases, is a problem on college campuses. One national survey found that 14% of male college students had used spit tobacco during the previous year.¹

1. History

- NIRA is the sanctioning body for most college rodeos. The group was founded in 1949 in Denver, Colorado. NIRA currently holds about 100 rodeos per year, and is divided into 11 regions with over 3,500 student members participating annually and 137 member schools and universities.²
- In 1975, the first national NIRA sponsorship was the Scholarship Awards Program of the US Tobacco Co. (now known as the US Smokeless Tobacco Company, or USSTC). The program offered scholarships totaling \$70,000 to college rodeo champions. USSTC continues to provide scholarship funds to college rodeo athletes through its sponsorship and affiliation with NIRA.³
- NIRA rodeos are not affiliated with the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). According to its website, the NCAA prohibits tobacco advertising at its events.⁴

2. How the tobacco industry infiltrates colleges and college rodeo

- USSTC has distributed nearly \$5 million in scholarships to college rodeo participants over the last 30 years.⁵ The average purse of \$200,000 per year is distributed among the universities attended by winning college athletes.
- Records are not available to determine the amount of tobacco scholarship funding each local university receives annually for its students who win rodeo championships. However, one California university that participates in NIRA receives \$10,000 or less per year in scholarship funds from USSTC. Note that a local alternative sponsor might consider replacing that amount of funding in support of deserving athletes. You may be able to determine the average level of annual USSTC scholarship funding at your local university by contacting the rodeo coach or the College of Agriculture.
- Tobacco companies also target college students through industry-sponsored events at college area bars and fraternity parties. At these events, they often distribute spit tobacco samples.⁶

3. Examples of successful work to restrict tobacco sponsorship of college rodeos

- In April 2004, South Dakota State University's Jackrabbit Stampede rodeo, "one of the largest and oldest collegiate rodeo clubs in the nation," successfully ended its 30-year affiliation with the tobacco industry by banning tobacco advertising and tobacco-funded scholarships.⁷
- Montana State University refused to allow the free distribution of tobacco samples at their 1998 rodeo, and was promptly dropped as the site for the College National Finals Rodeo (CNFR).⁸ This was a courageous decision by the university.

- ¹ Rigotti, N.A., Lee, J.E., & Wechsler, H. (2000). US College students' use of tobacco products: results of a national survey. *JAMA* Aug 9;284(6): 699-705.
- ² National Intercollegiate Rodeo Association (NIRA) website at <http://www.collegerodeo.com>.
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ NCAA Division I Manual, sections 31.1.14.1 (advertising of tobacco products at its events), and 31.1.14.1.2 (tobacco sponsorship of championships). Information obtained from <http://www.ncaa.org>, 1/12/04.
- ⁵ Egan, T. "Taking Aim at the Professional Rodeo Circuit's Drug of Choice." *The New York Times*, June 11, 2004.
- ⁶ Anderson, B. "Tobacco makers dip into frat gigs." *The Fresno Bee*, May 22, 2004.
<http://www.fresnobee.com/local/story/8607257p-9474991c.html>
- ⁷ "One of largest, oldest college rodeos goes tobacco free." South Dakota State University website, 5/3/04.
<http://www3.sdstate.edu/CooperativeExtension/NewsDetail51157.cfm?Id=46,3658>
- ⁸ Associated Press. "School Nixes Giveaway of Tobacco, So Rodeo Leaves—College in Montana Refused Sponsor Plan." *The Seattle Times*, September 4, 1998.