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Real jousting a hard-hitting -- and painful -- sport

By Amanda Neufeld
The Modesto Bee
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MODESTO, Calif. -- In the world of jousting, there are two types of knights: those who joust for show at Renaissance fairs and those who joust for real -- painfully so -- in competition. It's like pro wrestling vs. heavyweight boxing.

In theatrical jousting, the passes are scripted and the lances are built to break rather than deliver much of a blow. In tournament jousting, however, every hit is the real deal and the winner is, literally, the last man standing.

"We're just crazy enough to crave the impact," said Clifton Bassett, 30, from Sanger, Calif. competitively for 11 years.

"The dinner theaters, like Medieval Times, that's more of a stunt show," he said. "Here, an car wreck."

"This is how it was in the 1500s," said Patrick Karnahan, producer of the International Jou: Sonora, Calif. "It's the real thing. This is not phony or fake. You don't know what's going to

During jousting's heyday in the Middle Ages, knights -- mostly from northern Europe: Engl: one another to gain prestige and notice from nobles, who would then hire the knights to fig

Later, jousting was adopted by the nobles themselves as a way to prove their horsemanst: the mid-16th Century as weaponry improved.

At Sonora, the two-day jousting tournament was modeled after an actual event in 1520, wl King Francis I of France organized a jousting tournament between their respective knights fighters.

It was called the Field of the Cloth of Gold because each king spent an outrageous sum of other. The meeting ended abruptly when King Henry challenged King Francis to a wrestlin threw Henry to the ground and won. Soon after, the two countries went to war.

"We really haven't evolved that much from the times of the Romans," said Bassett, a histo



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fighters or some of the extreme ballgames they had in Meso-America, and there's this cravir connection to their more primal beginnings."

At the Sonora tournament, jousters are scored on points, with five points given for unhorsing a lance and two points for breaking the tip of the lance.

Each joust round begins with a series of skills games: the rings (jousters aim their lance through rings) and spear throwing (jousters hit a shield and make it spin) and spear throwing. Points are awarded for successful hits.

The joust with the most points wins a purse of \$4,000. In addition, each joust is paid \$

Not for the money

The money, however, isn't why they compete, the jousters say. Most of them -- unless they are professional -- have day jobs. The armor used in competition --

"This is for my own personal satisfaction," said Marty Collins, head groundskeeper at San Juan. "It's for the glory, not for the fame. It's just because I want to do it."

"I need that whole internal, getting hit, adrenaline rush of it all," Collins, 36, continued. "It's not just somebody with something and not go to jail for it."

Buying the supplies needed to start competitive jousting, including a full suit of armor, a quality horse and a vehicle to transport all of it, is steep.

Bassett, who is also a blacksmith and trainer/seller of jousting horses, said the midrange custom-made to the jousting horse, is \$7,000. The horse, a Belgian, French or English draft horse,

Jousters usually make their own practice lances, but those used in tournaments are supplied by the organizers.

"[Jousting is] kind of a young man's sport, physically," Bassett said. "But it's hard, because it requires a lot of resources to fund it."

To help defray some of those costs, most young jousters join troupes, such as Bassett's K. If jousters earn enough money from their winnings, they tend to venture out on their own, as

No boxing, rugby

Yet even with the expense, those who joust competitively say there's no way they'd compete in any other activity, such as boxing or rugby.

"The one thing I like is, No. 1, you're not reliant on a team," said Charlie Andrews, 37, a jousting enthusiast. "You sink or swim on your own. Whatever you achieve, or don't, is up to you."

And, he added, "the whole being-a-knight thing, that whole rock-star persona, is pretty cool. It's kind of the star of the show."

Even so, competitive jousting is a physically brutal, grueling sport. Each jousting horse is trained to be hit by a lance weighing 15 to 25 pounds carried by a rider atop a 1,500-pound draft horse approaching 30 m.p.h.

"Hit first and hit hardest," advised Andrews. "If you ride with your lance dead straight over the top, you may take yourself off or the other knight, but when I ride, someone's coming over the top."

Interestingly, the jousting horse most in danger of getting injured is the one holding the lance when it is hit. The force from the hit can reverberate up through the wood, shattering the bones in the joint.

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