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Sweat, steel and battle lances prepare to clash in Sonora

Dana M. Nichols
Record Staff Writer
Published Friday, Sep 23, 2005

SONORA -- Burly men clad in steel and mounted on horseback will smash into each other at the International Jousting Championships this weekend in Sonora.

But that doesn't mean they're not friends.

"I don't want to hit him in the crotch or square between the eyes, where I could cause a concussion," said Clifton Bassett, 30, of Sanger, who was spending the week before the tournament hosting Petter Ellingsen of Norway, a rival knight and personal friend.

"I want to make sure I hit him exactly where I want," Bassett said.

It isn't easy.

Take a 2,000-pound horse. Add a 200- or 250-pound man plus 120 pounds of steel plating and an 11-foot battle lance. Then set the whole rig galloping at 20 miles an hour directly at another chivalry crazed horse-warrior.

At the last moment, the knights swing their lances down, aiming for the chest.

The result is usually a loud "whump," often followed by a "clank" and an "oomph."

Bassett dislocated his shoulder when he took a fall while jousting July 8 at the Calgary Stampede in Alberta, Canada.

"The ground wasn't prepared right," Bassett said. "They had 4 or 5 inches of sod over concrete. It wasn't until I landed in it that I realized it was concrete."

Little things like broken hands and dislocated shoulders don't discourage modern knights.

Event info

The championships run from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. Saturday and 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday at the Mother Lode Fairgrounds, 220 Southgate Drive, Sonora. Admission for the entire weekend is \$16 for adults and teens and \$10 for children ages 6 to 12 if purchased in advance. At the gate, tickets are \$20 for adults, \$18 for students, seniors and teens, and \$10 for children 6 to 12. Children 5 and younger are admitted free. Musical entertainment includes The Young Dubliners, Tempest, The Black Irish Band and Crazy Ivan. Bring lawn chairs for the area in front of the stage. No ice chests or outside food are allowed except for baby food and baby bottles. Tickets are on sale at Replay Records in Manteca, 1261 W. Yosemite Ave., (209) 825-4487; Replay Records in Stockton, 7560 Pacific Ave., (209) 951-8010; and Toy Knights in Tracy, 1863 W. 11th St., (209) 832-0808. Tickets and information are also available online at www.joustingchampionships.com

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recovered, but I'm still nursing it a little bit," Bassett said.

He's still nursing it because his good friend Ellingsen knocked him off a horse, and he injured it again last weekend at a tournament in Truckee.

Ellingsen can't help gloating a little.

"I took care of Cliff this weekend, so I won't have to worry about him next weekend," Ellingsen said during an interview Tuesday.

Charlie Andrews, 37, of Eagle Mountain, Utah, also is riding injured -- a broken thumb he suffered during a tournament in Anderson just before he and the other top professional knights headed to Calgary.

He and Bassett unhorsed each other two weeks ago during a jousting show at Casa De Fruta, near the Pacheco Pass. The shows also are unscripted combat but are intended to be slightly less violent than tournaments.

"We do weaken the lances a little bit, so they can break a little easier," Andrews said.

Andrews is known as one of the professional jousting circuit's hardest hitters.

He weighs 245 pounds, is a Navy veteran with combat experience in the first Gulf War and Somalia, and is a lifelong rancher and horse-man.

His plans for his rivals in Sonora are simple: "I am looking to plant them all in the dirt."

Contact reporter Dana Nichols at 209 754-9534 or dnichols@recordnet.com

JOUSTING CHAMPIONSHIPS

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