

# BULLFIGHTING

## Bullfighters lay it on the line for bull riders

Tim O'Connell is the difference between a horn to the backside or a hoof in the back.

The California bullfighter has been putting himself between bulls and cowboys for the past 17 years, and will make his sixth appearance at the upcoming Farm-City Pro Rodeo.

"I like it there," O'Connell said. "David Bothum and the committee are really good to work with."

Like most bullfighters, O'Connell got in the game at an early age.

"I had an uncle (Craig O'Connell) who was a bullfighter, and growing up, that's all I wanted to do," he said. "I put most of my attention into sports when I was young, but when I was 16 or 17, I realized I wasn't going to go pro."

O'Connell's uncle worked with him, and at 16, he started working junior rodeos. It wasn't long before he moved up.

"A lot of guys had to learn the hard way and pay for someone to teach them," O'Connell said. "I had it in my own back yard."



Photo credit: courtesy of Tim O'Connell



O'Connell, 37, earned his PRCA card in 2002, and worked mainly in California until 2007.

"I got Reno in 2007 and it picked up pretty quick," O'Connell said of his workload. "I don't think I will get in 30 years like Rowdy (Barry), but I have a few good years left in me."

O'Connell will work with Nate Jestes of Douglas, Wyo., at the FCPR.

"We've worked a few rodeos together," O'Connell said of Jestes. "He's a real good guy to work with."

Jestes, 31, hasn't been in a rodeo arena since Dec. 6 when he suffered a severe right hamstring injury at the National Finals Rodeo. He had surgery Jan. 31.

He is schedule to work the

Dodge City Roundup Rodeo before heading to Hermiston.

"I've been out eight months, and that has been tough," Jestes said. "I've been going through rehab, and got cleared to play golf in April. That has helped keep me sane."

Jestes headed to Colorado two weeks ago to work on his footwork and timing.

"I'm going to step around some young bulls," he said. "It was pretty scary for a while, but I'm grateful I get to do this again."

There's always is the possibility of injuring his hamstring again, but he said he can't worry about it.

"I just have to put it out of my mind," Jestes said. "I'm excited to get back on the road, see my friends and work some good rodeos."