

# A Spectator's Guide To Cutting

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HORSE  
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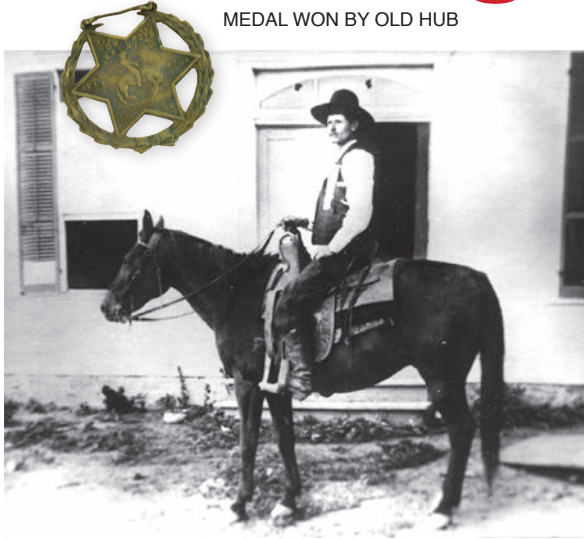


# What is Cutting?

Cutting is a western riding style event where the horse and rider are judged on their ability to separate and keep away a single cow from the cattle herd within a two and a half minute time period. Judges score the horse and rider based on their performance with the highest score winning the competition.

## HISTORY

The sport of cutting originated in the West when cowboys had to isolate a single animal from the rest of the herd. This was done for several reasons including giving it medical attention, taking it to the sale, branding it, etc. Ideally, the horse and rider would ease into the herd with a minimal amount of disturbance and sort off a small group of the herd and push them away. Little by little, the horse and rider would allow the small group to trickle back to



MEDAL WON BY OLD HUB

SAM GRAVES ON HUB, CUTTING'S FIRST CHAMPION (1898)



A FEW OF THE ORIGINAL FOUNDING NCHA MEMBERS

the herd until the one cow remained which needed the attention. A cow's natural instinct is to remain with the herd so after the cow was

isolated, it was the horse's job to keep the cow from returning to the herd until they had accomplished their task.



A cutting horse is an athletic and willing animal possessing an innate "cow sense" and the ability to respond quickly, turn sharply and get down low to keep the cow from returning to the herd.

# What Makes These Horses So Special?



The most amazing part of it all is the horse is trained to perform these maneuvers on its own, with little to no guidance from the rider. Some horses will even cut without a rider on their back.



# Cutting 101

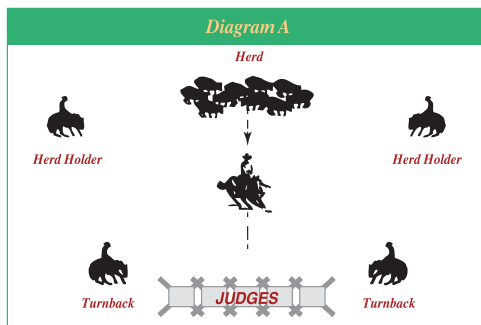
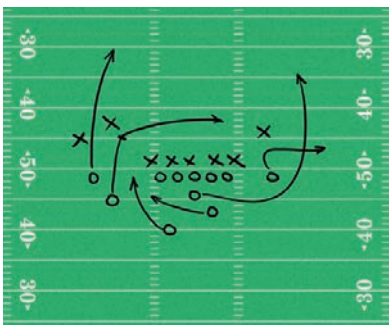


Each contestant receives two and a half minutes to showcase their horse's ability to isolate a single cow from the herd, give their horse full control by dropping the bridle reins to the horse's neck, and allowing the horse to maneuver defensively to keep the cow from returning to the herd. After working a cow, the rider will "quit" the cow by picking up the bridle reins

and riding into the herd to sort out a new cow to work. In a typical run, a contestant will sort and work at least two cows. After the two and a half time limit is up, the judge(s) score the performance with the highest score winning the class.

While there are other people riding horses in the arena helping the contestant, cutting is not a team sport. Those

extra people "turn back" and "hold herd" for the contestants showing their horses. People who turn back keep pushing the cow that is being worked towards the contestant. Without them, the individual cow may run away without challenging the horse. Herd holders keep the herd together. One of the great aspects of cutting is the comradery as many of the people you see in the arena turning back or holding herd are actually competing against each other.



## FOOTBALL FOR HORSES

Watching Cutting is similar to the concept of football in which the cattle herd is the end zone, the cow that is sorted from the herd is the offensive running back, and the rider/horse are playing defense by not allowing the cow to return to the herd. Like a running back, the cow ducks and dives to run past the horse, but the cutting horse uses its extreme athleticism to maneuver with the cow, always staying ahead of it.

**NATIONAL CUTTING HORSE ASSOCIATION**



*The NCHA promotes and celebrates the cutting horse, whose origin on Western ranches allows us to support ranching and its western heritage. By establishing rules for the conduct of cutting horse shows, NCHA strives to give cutters a level playing field and a progressive class structure, which accommodates everyone from the beginner to the advanced competitor. NCHA draws on the diverse talents and background of its members, and encourages their participation in helping it achieve these goals. — NCHA mission statement*

# Scoring

Cutting judges are similar to football referees in that they monitor the run, enforce the competition rules, and determine the contestant's score. A judge's score can range

from 60 to 80 points and a show can use from one up to five judges. At major NCHA events, a panel of five judges is used and the lowest score and the highest scores are discarded

and the three middle scores are totaled. Every rider starts out with a score of 70 from each judge and as the run progresses, each judge adds or deducts points as necessary.



## WHAT MAKES A HIGH SCORE?

While there are many different reasons a run can score high, here a few common characteristics of high scoring runs.

**1. The horse and the cow** are a mirror reflection of each other. When the cow moves, the horse moves. When the cow is still, the horse is still, waiting for the cow to make it's next move.

**2. The horse** is dominating the cow. The horse never gets out of its defensive position no matter how hard the cow is trying to run past it. The horse is in control of the cow.

**3. The horse** is keeping the cow in the middle of the arena rather than the cow running from wall to wall. Again, this shows the horse is in control of the run.

**4. In the two and a half minute time period**, at least one of the cows that is worked is usually very aggressive and really challenges the horse's physical ability.

## COMMON PENALTIES

**1. Losing a Cow** - The most detrimental penalty is the cow running past the horse to get back to the herd before the rider properly "quit" the cow. Many

times, a rider will leave the arena before their time is up if they lose a cow.

**2. Hot Quit** - When a rider is working a cow, there are two times when they can legally "quit" the cow without being penalized:

*a. The cow turns away from the horse rather than facing the horse head to head*

*b. The cow is stopped with all four feet planted in the ground*

A "Hot Quit" penalty is added when the rider quits a cow (picks up the bridle reins) that is not turning away from the horse or is not completely stopped.

# Is Cutting For You?

Whether you're an accomplished horseperson, competing in another discipline, or you've never ridden a horse, you can cut. Man, woman, child -

young or old, cutting is an equine discipline that allows any person at any skill level to compete. Cutting shows offer classes for beginners

to experts, giving you the opportunity to be competitive regardless of your skill level. To help you get started, visit [NCHAcutting.com](http://NCHAcutting.com).

THE NATIONAL CUTTING HORSE ASSOCIATION

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## WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION?

The sport is governed by the National Cutting Horse Association (NCHA) whose responsibility is to establish rules for the conduct of cutting horse shows. The NCHA offers thousands of sanctioned events world wide and awards tens of millions of dollars of cash and prizes to winners each year.

For more information about cutting, scoring, events in the area, or how to get started cutting, visit [NCHAcutting.com](http://NCHAcutting.com).