Letters to the Editor

Computers and rodeos

Editor:

I have reviewed "Computers on the College Rodeo Circuit" by Joel Schecter (Computer, February 1978). While the major portion of his paper is excellent I would like to point out some minor errors, disagree with one of his conclusions, and point out the main reason for using computer scoring.

First the inaccuracies. The Montana State University system is not 10 years old as the first system was developed in 1971. Furthermore, while the MSU system does calculate the winner's money and writes the checks, it does not assign trophies, buckles, hats, and other "winner's prizes." Also, the MSU system draws rough stock but not roping cattle (steers and calves). Saddle bronc riding is for 8 seconds in college rodeo not 10 s as indicated, and the time for a calf to remain tied is 6 s, not 5.

I don't agree with Dr. Schecter's conclusion that one of the major problems impeding widespread usage of computer systems is poor working conditions at a rodeo. It is true the conditions sometimes are poor but this is a plus factor for computer scoring since arena secretaries are even more prone to calculation error under adverse conditions. Also our experience is that data entry is very accurate on the MSU system, perhaps one error per 250 entries. Perhaps the higher error rate for the Idaho State system is due to use of 4-digit NIRA members (rather than assigned contestant numbers of 1 to 3 digits) and the requirement of entering data (zero included) for every contestant. With the MSU system only data for contestants receiving times or scores are entered since all score and time files are zeroed to begin with.

I believe the major problem opposing widespread computer usage is cost. Rodeo productions nearly always are marginally funded, and it is difficult for the sponsor to find additional funds for long distance telephone charges and pay for computer time.

It should be noted that although arena secretaries greatly benefit from these computer systems, the prime reason for computer use is to provide fast, accurate team, all-around, and national standings to the announcer, radio, and other media personnel. Rodeo committees usually don't recognize the value of this publicity information. Also, they can obtain secretarial help at little expense. Hence, it is very difficult to convince them to spend money for computer scoring.

There are many improvements and benefits yet to be achieved with these systems. The biggest advance now in progress is an "on site" real-time system now being developed at MSU for the National High School Rodeo Association.

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Software engineering

Editor:

The article appearing in the February 1978 issue entitled, "The Need for Software Engineering" provided an interesting summary of the effects of utilizing modern programming practices.

However, the author's tabularized summary of the paper presented at COMPCON Fall 77 by Belford et al is misleading in regard to the overall effectiveness of management techniques. The author should have pointed out, as the paper did, that the basic purpose of management techniques is not to increase the detection of errors, but rather to decrease the occurrence of errors. Since the data presented in the paper reflected only the effectiveness of the techniques in detecting errors, the management techniques described [e.g. top-down development, Threads, and Builds] appeared to be least effective. A study of the effectiveness of software engineering techniques in reducing the occurrence of errors would, in my opinion, have shown a reversal of the effectiveness.

The true effectiveness of any technique can only be measured by a composite of the error detection capability and the error abatement capability. The casual observer of your article might be misled by the data, and I appreciate this opportunity to complete the presentation of the original paper as presented at COMPCON Fall 77.

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