

## Foundation Roots From Rodeo

The 'spirit of competition' has existed in this prairie settlement long before organized sports began. Generations back, early settlers and ranchers were competitors who carried a rope instead of a leather ball, and would spur their way to the highest rank on the cowboy totem pole. Confidence was strutted at the only form of competition they were familiar with.... ranch rodeo.

In July 1901, the founder of Raymond, Jesse Knight Sr., bought approximately 260,000 acres of land in Southern Alberta. The town site was named after his oldest son Raymond, who worked alongside the cowboys spinning a rope, as well as he spun a good tale. Ray Knight was a builder - a big man with big ideas and carried them through, creating three ranches, the first irrigation lines and the first rodeo in Canada.

The Raymond Stampede started in 1902 as a way for local ranch hands to gather and show off their cowboying skills in a friendly competition. Past rodeo cowboy and athlete Bill Nalder recalls, "You could hear the cattle bawling when they were trailed to town from the Knight Ranch. I don't think they had chutes they just held the wild horses by hand, blindfolded then saddled them for the cowboys to ride right out in the open." The town folk would circle cars around in a field to form a barrier, and kids would sneak up as close to the action as possible to listen to cowboys analyse the stock, pick a strategy or drop a cuss word or two! He added, "Ray Knight brought this feeling of winning here. Raymond cowboys usually won, so it became tradition to win."



**RAY KNIGHT**



**BULL RIDER AT THE RAYMOND STAMPEDE**

Baseball was the first organized sport played in 1902, followed by basketball in 1903 on a dirt court. Many cowboys were also excellent athletes enjoying the competitive aspect. A Raymond basketball team took it one step further in 1920 forming the Union Jacks and joining the Amateur Basketball Association in Canada. All players were from Utah Mormon descent with high moral standards abstaining from tobacco and liquor use, which they claim this was a contributing factor to their health and success. In 1921 they won the first of 15 AB Championship titles (1921-1941) and in 1923 they captured Dominions of Canada Men's Senior Basketball Championship.

This may be where some of the early regimented philosophies and competitive mentality were strengthened, as well as the passion, which has led to notorious brawls had breaking out by upset coaches, players and fans.

Following suit, the first high school boys basketball team was in 1929 and the girls in 1938 (then called the Hellcats) with the first Raymond Invitational Tournament in 1943. High school football came much later in 1967 when Brian Dudley and Jerry Palmer started a team. Volunteers built the field and scrounged up old equipment; leftovers from the Calgary Stampeders.

Dudley remembers learning the basics, then practicing repeatedly to get the fundamentals down during his 25 years of consistently hard coaching. "It was always in the attitude of the kids. Most are average players that gave 150% and that's why they are able to win. Other teams may have been more skilled and had bigger kids, but Raymond kids are super dedicated and had commitment and desire."

No doubt about it, the Raymond program has produced athletic excellence and many have gone on

to be college, national and professional athletes like Lloyd Fairbanks who played for Brigham Young University and the Canadian Football League (CFL). The Ralph family produced four college players, with daughter Kenzie Ralph playing rugby, three boys played college football with two progressing to the CFL (Brock and Brett Ralph) and one coached RHS football (Dustin Ralph). Then one of the most respected Phil Tollestrup, played for BYU, at the 1971, 1975 and 1979 Pan Am Games and the 1976 Summer Olympics. There were many more that excelled in sports after highschool.



**THE UNION JACKS**



**BRETT RALPH  
FORMER RAYMOND COMET AND CALGARY STAMPEDER**

Tollestrup recalled some Raymond memories, "The gyms were always open here and after school we would sprint to the gym and stake out a basket. When I was in Grade 9 and my dad was the janitor at the high school; they had final exams with chairs all over the gym." He grins as he remembers, "After they finished I would help move some of the chairs away and then I would dribble the ball and pretend, the chairs left were players. I would turn the radio up and zigzag around them all by myself for hours."

High school principle, father of successful athletes, past coach and player Jim Ralph said, "If you had 20% more to give and you didn't, well then you cheated your team. Great athletes could come from other towns, but they

don't have that tough innate desire to excel." He continued, "In a fight you go until someone shows a weakness... our kids won't back down. Just like animals in the wild, when they're down, we go for the throat!"