

A Bull Fight with a Buffalo!!?

In January of 1907, "the bull fight of the century" pitted a bull against a buffalo. The winner? Depends on how you look at it.

It all started when some Mexican officials came to Fort Pierre, South Dakota, to see Scotty Philip's buffalo in their pasture. They made some condescending remarks about the laziness and slowness of the big animals. A fighting bull of Mexico, they said, would make a fool of a buffalo bull.

Having had his buffalo herd over five years, Philip was very proud of them and could not let a challenge like this go unanswered. He made a stinging reply, and one Mexican retorted angrily that a Mexican fighting bull would whip one of Scotty's shaggy animals with one foot tied. Just as hot and exaggerated came Scotty's answer, that the Mexican bull wouldn't last long enough against a buffalo to give the buffalo any exercise.

The result of the argument was a letter to Felix Robert, the manager of the bull ring in Juarez, offering to send down a couple of buffalo bulls to challenge the Mexican fighting bulls. The challenge was quickly accepted.

Excitement ran high around Fort Pierre as the news spread about the coming fight. Scotty made preparations to go with the bulls to Mexico. He was confident that his big buffalo bulls would trample the smaller Mexican bulls like they would a cripple wolf. He intended to be on hand to see it happen.

A reinforced box car to hold the two bulls was prepared in Pierre as no ordinary box car would hold the animals if they got excited. And they would be excited long before they got inside the car.

A big eight year old bull and a smaller four year old were picked to make the trip to Mexico. The men involved gave them the names of Pierre and Pierre, Jr.

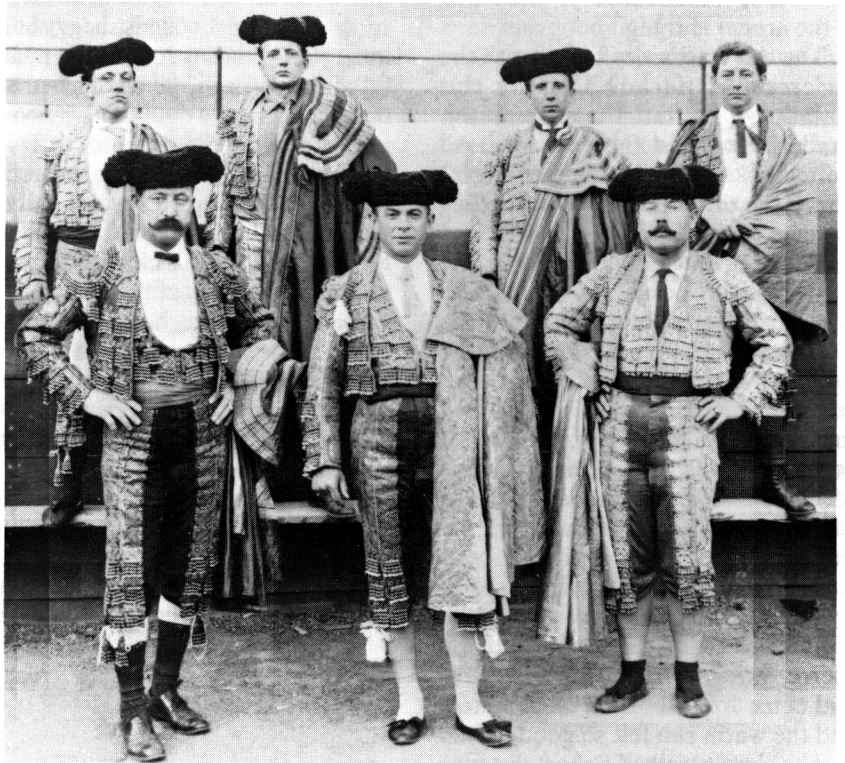
Originally, Scotty Philip planned to personally escort the bulls to Mexico and watch his pride and joy take on those Mexican bulls. However, shortly before they were to leave Fort Pierre, a severe blizzard blew out of the northwest and he didn't dare leave his ranch and its stock. So he sent his

top hands Bob Yokum and Eb Jones, and his nephew George Philip with the two buffalo bulls.

With them went the pride of Pierre and Fort Pierre. The importance of the battle had grown until it encompassed the entire community. If the buffalo bulls lost their fights in Juarez, it would be a sad homecoming for the adventurers. But only supreme confidence rode with the men on the train as it raced southeast on the blizzard winds.

A frantic search finally located the buffalo car on a siding about ten miles from the switching yards where some other train had discovered its mistake in picking up the car and had switched it off on a siding.

They hooked the car onto another train and left Omaha. Toward evening a conductor pointed out the wreck of a caboose that had been the victim of a read end collision earlier in the day. The conductor explained to them that that caboose was the one they would



Back l. to r.: Felix Roberts, owner of Bull Ring near Jares, Mexico; Eb Jones, cattleman near Cherry Creek; Tom Powers, El Paso businessman; George Philip, nephew of Scotty Philip. Front l. to r.: E.D. Bara, commercial agent for Mexican Central Railroad; William Amenette, El Paso merchant; Robert I. Yocum, Ft. Pierre, SD. The gents are dressed in authentic Mexican Matadore costumes. Photo courtesy of South Dakota State Archives.

At Omaha, the buffalo car was switched off on a sidetrack to be picked up by a train on the Rock Island line. The three men got a room at a hotel since the train wasn't scheduled to leave until 6:30 the next morning. However, when they went down to the yards to take care of the buffalo before the train headed on toward Kansas City, they couldn't find the special car anywhere.

have been riding if they had not been delayed in finding the buffalo car.

As they continued south, people crowded the stations where the train paused. Word of the coming bull fight had spread and would be followed with keen interest by more people north of the border than any fight ever held in the bull rings of Mexico.

The bull ring in Juarez was crowded well before time for the bulls

to meet in the arena. People from both sides of the border were crowded into the seats to see what would happen when a gallant Mexican fighting bull challenged the ponderous buffalo bull. It was a prospect that enticed every sporting mind.

The rules governing the fight were reviewed and the bulls put in their pens. Pierre, the eight year old buffalo, was chosen for the first fight. The quickest and fiercest of the Mexican bulls was chosen to oppose him. As honored guests for the occasion, George Philip, Bob Yokum and Eb Jones were put in the presidential box where they could see every move made in the arena.

The day's activities began with the ceremonial parade, led by the matadors. Behind them were the banderilleros and the picadors. All were decked out in their brightest finery, the tinsel and sequins dazzling the eyes of the Americans.

Four regular bull fights were first on the afternoon's schedule. The Americans were impressed with the quickness and determination of the fighting bulls. But when their Mexican hosts suggested that they might do well to concede defeat for their buffalo bulls before the contest, they laughed off the possibility that any animal Mexico could produce could conquer the mighty king of the prairies.

A murmur of sound from the crowd rose to a roar as the time came for the buffalo and bull fight. The big buffalo, Pierre, was turned into the ring. He had come from the land of blizzards, and the warm sun felt so good to him that he simply walked a short distance into the arena and laid down, not even allowing the taunting yells of the crowd to disturb him.

Then a cheer ripped the afternoon as the other gate was opened and a fighting bull appeared. Two darts were jabbed into his withers to make sure he didn't forget his role once he got into the arena.

He charged into the open and stopped as he spied the buffalo across the arena from him. For a minute he simply stared at the animal, apparently trying to decide just what it was. Then he started toward him.

The buffalo, seeing the Mexican bull coming at him, got up and pawed the ground, warning the other bull to keep his distance. There was no

animosity in the buffalo's action. He would have given the same warning to another bull that happened to come too close to him.

But the Mexican bull was not in the mood to take any friendly warnings. He came closer, gaining speed as he advanced. He evidently expected the big buffalo either to retreat or come charging to meet him. Pierre did neither. He simply stood his ground and when the Mexican bull reached him, met him head to head.

The Mexican bull learned then that there are few things harder than a buffalo head. he staggered backward, shook his head, and glared at his adversary. Pierre shook his shaggy head, too, eyeing this intruder on his peaceful afternoon as if he were surprised that such a runt would think he could push him around.

The bull circled warily, expecting the buffalo to keep facing him. But the buffalo practically ignored the bull. Infuriated, the bull charged again, aiming at the flank of the buffalo.

Just before the bull reached the buffalo, Pierre moved in a way no Mexican bull had ever seen before. Bulls will pivot on their back legs but buffalo pivot on their front legs, where the bulk of their weight is. The back legs are not weak, though, and can kick with twice the force of an army mule.

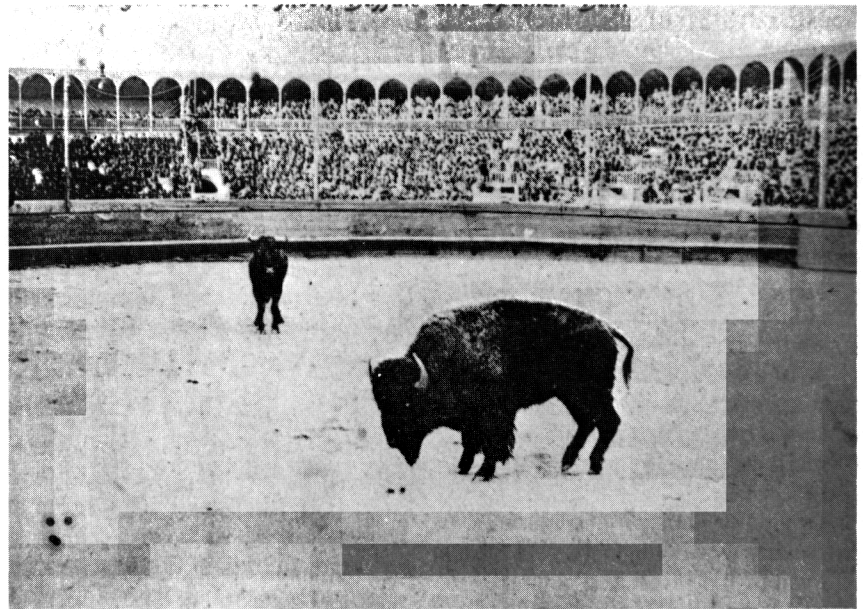
Just as the bull was about to strike his flank, Pierre pivoted and let the Mexican bull crash into his head again. The blow sent the bull reeling to his knees.

The bull backed off, considering the situation carefully. Then once more he tried a flank attack. But as before, the buffalo spun around at the last second and met the other bull head on. This time the Mexican bull went all the way down. And Pierre was content to quietly stand there with his wish to be left alone.

A horrified gasp went up from the spectators. In all their years of watching bull fights they had never seen a bull humiliated like this. To be flattened in the arena by a foe that disdained to follow up his advantage was more than the crowd could accept.

The Mexican bull refused to accept it, too, and tried once more, circling even farther behind the buffalo before charging. But once again a swift swivel of the huge buffalo's shoulders brought about a head-on crash. Once more the bull was knocked flat, then ignored by Pierre.

When the Mexican bull got up this time, he'd had enough and he began circling the arena, looking for a gate to let him out. The crowd roared its disappointment and anger and shortly thereafter, the manager came to the



North American buffalo and Mexican fighting bull meeting in the bull ring in Juarez, Mexico.

Photo courtesy of South Dakota State Archives.

presidential box and asked if they could put in another bull. His handlers had just told him the bull in the ring was not feeling well this day; another bull would put up a much better fight.

Feeling the heady confidence of victory, George Philip told him to bring on all the bulls in Mexico if he felt like it.

So the defeated bull was let out of the arena and another bull turned in, charging in full of fire and fury. He didn't find a buffalo lying down enjoying the sun, but neither did he find an angry enemy. To Pierre, this was just another annoyance to be met and disposed of if it got out of hand.

The fight was almost a duplicate of the first, and was the third bull to be turned in. The arena manager asked to be allowed to try one more bull, apparently feeling that the big buffalo must surely be worn down by now. Permission was granted, and the fourth bull was let in.

By now, Pierre was annoyed. When the Mexican bull pawed the ground defiantly, Pierre pawed the arena dust in reply.

The bull charged straight at the buffalo, and for the first time, the buffalo moved to meet the enemy. The crash when they met made even the American in the presidential box wince. But it did more than that to the Mexican bull. He shot backward as if he'd been hit by a freight locomotive. He landed in a heap and when he got up, turned and began circling the arena, his head in the air looking for a place in the wall low enough to leap over. The spectators watched in stunned, horrified silence. The only happy customers that day were the Americans who had expected victory for the buffalo but not by such a convincing margin.

As the last bull was let out of the ring, the crowd voiced its displeasure at the outcome of the widely advertised fight. But a "money scramble" between young boys and a small fighting bull with his horns knobbed calmed the fury of the crowd.

Although the actual battle between the Mexican bulls and the buffalo was a fiasco to the bull ring patrons, the owners considered it a financial triumph. The share paid to George Philip was more than enough to cover the expenses of bringing the two bulls down from South Dakota.

A matador would fight the younger buffalo bull on the next Sunday. The Americans were confident that the younger bull would do as well against the matador as the older bull had against the fighting Mexican bulls. They didn't think anyone in their right mind would fight an angry four year old buffalo bull with only a sword.

On the following Sunday, the capacity crowd waited anxiously for the last event, the fight between their best matador and the buffalo.

Events took an unexpected turn, though. The bull chosen for the first fight was one of the four bested the week before by the buffalo. The bull entered the ring, looking around for his opponent, and it was obvious to all that he expected the buffalo bull to be there.

After one quick look over the arena, he turned to the wall and began trotting around, his eyes on the top of the wall, looking for a place to escape. No amount of hazing or efforts by the picador could bring him into the middle of the arena to fight. In disgust, the bull was turned out and another brought in. But he too, had met the buffalo the week before and had only one wish, to get out of that arena!

Finally they were ready for the big fight and the crowd was excited.

Pierre, Jr. was brought into the ring and aggravated by the picador and banderilleros to make him ready to fight. But the buffalo bull had been penned up for a week already and he

was ready for action. Pierre, Jr. was furious.

The matador came on with his red cape, swishing it past the buffalo a time or two. Lacking the quickness of the Mexican bulls, the buffalo was not likely to injure the matador, but then the matador was not doing any damage to the buffalo, either.

The buffalo, matador, and the crowd were just warming up for a long battle (with the odds on the side of the buffalo), when the governor of the province called off the fight. The outraged crowd was calmed when it was announced that all gate receipts would be refunded since there hadn't been one good fight that day.

George Philip was convinced that the governor and his advisors had decided, given the week's before fiasco, that they didn't want to risk a buffalo humiliating their best matador. Philip was sure that Pierre, Jr. would have worn down the matador and either killed him or made him admit defeat.

Returning the buffalo to South Dakota, Philip ran into trouble with the Mexican authorities who wouldn't grant clearance for the buffalo bulls. Therefore Philip made a deal with an El Paso butcher to buy the animals for \$200 each. The butcher killed them and brought the carcasses across the border to his shop where he charged plenty for buffalo steaks. Some of his customers, furious at the buffalo for defeating their prize fighting bulls, got revenge by eating the victor.

HOMESTEAD FARMS

EASTERN ACCLIMATED BUFFALO

BREEDING STOCK

HERD STARTED IN 1965

Delivery Anywhere on a Mileage Basis

HOMESTEAD FARMS

Stormville, NY 12582

Problems? Call Buffalo Charlie's consulting service

Prices on Request

Route 216, RD1, Box 6

(914) 221-6837-6602