



ALL COWBOY & ARENA CHAMPIONS

HALL OF FAME

Ferrell “Flashbulb” Butler

2003 Texas Rodeo Cowboy Hall of Fame



Rodeo photographer and steer wrestler, Ferrell was born March 26, 1936 in Davidson, Oklahoma (an only child to UJ and Hazel Butler) and moved to the Dallas area in 1948 where he finished school and graduated from Arlington State College in 1954.

Ferrell “Flashbulb” Butler hadn’t a penny left to pay his entry fees. So the calf roper took out his camera and started shooting rodeos, selling the photos for a dollar and a half apiece in the 1960s. Each click of the lens drew him closer to the acclaim he receives today for the moments of rodeo history captured with his German Rolleiflex T camera.

His family later moved to Mesquite, Texas, and young Butler began competing in rodeo when he was 15. “I wanted to rope calves like all the other kids in the ’50s. I wanted to ride bulls, too, but that didn’t last long.” Butler went on to compete on the Arlington State College rodeo team. He was a charter member of several rodeo associations, but much of the time he competed in his hometown in Mesquite. It was there that 24-year-old Butler began his photography, learning the trade as he went. “I started taking pictures for money and the picture taking got plumb out of hand!” In 1960 at the NFR in Dallas, Texas, Butler met rodeo photographer DeVere Helfrich, future friend and mentor. Helfrich pioneered the technique of classic saddle bronc pictures capturing the rein picked up and the horse stretched out, jumping and kicking.



He competed as a steer wrestler in high school and college and began his rodeo photography career at the Mesquite, Texas rodeo in 1961 and in 1962 started to travel across the country to the larger rodeos.

At the Fort Worth Rodeo in 1962, Jim Shoulders gave him a nickname that would stick with him for life, he is still known as “Flashbulb”.

Ferrell patterned his rodeo photography career after the premier rodeo photographer of the fifties and sixties, the great DeVere Helfrich of Klamath Falls, Oregon. Ferrell worked the 1965 and 1966 N.F.R. as a back up to DeVere, and they became good friends. When DeVere retired in 1966 he introduced Ferrell to the committees of all the good rodeos that he had worked for throughout the U.S. and Canada in his thirty year career.

In 1967, the N.F.R commission selected Ferrell as the official photographer at the National Finals Rodeo, a position that he held until 1973.

In 1974, Ferrell broke his neck in a steer wrestling accident and retired from the arena. His wife Pat put all the old negatives that Ferrell had kept over the years in

boxes and stored them away, where they stayed for twenty-five years. In 1999, he discovered that with the help of a computer he could bring them back to life on CD-ROMs and with Pat’s help he has put together several CDs with three to eight hundred pictures on each one.

Ferrell and Pat still make their home at Red Oak, Texas and are working The Old Worn Out Cowboy Reunion Circuit now and enjoying their many friends, grandchildren and life after rodeo.

Ferrell was inducted to the Bull Riding Hall of Fame in 2018.

