

Holster Rules - General Principles Explained February 3, 2019

By: Quick Cal

CFDA was founded in 2002 and has gone through stages of development since then. From time to time, questions arise from some of our newer members who have joined the sport and wonder how our rules were established and what are they based upon. The most asked questions usually are in regard to the two main pieces of equipment that a new shooter must acquire, Guns & Holsters. A few years ago, I wrote an article called, "CFDA Gun Rules Explained." It can be permanently found in our Article Section on our CFDA website. Recently, the subject of Holsters became a main topic of discussion on our Cowboy Fast Draw Society - Discussion Group. When a topic that is so important to our sport arises, I resist making short comments that stand a good chance of being misunderstood. Instead, I invest the time to write a detailed explanation article, and then post it permanently as a resource for future reference on our website. I could easily spend 10 pages on this subject rather than just a few, but I doubt that few folks would actually take the time to read it. So, the following is more of an article covering the general topic of why certain holster patterns are acceptable in CFDA and why some are not.

Cowboy Fast Draw is a sport based upon the Romance and Legend of the Old West, which is actually based more on legend than fact. Hollywood has been making westerns for 116 years, and has produced many colorful interpretations, that have become the Mainstream Legend in our culture for a much longer period than the actual American Old West existed. As said in the great movie "The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance", "When the Legend becomes Fact, Print the Legend." So, why don't we allow Hollywood Holsters?

The original sport of Fast Draw began in 1955, but the sport developed so quickly into so many versions in its early days. By the early 60's numerous regional associations were created with each believing that their version was the correct one. Some aligned certain rules so members could cross-over compete. But still, main philosophies were very divided. Some shot mainly wax events that focused more on accuracy, with tougher degrees of target difficulty and penalties for misses. Others preferred blanks at balloons and focused on speed over accuracy. As a result, the sport in general could never truly define itself and standardize the rules and principles of the game. Also, the holsters and six-guns became so radically departed from anything to do with the history of the Old West and went way beyond even Hollywood's wildest interpretations.

When CFDA was formed and developed we took into consideration lessons learned from the history of the sport and it was decided to base the equipment as close as possible to gun types and holster patterns that were commonly available in the post-civil war time period of the 1800's. That was the only way to keep "competitive innovations" in check and within reasonable parameters. Admittedly, some holster types did slip through that probably shouldn't have, until we further defined the rules in 2006 and we were able to stop further intrusions at that point, which has held since then. The history of holsters is even more challenging than the history of six-guns, since guns were fairly well documented by the manufacturers. Whereas, the evolution of holsters was regional by nature and not documented very well since saddlemakers generally made holsters to order and sometimes innovations took decades to develop into other regions.

When it came to defining holsters in a competitive sport, we decided in 2006 to base our rules upon a book written by an actual Historian. You can find this in Holster Rule, #10. *"While there may be some differences of opinions on time frames of certain holsters, we accept the fine book, "Packing Iron" Gunleather of the Frontier West - By Richard C. Rattenbury as the standard we base our rules upon."*

I spoke with Mr. Rattenbury just a few years ago to consult with him on a few historical facts he stated in his book, at that time he was still the Curator of History at the National Cowboy Hall of Fame in Oklahoma City, OK. His book "Packing Iron" is considered to be the "Bible of Holster Making", by many holster makers. He does not dispute that there may have been advanced outliers as holster making has always been an innovative trade. However, "Packing Iron" focuses on items that were commonly found and widely available in the time period of the Old West, and that is also what our rules are based upon.

Near the beginning of the section named "Twentieth Century Western Gunleather", Mr. Rattenbury wrote. *"Ultimately, however, the guns and gunleather that once had been fundamental to survival and settlement were put aside, to remain little more than a tangible reminder of the western epic. What followed - the 'Buscadero' and 'Fast Draw' rigs portrayed in Hollywood westerns - were but a pale and misleading imitation of the genuine article."*

I mentioned to Mr. Rattenbury that we credited his book in our rules and based some of our rules upon his writings and was honored to offer him an invitation to travel to the 2014 FGA. I also indicated an interest in learning his opinions of some of our interpretations of his findings. He politely declined the invitation stating that he didn't travel much anymore. Then he said, "And Honestly, I don't think you would care very much for my opinions about modern holster designs, once you heard them." To that, I thanked him for the conversation and we cordially parted ways on our telephone conference.

So, if you want to know more about what our rules are based upon, please refer to Packing Iron, which if you are lucky enough to find a copy, have become collector's items.

Also, as far as using rawhide to stiffen areas in leather goods, I believe that this is completely period correct. Rawhide is nothing more than unprocessed and untanned cow hide, which was plentiful and used for many things in the Old West. The use of rawhide can be found in many period correct saddle patterns and since saddle makers were the predominate holster makers of the 1800s, I can't imagine that they did not use it to stiffen leather that was sometimes fairly soft.

This is a great topic, and I hope that I've answered your questions.

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