

## Breeding Bull Injuries

Richard Hopper, DVM, Diplomate ACT

Your herd bull represents a significant financial investment. Any injury or condition that inhibits a bull's ability to breed is of immediate concern. There are several common injuries that are detrimental to your bull's ability to breed and that will dictate culling if not corrected. This article will address these injuries, the immediate care you should provide, and treatment/surgical options that are available.

Prolapse prepuce- Virtually all Brahman influenced bulls have both extra sheath and extra (redundant) preputial tissue. You will often notice this when a bull is standing & relaxes, exposing 3-6 inches of the pink prepuce hanging below the sheath. This extra tissue is very easily damaged by contact with thorns, tall pasture weeds and even during breeding. If damaged the prepuce will bleed and swell, eventually becoming 3-4 times the normal size and covered with scabs and dirt, the bull is unable to retract it, so the injury/damage gets worse. When you discover this injury, the best thing you can do is bring your bull up, put him in the chute, and soak the damaged tissue. The recommended mixture is salt and sugar added to warm water. Put the water bucket in the chute or fix the bucket over the damaged prepuce and close to the bull with ropes over his back. Let it soak an hour or two twice a day. Contact your veterinarian, they might instruct you to continue for a few days or they might want to see the bull immediately. Either way, the soaking should soften the scabs and help with swelling/inflammation. This will make it easier for them (your veterinarian) to replace the prolapsed tissue and bandage. After 2-3 weeks of care the bull is often able to return to service. A problem is that the injuries result in scarring and this decreases the bull's ability to retract the prepuce in the future, making them even more susceptible to injury. An alternative is to have a surgical procedure performed which removes the extra preputial tissue (and scarred tissue). This procedure is called a Circumcision or "Reefing" procedure. Results of this surgery are typically excellent and bulls that have had this surgery are able to breed for the rest of their normal lifespan.



Other injuries to the prepuce- Non Brahman bulls can injure their prepuces too. These injuries typically result in an inability to extend their penis, so they have to be treated differently. You might have noticed that I didn't mention antibiotic administration for the prolapsed/damaged prepuce. That's because depending on severity the bull may not need any (leave that to your vet to decide, when they examine your bull). With this situation however, you always want to give antibiotics and as soon as possible. Use whatever your vet recommends, but penicillin in high doses works great. Also because you don't have anything exposed to soak, you have to approach first aid care differently. Get the bull in a chute and if possible provide hydrotherapy by water hosing the swollen area. This condition almost always requires surgical correction, but like the prolapse is best performed after the inflamed tissue "calms" down (swelling goes away, drainage stops).

Hematoma- This is a large blood clot that forms when the thick fibrous lining of the penis ruptures during breeding. The swelling is large, usually softball to soccer ball sized and near the teats of the bull, in front of the testicles. Antibiotics are indicated. Do not attempt to lance or drain the swelling. Surgery is best performed within 10 days of the injury and since a condition like this can go unnoticed for 2-4 days after occurring, contact your veterinarian immediately. Hydrotherapy is usually helpful and a small percentage of these will resolve without surgery.



Lameness- The same foot problems that cows have (foot rot, laminitis, injury) can all occur to your bull, but with more devastating results during breeding season. One of the best things you can do is to carefully examine your bull(s) feet 30 days or so before breeding season. That gives you enough time to have the necessary foot care work (trimming or treatment) performed early enough before turn out to allow recovery. Many cattlemen have Breeding Soundness Exams performed on their herd bulls 30-45 days prior to breeding season and incorporate preventative foot care at the same time.

An actual breeding season injury that occurs and is devastating to breeding efficiency is an injury to the stifle. This is very similar to the knee injury (cruciate tear) that humans experience, usually during sports activities. In the bull this injury usually occurs as a result of fighting, but can happen during breeding due to cow movement or poor footing. Although veterinarians routinely repair this injury in dogs utilizing surgical techniques similar to those performed by orthopedists on us, because of the heavy musculature and size of most beef bulls this is typically not an option and so a stifle injury is usually a career ending event for most bulls. Despite this some bulls will become serviceable with pen rest and anti-inflammatory drugs. Very valuable bulls are often treated with the simple goal of making them sound enough to walk around, so that they can be transported to a bull stud for use in artificial insemination.