

BILL RILEY TALENT SEARCH 2026

Sponsored by Woodbury County REC

Superintendents: Kathy Clarkson (712) 251-9844 (kathycla@wiatel.net) & Tom Gerking (712) 899-6344.

The Woodbury County Fair will hold two complete Bill Riley Iowa State Fair Talent Searches. The contests will be on Thursday, August 6, at 7 PM and Saturday, August 8, at 7 PM. The competition will be in Flathers Hall on the fairgrounds in Merville. The search is divided into two divisions, Sprouts--Ages 2 through 12, and Seniors--ages 13 through 21. The winner of each division will be entitled to enter the competition at the Iowa State Fair. If the first-place winner cannot attend the Iowa State Fair, the second-place winner may compete. Prizes in each division will be 1st--\$75; 2nd--\$50; and 3rd--\$25. A special prize of \$25 will be awarded to the highest placing Woodbury County resident in each division.

The following rules are specified by the State Fair Talent Search. We have no means for checking every rule the day of the contest, however, you will be disqualified at state if you break one, so make sure your act is within these rules before you come.

1. Show is open to legal residents of the state of Iowa only. Acts must appear in a locally sponsored/Iowa State Fair sanctioned show somewhere in the state of Iowa and be the show qualifier to be eligible to compete at the Iowa State Fair. Judges' decisions are final.
2. Sprouts: Ages 2 through 12 years and Seniors: Ages 13 through 21 years
Seniors and Sprouts must qualify within the age requirement at local shows. For example, if you are 21 and don't qualify before you are 22, you are ineligible. All Sprout acts must qualify for the State Fair at the age of 12 or under.

The following applies only to the competition at the Iowa State Fair, NOT local shows: A person's age for the Iowa State Fair competition is determined at the time they win a local show. A 12-year-old who wins a local show (or 21-year-old) could turn 13 (or 22) by the State Fair and still be eligible in the Sprout (or Senior) division, as they met age requirements at the time of qualification at a local show.

This applies to individuals or anyone in a group who qualifies at a local show at age 12 but turns 13 before the State Fair. If more than one performer in a group turns 13 before the State Fair, thus making the Sprout act have two or more 13-year-olds, that act will automatically become a Senior act.

3. Professionals are NOT permitted to compete. This includes Union musicians and anyone whose principal source of income is from their talent. Compensation for performing at weddings, etc. does not constitute principal source of income.
4. Acts must keep the performance to three minutes. Acts timed past three minutes are subject to possible disqualification or point deduction. Five seconds over would be a starting point to begin deductions, ten seconds over or longer can be considered for disqualification. This is at the judges' discretion and should be monitored carefully. There are two different timers at the state level, so we are very serious about the three-minute rule. Set-up time is not included. Limit set-up time to one minute. Official time starts when music starts and ends when the music is done.
5. No more than five persons are allowed in an act. Piano accompanist is NOT included in an act and may be any age. No more than three accompanists permitted per act. Drums, amps, etc. are discouraged due to the one-minute set-up time. No combos, rock bands or similar musical groups permitted.

6. **All acts must pre-register with the Talent Show Superintendent prior to the day of the talent show.**
7. Acts will need name, complete address, birth date, age, phone number (include area code), email, and type of talent. Multiple acts need one member to act as a contact person with all information going through them. Additional members of the act need only birth date, age, and town. **(No social security numbers are needed.)**
8. Acts are asked to not dance onto or off the stage. After introductions, you may take any position you wish to begin your performance.
9. Vocalists can perform with an accompanist or prerecorded track on a USB flash drive. Prerecorded tracks should be instrumental only. Any prerecorded track with backing vocals is not allowed, and the act will be disqualified.
10. Looping (typically seen in vocal or instrumental performances) is allowed as part of an act as long as each loop is performed live on stage. Previously recorded loops will not be allowed. Looping equipment must be provided by the contestant.
11. Foul language is not allowed in the Bill Riley Talent Search. Acts performing to or singing pieces with inappropriate lyrics will be disqualified, and the show coordinator will encourage performers to compete with a different song.
12. Contestants may only appear once in any given show. This applies to qualifying shows as well as the competition at the Iowa State Fair. They may not perform “solo” and then return in the same show in a duet or trio. Contestants are allowed to perform in different acts in different shows, but they may only qualify for the State Fair Show with one act. Once a performer has qualified for the State Fair, they are not allowed to perform in local shows as part of another act.
13. Only one qualifier from each division (Sprout and Senior) of a local show is permitted to advance to the Iowa State Fair. **NO TIES** are permitted in all placing.
14. Exceptions may be made at the discretion of Iowa State Fair staff or Bill Riley Jr.
15. An act already qualified may not compete in this contest but may appear as entertainment during the judges’ conference. **(This is a Woodbury County rule. Since we are one of the last shows to qualify for the State Fair, this gives more people an opportunity to qualify.)**

Check-in Procedures:

Thursday, August 6, or Saturday, August 8, Meet in Flathers Hall at the north bleachers around 6:15 PM. Tom Gerking or Kathy Clarkson will be there to check in the participants

The **general comment** section of the judge’s ballots will be returned to participants at the conclusion of each show.

COMPETITION AT THE IOWA STATE FAIR

Semi-Finalists: Semi-finalists from the **2025** Iowa State Fair Bill Riley Talent Search are automatically qualified for the 2026 State Fair competition. You do not have to re-qualify by winning at the local level show.

Birthdays and Semi-Finalists: 2025 semi-finalists returning in 2026 will perform in the division for their current age as of the last day of the 2026 Iowa State Fair.

Sprout Champions in the Sprout division must sit out one year of competition. They also must re-qualify when returning after the one-year absence and be 12 years old or less to compete in the Sprouts division. Sprouts may compete the next year IF they have aged up to the Senior Division. In order to do this, they **MUST** requalify at a local show.

Senior Champions—All finalists in the Senior division from 2025 must sit out one year—they cannot perform as an individual or in a group during 2026. They also must re-qualify when returning after the one-year absence and be 21 years old or less. The “Grand Champion” of the Senior division is no longer allowed to compete in the Talent Search at the local or Iowa State Fair level.