Bill Riley Talent Search
Sunday August 2nd, 2026

Plymouth County Fair Coordinator: Mandy McKibbin-Woodard

11:30am Bill Riley Talent Search Check-in – Century Hall
12:00pm Bill Riley Talent Search – Century Hall

2026 Bill Riley Talent Search Contestant Rules

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 Seniors: Ages 13 through 21

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 principle 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 closely. At the local level this would be a great opportunity for show coordinators to let an act know that they were over the time limit. 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. Acts should meet with the show coordinator or emcee a minimum of 45 minutes to an hour prior to the show to get checked in.

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. **DO NOT PROVIDE SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBERS TO LOCAL SHOW COORDINATORS**.

Please only provide contact information for the act themselves or their parent/guardian to Iowa State Fair staff. DO NOT provide information for a coach or instructor, we prefer to work directly with the parent or guardian.

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 should 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. They may keep competing in local shows with the qualifying performance.

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.

Competition at the Iowa State Fair

- Preliminary rounds: First 7 days
- Semi finals: Days 8, 9, and 10
- Championship show: Day 11

Semi-Finalists: Semi-finalists from the 2024 Iowa State Fair Bill Riley Talent Search are automatically qualified for the 2025 Iowa State Fair competition. You do not have to requalify by winning at the local level show, but you are encouraged to compete at local shows. If you win at the local level show, you are entitled to the prize money, but you must inform the emcee that you have already qualified for the State Fair. The second place winner will then be able to advance to the State Fair competition.

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.

Iowa State Fair Championship Show:

Sprout Division Champions: There will be 6 Sprout Champions showcased in the Championship Show. 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 Sprout 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 Division Championship: There will be 9 finalists in competition. All finalists in the Senior division must sit out one year - they cannot perform as an individual or in a group during the next year. 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 Bill Riley Talent Search at the local or Iowa State Fair level.

Please email any questions to rileytalentsearch@gmail.com or call 515-262-3111.