Scaling Properties of Proton and Antiproton Production in $\sqrt{s_{NN}} = 200$ GeV Au + Au Collisions

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We report on the yield of protons and antiprotons, as a function of centrality and transverse momentum, in Au + Au collisions at $\sqrt{s_{NN}} = 200$ GeV measured at midrapidity by the PHENIX experiment at the BNL Relativistic Heavy Ion Collider. In central collisions at intermediate transverse momenta ($1.5 < p_T < 4.5$ GeV/c) a significant fraction of all produced particles are protons and antiprotons. They show a centrality-scaling behavior different from that of pions. The $\overline{p}/\pi$ and p/π ratios are enhanced compared to peripheral Au + Au, $p + p$, and e^+e^- collisions. This enhancement is limited to $p_T < 5$ GeV/c as deduced from the ratio of charged hadrons to π^0 measured in the range $1.5 < p_T < 9$ GeV/c.

Heavy-ion collisions at the BNL Relativistic Heavy Ion Collider (RHIC) energies permit the study of nuclear matter at extreme energy densities. Hadrons originating from fragmentation of partons that have undergone large momentum transfer (hard) scatterings are sensitive probes of the hottest and densest stage of the collision. Data collected during the first RHIC run at $\sqrt{s_{NN}} = 130$ GeV led to the discovery of suppression of high transverse momentum ($p_T \gtrsim 2$ GeV/c) hadron production in central Au + Au collisions [1–3] when compared to expectations from nucleon-nucleon collisions. This effect, quantified in terms of a nuclear modification factor $R_{AA} = (\text{yield}_{AA}/N_{\text{coll}})/\text{yield}_{pp}$, where N_{coll} is the average number of binary nucleon-nucleon collisions, had been discussed as a possible consequence of the energy loss suffered by partons moving in a dense medium [4,5]. Unexpectedly, it was found that R_{AA} is more strongly suppressed for π^0 than for charged hadrons [1], and that the yields of p and $\overline{p}$ near 2 GeV/c in central events [6] are comparable to the yield of pions ($p/\pi \sim 1$). This is in contrast to the p/π ratios of $\sim$0.1–0.3, measured in $p + p$ [7] and e^+e^- [8] collisions, and to perturbative quantum chromodynamics phenomenology [9]. These results suggest that an investigation of particle composition is important for understanding the medium effect on high-p_T phenomena at RHIC. During the 2001 Au + Au run at $\sqrt{s_{NN}} = 200$ GeV the PHENIX experiment collected data to study the scaling properties of p and $\overline{p}$ production as well as the p/π, $\overline{p}/\pi$, and charged hadron to pion (h/π) ratios as a function of centrality.

The PHENIX detector [10] combines high momentum resolution with diverse particle identification (PID), resulting in hadron identification over a broad momentum range. The present results combine the measurements of $\pi^{\pm}$, p, and $\overline{p}$ with those of neutral pions [11] and inclusive charged hadrons [12]. A "minimum bias" trigger based on signals from the beam-beam counters (BBC) and zero-degree calorimeter (ZDC) sampled $92.2^{+2.5}_{-3}\%$ of the inelastic Au + Au cross section of $\sigma^{\text{AuAu}}_{\text{inel}} = 6.9$ b [11]. The collision vertex is restricted to ± 30 cm of the nominal origin. Approximately 2×10^7 (3×10^7) minimum bias events are used in the charged (neutral) particle analysis. These samples are subdivided into seven centrality classes based on cuts in the combined ZDC and BBC response: 0–10%, 10–20%, 20–30%, 30–40%, 40–50%, 50–60%, and 60–92% of $\sigma^{\text{AuAu}}_{\text{inel}}$. The average number of participants (N_{part}) and collisions (N_{coll}) for each centrality class are derived from a Glauber model calculation [11].

Identified charged particles are measured over a subset of the PHENIX East-arm spectrometer covering pseudorapidity $|\eta| < 0.35$ and $\Delta\phi = \pi/8$ in azimuthal angle. PID is based on particle mass calculated from the measured momentum and velocity. The momentum resolution is $\delta p/p \simeq 0.7\% \oplus 1\% \times p(\text{GeV}/c)$ and is provided by a multilayer drift chamber followed by a multiwire propor-

tional chamber with pad readout (PC1). The velocity is obtained by measuring the time of flight (TOF) and the path length along the trajectory. The timing system uses the BBC to provide a global start signal; hits on the TOF scintillator wall, located at a radial distance of 5.06 m, provide individual stop signals. The resolution is $\sigma \simeq 115$ ps, which allows a 4σ π/K and K/p separation up to $p_T \simeq 2$ GeV/c and $p_T \simeq 4$ GeV/c, respectively. A 2σ momentum dependent cut in mass squared is used up to $p_T = 2$ GeV/c and $p_T = 4$ GeV/c to select π and $(\overline{p})p$. Asymmetric cuts are applied at higher momenta to extend the π/K and K/p separation up to p_T of 3 and 4.5 GeV/c. The spectra are corrected for geometrical acceptance, decay in flight, and reconstruction efficiency using a GEANT-based Monte Carlo (MC) simulation and embedding simulated tracks into real events with different particle multiplicities.

The p and $\overline{p}$ yields are corrected for feed down from weak decays using a MC simulation and the measured Λ/p and $\overline{\Lambda}/\overline{p}$ ratios at $\sqrt{s_{NN}} = 130$ GeV [13] which include contributions from Ξ and Σ^0. Corrections for feed down from $\Sigma^{\pm}$ are not applied, but estimates based on HIJING MC give less than $\sim$5% contribution. At $p_T = 0.65$ GeV/c, about 40% of the inclusive $(\overline{p})p$ come from weak decays. This fraction reduces to $\approx 25\%$ at 4 GeV/c. The systematic uncertainty of this correction is estimated at 6% by varying the Λ/p ($\overline{\Lambda}/\overline{p}$) ratios within the $\pm 24\%$ errors of the $\sqrt{s_{NN}} = 130$ GeV measurement and assuming m_T scaling at high p_T. The above uncertainty could be larger if the Λ/p ($\overline{\Lambda}/\overline{p}$) ratios change significantly with p_T and beam energy. The additional systematic error on the overall normalization is 8% for $p_T < 3$ GeV/c and 12% above 3 GeV/c. Added in quadrature, the total systematic errors are 11% and 14%; the larger value is for $p_T > 3$ GeV/c.

Inclusive charged hadrons are measured in the West-arm spectrometer covering $|\eta| < 0.35$ and $\Delta\phi = \pi/2$. Two pad chambers (PC2, PC3) located at 4.2 and 5 m, respectively, and a ring imaging Čerenkov counter [12] are used to reject and subtract high-p_T background. The systematic errors on the yields range from 11% for $p_T < 5$ GeV/c to 45% at 9 GeV/c.

Neutral pions are reconstructed via the decay $\pi^0 \rightarrow \gamma\gamma$ through an invariant mass analysis of γ pairs detected in the electromagnetic calorimeter (EMCal), which covers $\Delta\eta = 0.7$ and $\Delta\phi = \pi$. The absolute energy scale is known to $\leq 1.5\%$. The systematic errors on the π^0 spectra range from 10% to 17%, from low to high p_T [11].

Figure 1 shows the p/π and $\overline{p}/\pi$ ratios as a function of p_T measured at midrapidity in central (0–10%), midcentral (20–30%), and peripheral (60–92%) Au + Au collisons. The open symbols represent the p/π^+ and $\overline{p}/\pi^-$ measurements, while the closed symbols represent the corresponding p/π^0 and $\overline{p}/\pi^0$ ratios. The error bars are the quadratic sum of statistical errors and point-to-point systematic errors. There is an additional normalization
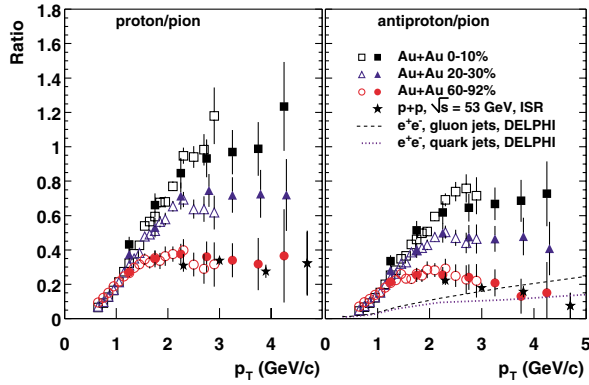
FIG. 1 (color online). p/π (left) and $\overline{p}/\pi$ ratios for central
(0–10%), midcentral (20–30%), and peripheral (60–92%)
Au + Au collisions at $\sqrt{s_{NN}} = 200$ GeV. Open (filled) points
are for $\pi^\pm$ (π^0), respectively. Data from $\sqrt{s} = 53$ GeV $p + p$
collisions [7] are shown with stars. The dashed and dotted lines
are $(\overline{p} + p)/(\pi^+ + \pi^-)$ ratios in gluon and in quark jets [8].

uncertainty of ~8% (for p/π^+, $\overline{p}/\pi^-$) and 12% (for
p/π^0, $\overline{p}/\pi^0$), which may shift the curves up or down,
but does not affect their shapes. In the region of overlap,
the $\pi^\pm$ and π^0 measurements, with very different system-
atics, are consistent to within 5% to 15%. For all central-
ities the ratios rise steeply at low p_T and then, at a value of
p_T which increases from peripheral to central collisions,
level off. In central collisions the ratios are a factor of ~3
larger than in peripheral events. At $p_T > 2$ GeV/c the
peripheral Au + Au data agree well with the ratios ob-
served in $p + p$ collisions at lower energies [7] (shown
with stars). The $(p + \overline{p})/(\pi^+ + \pi^-)$ ratios in gluon and
quark jets produced in e^+e^- collisions [8] are shown with
a dashed (dotted) line. Above 3 GeV/c the p/π, $\overline{p}/\pi$
ratios from peripheral collisions are also consistent with
gluon and quark jet fragmentation, which should be in-
dependent of the collision system. Deviations from jet
fragmentation below 3 GeV/c indicate the absence of soft
hadron production in the e^+e^- data.

Hydrodynamic models have had success reproducing
$(\overline{p})p$ [6,14] and π data [6] from $\sqrt{s_{NN}} = 130$ GeV Au +
Au collisions [15,16] and preliminary 200 GeV data [17].
The calculations show good agreement with the central
$p, \overline{p}$ and $\pi^\pm$ spectra up to $p_T \simeq 3$ and 2 GeV/c, respec-
tively. In peripheral collisions the calculations deviate
from the data above $p_T \simeq 1$ GeV/c. Within these models
the large $\overline{p}/\pi$ ratio is a natural consequence of the strong
radial flow [18]. All particle spectra converge to the same
slope if p_T is sufficiently larger than the particle mass m_0.
The $\overline{p}/\pi$ ratio is $R_{\overline{p}/\pi} \simeq 2 \exp(-\mu_b/T_{ch})$, governed only
by the baryon chemical potential μ_b and the chemical
freezeout temperature T_{ch}. Using $T_{ch} = 177$ MeV and
$\mu_b = 29$ MeV [19], $R_{\overline{p}/\pi}$ reaches a limiting value of
1.7. Within 10%, the same limiting behavior is expected
for all centralities, since the thermal parameters vary
only weakly with centrality [20]. The data are not only

below the asymptotic value but also show a more pro-
nounced centrality dependence than can be accommo-
dated by hydrodynamics models. This suggests that
other mechanisms begin to play a role before the asymp-
totic value is reached. At intermediate p_T ($2 < p_T <$
4 GeV/c), hard scattering is one possible mechanism
that competes with "soft" processes as described by
hydrodynamics.

Figure 2 shows the p and $\overline{p}$ spectra for different cen-
tralities (0–10%, 20–30%, 40–50%, 60–92%) scaled by
the corresponding value of N_{coll} [11]. Error bars are
statistical only. Multiplicity dependent systematic errors
are of the order of 3%. Errors on N_{coll} range from ~10%
for central to ~28% for the peripheral event class. Below
$p_T \simeq 1.5$ GeV/c the p and $\overline{p}$ yields scale slower than N_{coll}
as expected for soft processes, and the effect of the radial
flow on the shape of the spectra is clearly visible. The
inverse slopes gradually increase from the most periph-
eral to the most central event class. Beyond $p_T \simeq$
1.5 GeV/c all spectra converge to the same slope and
seem to obey N_{coll} scaling as expected for production
due to hard processes in the absence of nuclear effects.

Figure 3 compares the N_{coll} scaled central to peripheral
yield ratios,

$$R_{CP} = \frac{\text{yield}^{0-10\%}/N_{coll}^{0-10\%}}{\text{yield}^{60-92\%}/N_{coll}^{60-92\%}}, \qquad (1)$$

for $(p + \overline{p})/2$ and π^0. In the p_T range from 1.5 to
4.5 GeV/c, p and $\overline{p}$ are not suppressed in contrast to π^0
which is reduced by a factor of 2–3. Moreover, this
behavior holds for all centrality selections (Fig. 2), while
the suppression in the π^0 yields increases from peripheral
to central collisions [11]. The apparent scaling with N_{part}
for $p_T \simeq 4$ GeV/c of inclusive charged hadrons [21],
which has been interpreted in terms of saturation sce-
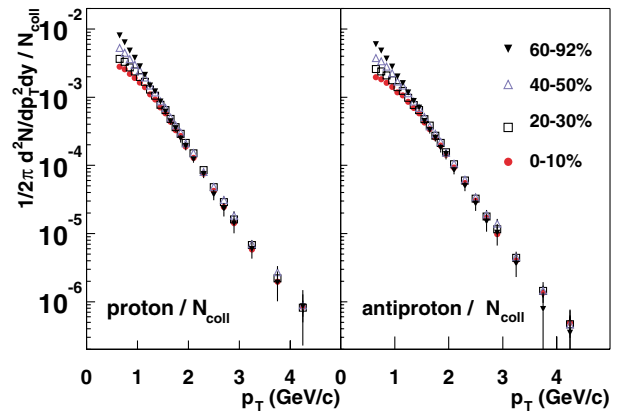nario [22], appears to be somewhat coincidental, since we

FIG. 2 (color online). p and $\overline{p}$ invariant yields scaled by N_{coll}.
Error bars are statistical. Systematic errors on N_{coll} range from
~10% for central to ~28% for 60–92% centrality. Multiplicity
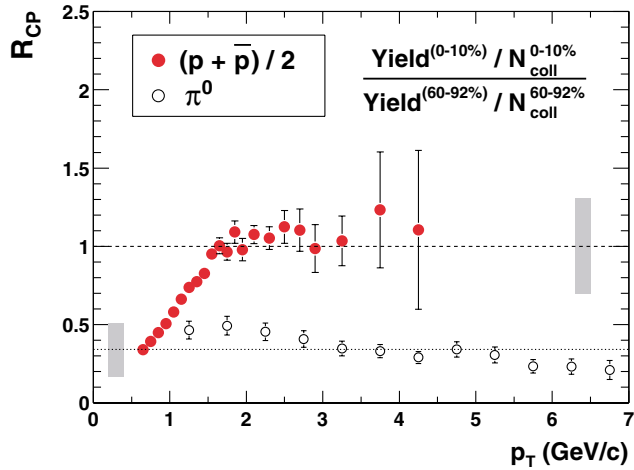dependent normalization errors are ~3%.

FIG. 3 (color online). Nuclear modification factor R_{CP} for $(p + \overline{p})/2$ (filled circles) and π^0. Dashed and dotted lines indicate N_{coll} and N_{part} scaling; the shaded bars show the systematic errors on these quantities.

observe a strong species dependence not expected in the model. However, the interpretation in terms of soft and hard processes is also not straightforward. If both π and $p, \overline{p}$ originate from the fragmentation of hard-scattered partons that lose energy in the medium, the nuclear modification factor R_{CP} should be independent of particle species contrary to our result. As discussed above, for a "hard" description to hold, the particle ratios $\overline{p}/\pi$ and p/π should reflect the fragmentation function, which favors pion production.

It is possible that nuclear effects such as the "Cronin effect" [23,24] contribute to the observed large $(\overline{p})p/\pi$ ratios. In $p + A$ collisions at energies up to $\sqrt{s} = 38.8$ GeV a nuclear enhancement beyond N_{coll} scaling has been observed for π, K, p and their antiparticles [25]. The effect is larger for $p(\overline{p})$ than for π which leads to an enhancement of the $(\overline{p})p/\pi$ ratio compared to $p + p$ collisions. For $p + W$ the increase is a factor of ~ 2 in the range $3 < p_T < 6$ GeV/c. Theoretical descriptions assume that the effect is due to initial state scattering or p_T broadening [26]. Recent results comparing charged hadrons to π^0 to $d + Au$ at $\sqrt{s_{NN}} = 200$ GeV suggest that the Cronin effect in baryons is different from that in mesons [27]. Another possibility is that the variation in the p/π ratio with centrality reflects a medium-induced difference in the formation time of baryons and mesons—an effect which has been cited to explain DIS results [28].

Recently, the abundance of p relative to π in central collisions has been attributed to the recombination, rather than fragmentation, of quarks [29]. In this model, recombination for p and $\overline{p}$ is effective up to $p_T \simeq 5$ GeV above which fragmentation dominates for all particle species. Another explanation of the observed large baryon content invokes a topological gluon configuration: the baryon

junction [30]. A centrality dependence, which is in qualitative agreement with our results, has been predicted [9]. In both theoretical models, the baryon/meson enhancement is limited to $p_T < 5$–6 GeV/c. The identification of charged particles beyond $p_T \approx 4.5$ GeV/c is not yet possible with the current PHENIX configuration; however, the baryon content at high p_T can be tracked indirectly using the h/π^0 ratio.

Figure 4 shows h/π^0 for central and peripheral Au + Au collisions. The error bars represent the quadratic sum of statistical and point-to-point systematic errors. In peripheral Au + Au collisions, R_{h/π^0} is consistent with the measurement in $p + p$. In central collisions in the region $1 < p_T < 4.5$ GeV/c, R_{h/π^0} is enhanced by as much as 50% above the $p + p$ value. As shown in Fig. 1, this enhancement is due to a large baryon contribution. Above $p_T \simeq 5$ GeV/c, the particle composition is consistent with that measured in $p + p$ collisions. This indicates that the centrality scaling of the p yields should become consistent with that of π at higher p_T ($\gtrsim$ 5 GeV/c). Similar trends are observed in Λ and K_S^0 measurements by the STAR Collaboration [31].

We have presented a systematic study of high-p_T particle composition in Au + Au collisions at $\sqrt{s_{NN}} = 200$ GeV as a function of centrality. A large p and $\overline{p}$ contribution which increases from peripheral to central collisions is observed in the range $1.5 < p_T < 4.5$ GeV/c. In this p_T range, the p and $\overline{p}$ yields scale with N_{coll}, as expected for hard scattering. This is in contrast to the
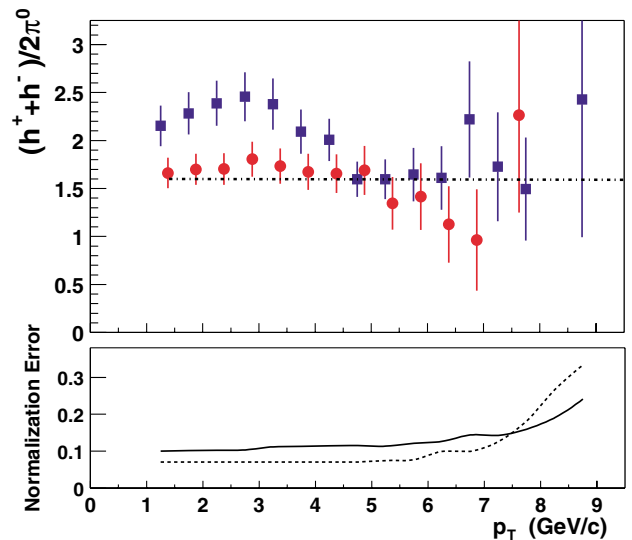

FIG. 4 (color online). Charged hadron to π^0 ratio in central (0–10% squares) and peripheral (60–92% circles) Au + Au collisions. The peripheral data points are offset by +130 MeV/c for clarity. The line at 1.6 is the h/π ratio measured in $p + p$ collisions [7]. The lower panel shows the fractional normalization error common to both centrality selections (solid line) and the relative error between the two (dashed line).

centrality-dependent suppression of π^0 production. The baryon enhancement with respect to π seems to be limited to transverse momenta $p_T \sim 5$ GeV/c, as deduced from the measurement of the ratio of inclusive charged hadrons to π^0. We conclude that π and $(\overline{p})p$ have different dominant production mechanisms for $p_T < 5$ GeV/c.

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