

## **Everything you need to know about Polo**

Polo has been termed the “sport of kings,” or sometimes the “king of sports.” However, one does not have to be a king to afford to play this game which in recent years has again grown in popularity. The enjoyment of playing can be achieved by owning only one horse or by having a whole string of polo ponies. The challenge of the game is to combine highly skilled athletic ability and horsemanship with the efforts of super-trained mounts. Game tactics have many similarities to those of soccer, hockey and football. Yet, it is the terrific speed combined with body contact and dart-like turns of the horses which gives polo its appeal to spectators and players alike.

### **THE MOUNT**

The mounts are called “polo ponies,” although they are horses ranging from 14 1/2 to 16 hands high at the withers (one hand equals four inches), and weighing 900-1000 lbs. The polo pony is selected carefully for great speed and stamina, similar to the thoroughbreds at racetracks, as well as agility and maneuverability, similar to the cow pony used on ranches. When one can combine these traits and train the horse to carry the rider smoothly and swiftly to the ball, the horse can account for anywhere from 70-80% of a player’s ability and net worth to his team.

### **THE PLAYER**

Each team consists of four mounted players. The Number 1 is expected to score the goals and carry out an offensive position. The Number 2 is also an offensive player but must be more aggressive since his object is also to break up the defensive plays of the opposition. The number 3 is the pivot man, similar to the quarterback on a football team, and is usually the long ball, penalty and knock-in hitter as well as the playmaker for the team. The Number 4, or back, is the defensive player. His priority is guarding the goal to keep the opponent from scoring.

### **THE FIELD**

The playing field is 300 yards long and 160 yards wide, the approximate area of nine football fields. The playing field is carefully maintained with closely mowed turf providing for a safe, fast playing surface. Foal posts are set eight yards apart at each end of the field.

### **THE EQUIPMENT**

Mallets are made of bamboo canes, which provide flexibility, and tapered heads of willow or maple. The mallets come in lengths of 49 to 52 inches and selection is made according to the height of the pony being played. The ball is struck with the side of the mallet head, not with the end. The ball is made of bamboo or willow root and is carved from the root. Its diameter is 3 1/2 inches and weighs about 4 1/2 ounces. All players must wear a protective helmet with a chinstrap. Some players wear protective kneepads and face masks. The horses are provided with protective bandages on their front legs and sometimes on their rear legs. The horses also will have their tails braided, taped or tied to minimize interference in making the various shots.

### **THE GAME**

Play commences when the mounted umpire bowls the ball between the players who line up opposite each other in the center of the field. The game consists of six 7-minute periods called “chukkers” during which players may change mounts. There is a 4-minute interval between chukkers and a 10-minute halftime. Play is continuous and is only stopped for penalties, broken tack (equipment), or injury to horse or player. The object is to score goals by hitting the ball between the goal posts, no matter how high in the air. If a ball goes wide of the goal, the defending team is allowed a free “knock-in” from the place where the ball crossed the goal line, thus getting the ball back into play. Teams change goals on ends of the field after each score to minimize any wind advantage, which may exist. There are two mounted umpires who officiate the game while a referee on the sidelines makes all final decisions concerning penalties or infractions of the rules. Penalties and fouls are described and explained in another section of this program.

## HANDICAPS

Each player is rated on a scale of -1 to 10, by regional and national handicap committees of the U.S. Polo Association. A player handicap is based on his net worth to his team with factors to consider such as: horsemanship, team play, hitting skills, anticipation and overall understanding of the game and its rules. The rating given is termed in "Goals;" example: if four three-goal players formed a team, it would be a 12 goal rated team. If their opponents' total handicap would be awarded to the lesser team to start the match with a two goal advantage. The term "Goals" is a player's rating and is not to be confused with how many times he will score in a match, it is just a matter of a rating system. At present time, there are three 10-goal rated players in the world. In the U.S. Polo Association, our two highest ranked at 9-goals.

**BUMP**..... A player is permitted to ride into another player so as to spoil his shot. The angle of collision must be slight causing no more than a jar. The faster the horse travels, the smaller the angle must be.

**CHUKKER**..... Also called a period. There are six chukkers in a polo game lasting 7 minutes.

**FIELD**.....The ground is 300 yards long and 160 yards wide with boards and 200 yards unboarded (9 acres). The goal posts, which are collapsible on severe impact, are 8 yards apart.

**HANDICAP**.....All registered players are rated on a scale of -1 to 10. Over 80% of the players are 1 or 2 goal players and there are two 10-goal players in the U.S. The word "goal" has no relation to the number of goals a player may score, only his ability. The handicap of the team is the sum total rating of its players and in handicap matches, the team with the higher handicap gives the difference in ratings to the other team.

**HOOK**.....A player may spoil another's shot by putting his mallet in the way of the striking player's mallet. A cross hook occurs when the player reaches over his opponent's mount in an attempt to hook; this is considered a foul.

**KNOCK-IN**..... Should a team, in an offensive drive, hit the ball across the opponent's backline, the defending team resumes the game with a free hit from their backline. No time-out is allowed for knock-ins.

**NEAR SIDE**.....The left-hand side of a horse.

**NECK SHOT**.....A ball which is hit under a horse's neck from either side.

**OFF SIDE**.....The right-hand side of a horse.

**OUT OF BOUNDS**.....When a ball crosses the sideline, it is considered out-of-bounds and the umpire throws in another ball between the two teams at that point. No time-out is allowed for an out-of-bounds ball.

**PENALTY**.....A free hit toward the goal from a set distance. The severity of the foul committed determines what penalty will be awarded-- the range is as follows:

1. An automatic goal
2. A free hit from 30 yards to an undefended goal
3. A free hit from 40 yards to an undefended goal
4. A free hit from 60 yards to a defended goal
5. A free hit from the point of the infraction or from midfield
6. Safety (See definition below)

**PONIES**.....The best polo ponies are of Thoroughbred blood whose

Main qualities are heart, speed, wind, stamina, ability to accelerate, stop and turn quickly, and whose temperament is amenable to the rigors of the game. There is no height limit for the horses, although most are between 15 and 15.3 hands. The age of the pony is generally between 5 and 15 years. Players concede the pony accounts for up to 75 percent of their game.

**POSITIONS**.....Each of the four team members plays a distinctly different

position. The players may momentarily change positions, but will try and return to their initial assignment. No. 1 is the most offensive player. No. 2 is just as offensive, but plays deeper. No. 3 is the pivot player between offense and defense and tries to turn all plays to offense. No. 4 or the Back, is the defensive player whose role is principally to protect the goal.

**RIDE-OFF**.....This occurs when two riders make contact and attempt to push each other off the line of the ball so as to prevent the other from striking.

**SAFETY**.....Penalty No. 6. When a defending player hits the ball across his own backline, the other team is awarded a free hit 60 yards from the backline with the ball placed at the same distance from the sideline as when it went out.

**SUDDEN DEATH**.....In the event of a tie score at the end of the final chukker, there is a five minute intermission to allow the players to catch their breath and change to a fresh mount before beginning a "sudden death" chukker in which the first team to score wins the match.

**TAILSHOT**.....Hitting the ball behind and across the horse's rump.

**THIRD MAN**.....The referee sitting at the sidelines is the third man. If and when the two umpires on the field are in disagreement, the third man makes the final decision.

**THROW-IN**.....A chukker begins and many plays resume with the umpire bowling the ball between the two ready teams.

**TIME-OUT**.....An umpire calls time-out when a foul is committed, an accident occurs, or at his own discretion. A player may only ask for a time-out if he has broken tack or is injured. No time-out is allowed for changing horses or replacing a broken mallet, although a player may do so at any time.