

Vibrant

POLO



By Rafael Gonzalez

It's the sport of kings, horses, elephants and Ralph Lauren! For nearly two thousand years it has been played in Asia for leisure and training for cavalry. Six hundred years ago, Tamerlane (Timur), the Mongol conqueror, had his own polo field, still visible today in his capital city of Samarkand in present day Uzbekistan.

Polo is certainly one of the most demanding horse sports, because each of the four humans on a team has charge of a one thousand pound horse trained to charge at thirty five miles an hour, then stop on a dime.

*"Let other people play at other things
The King of Games is still the
Game of Kings"*

This verse is inscribed on a stone tablet next to a polo ground in Skardu, north of Kashmir, near the fabled silk route from China to the West. In one ancient sentence it epitomises the feelings of many polo players today.

The word POLO is Originated from Balti language spoken in the Northern areas of Pakistan, Ladakh, Kargil area of India and in a few places of Tibet and Nepal where the word polo means Ball. The evidence of polo is found in a 4000-4500 years old Balti story named 'Hilafoo Kaisaar', So the original place of polo is Skardu (Baltistan) northern area of Pakistan, where till now it is played in its original form (Free-Style). Polo and Chogan are not similar, they are two different games. In Chogan a team consists of four players whereas in polo a team consists of seven players. The precise origin of polo is obscure and undocumented and there is more than enough evidence of the game's place in the history of Asia. No one knows where or when "stick first met ball" after the

Notable International Polo Players

Lucas Monteverde
Adolfo Cambiasso
Alberto Pedro Heguy, Sr.
Horacio A. Heguy
Bautista Heguy
Ignacio "Nachi" Heguy
Tommy Hitchcock
Porfirio Rubirosa
Victor-Mansour Semeika
Harry Payne Whitney
Henry Brett
Luke Tomlinson
Paul Clarkin
John-Paul Clarkin

horse was domesticated by the ancient Iranian (Aryan) tribes of Central Asia before their migration to Iranian plateau; but it seems likely that as the use of light cavalry spread throughout Iranian plateau, Asia Minor, China and the Indian subcontinent, so did this rugged game on horseback.

However, many scholars believe that polo originated among the Iranian tribes sometime before Darius I (521-485 BC) and his cavalry that extended the Achaemenid (dynasty that ruled the Persian gulf) rule to far greater Persian empire than its Median predecessor. Certainly it is literature and art that give us the richest accounts of polo in antiquity. For more than 20 centuries polo remained a favourite of the rulers of Asia, who played the game or were its patrons. Queens played, as did the nobility and the mounted warriors.

Polo for non-Iranians was the nearest equivalent to a national sport in those times, from Japan to Egypt, and from India to the Byzantine empire. However as the great Eastern empires collapsed, so did the glittering court life of which polo was so important, and the game itself was preserved only in remote villages.

Polo is now an active sport in 77 countries, and although its tenure as an



The oldest royal polo square is the 16th century Maidan-Shah in Isfahan, Iran (Post revolutionary name is: Naghsh-i Jahan Square).

The oldest polo club in the world still in existence is the Calcutta Polo Club (1862).

The highest polo ground in the world is on the deosai Plateau Baltistan at 4307 meters (14,000 feet).

sport was limited to 1900-1939, in 1998 the International Olympic Committee recognised it as a sport with a bonafide international governing body. Polo is still played professionally in only a few countries, notably Argentina, England, Pakistan, India, and the United States. It is so unique among team sports to an extent that amateur players are often the team patrons routinely hired to play alongside the sport's top professionals. The modern sport has had difficulty tackling with the traditional social and economic exclusivity associated with a game that is inevitably expensive when played at a serious level. On one hand, many polo athletes genuinely desire to broaden public participation in the sport, both as an end in itself and to increase the standard of play. On the other hand, many members of polo clubs, particularly social or non-playing members, are attracted to the sport precisely because of its aura of wealth and exclusivity. Nevertheless, the popularity of polo has grown steadily since the 1980's, and its future appears to have been greatly strengthened by its return as a varsity

sport at universities across the world.

Arena (or Indoor) polo is an affordable option for many who wish to play the sport with the rules being similar. The sport is played in a 300 feet x 150 feet enclosed arena, much like those used for other equestrian sports; the minimum size is 150 feet x 75 feet. The major differences between the outdoor and indoor games are speed (outdoor being faster), physicality/roughness (indoor/arena is more physical), ball size (indoor is larger), goal size (because the arena is smaller the goal is smaller), and some penalties. In the United States and Canada, collegiate polo is arena polo; in the UK collegiate polo is both.

Basic Rules

Polo is played by two teams of players mounted on horseback. When playing outdoors each team has four players, while arena polo is restricted to three players per team. The field is 300 yards long, and either 160 yards or 200 yards wide. There is a goal on both ends of the field. The object of the game is to score the most goals by hitting the ball through the goal.

A game is divided into periods, called *chukkers* (a Hindi word meaning circle or turn) for 7 minutes, and depending on the rules of the particular tournament or league, a game may have 4, 6 or 8 chukkers, with 6 chukkers being most common. A chukker is so exhausting for the horses that they cannot play two in a row. In championship polo, each human will have a different mount for each chukker. Games are often played with a handicap in which the sums of the individual players' handicaps are compared to each other, and the team with the worst handicap is given a few goals before the start of the game. **HT**