



The GAME OF POLO

Skull Valley Polo Club

The 2,500-year-old game of Polo is one of the fastest, roughest, and most dangerous sports played today. It is played on a 10-acre grass field, 300 by 160 yards, approximately the size of 10 football fields. The Harris field is smaller than regulation, 3/4 the size.

Goal posts are on either end, and the object of the game is to move the ball downfield and through the goal for a score. Teams change direction after each goal. In this match there are three teams made up of three players each, designated by shirt color. The players wear high boots, knee guards, and a helmet. Equipment used is a mallet made of a bamboo shaft with a hardwood head and a polo ball. Because the Harris' field is smaller than regulation, we are using an air-filled polo ball instead of the regular hard ball which goes much farther.

CHUKKERS: Each team will play 4 chukkers (7-minute play periods) each, with a break between each chukker. The team with the highest score at the end of the match wins. Play begins with a throw-in of the ball by the umpire at the opening of each chukker. Only penalties or injuries may stop play, as there are no time-outs allowed.

SHOTS: The four basic shots in polo are distinguished by the side of the pony on which they are made. That is "near -side" (left side of the mount) and "off-side" (right side). Thus you have the near-side forward and back shot and the off-side forward and back shots. Shots can also be made under the neck, across the tail, etc.

SCORING: When a team has succeeded in sending the polo ball between two goal posts, a flag person will wave a red flag into the air indicating that a goal has been made. If the shot misses, the flag will be waved below the waist.

STRATEGY: Each player is assigned an opponent to cover on defense and must be prepared to shift offensive and defensive modes and to make any play that will benefit the team. Polo is a passing game, and teammates will send the ball toward the goal to another player who may pass it yet to another teammate or make an attempt at a goal.

PONIES: Polo ponies are central to the success of any team, credited with 75 to 80 per cent of a player's game. Leg wraps protect the "Pony," which is actually a horse, usually of Thoroughbred breeding. Players must change mounts after each chukker due to the extreme demands placed on the animal.

RULES: Rules are dedicated to safety -- for the player and his mount. At the heart of the concept is a definition of right-of-way which, if followed, will create traffic patterns which enable the participants to not only play at top speed but to also to avoid collisions. The right-of-way is defined in accordance with a player's position relative to the direction of travel of the ball. Play will flow backward and forward, parallel to an imaginary line extended ahead of and behind the ball. The line of the ball usually may not be crossed. When a player has the line of the ball on his right, he has the right-of-way. This can be taken away by "riding off" an opponent's mount with shoulder-to-shoulder contact or to ride into another player's mount and bump him to spoil this shot. The "bump" is allowed as long as the angle does not exceed 45 degrees. A player may also spoil another's shot putting his mallet in the way.

WHAT TO WATCH: For the spectator, the area around the ball should be watched primarily with an eye kept open for plays made during the pursuit of the ball. These elements combine to make the fast-paced action of polo one of the most exciting and demanding sports in the world.

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