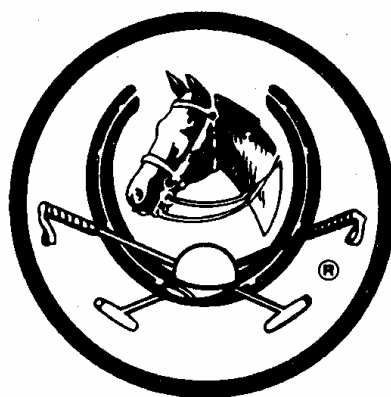


# HOW TO START A POLO CLUB



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# Introduction

With special thanks to Cornelia Bernard, who wrote and compiled the original edition, and the many contributors who have assisted in updating this booklet.

Starting a polo club is not easy, but it is an undertaking worth the effort. The hard work of getting a field, finding people who want to play, organizing the club, and improving the standard of play are all rewarded when polo takes a recognized place in your community.

You already have some knowledge of the United States Polo Association or this booklet would not be in your hands. The USPA and its membership of clubs and individuals dedicated to the sport of polo are your biggest allies in getting started. A phone call to the USPA office (800-232-8772) is the first step in getting started. The USPA personnel will put you in touch with people in your area who will help you get going. From advice on building a field, to a source for beginner horses, to coaches and instructors, the USPA is organized to help you along.

Once organized, your group should become a USPA Member Club. As a Member, you will receive the full benefits of the organization including contact with other players, insurance assistance, handicapping, rules and guidelines, and much more. Other clubs in your area are not competitors, they are allies, and they will be very helpful to you. The polo community is a worldwide fraternity like no other. Your USPA membership opens the doors for you to a wonderful and exciting world of sport and camaraderie.

United States Polo Association  
Club and Membership Committee

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# **CHAPTER I**

# **MEMBERSHIP**

## **ATTRACTING MEMBERS**

Membership is one of the most crucial factors in creating a polo club. It takes more than just eight playing members to make a club - it takes a great number of people willing to ride, willing to work; for beyond those on the field on Sunday afternoon you must have a referee and umpires, flag boys, gatekeepers, announcers and scorekeepers for the whole of the game day to run smoothly. With a small membership, even enthusiastic players will lose heart if they show up with their horses ready to play only to discover that a quorum is lacking for the afternoon's match. Always try to play an announced game, even if it means playing two or three-to-a-side. And always play on time.

Polo clubs constantly need new members. Attrition is high due to the amount of time polo takes, as well as the expense involved in maintaining several horses. New members must be actively sought out, cultivated, encouraged.

While polo does attract new players from other riding sports, it is a fallacy to think that other horse-sport clubs will be your best draw for members. Riding organizations have people participating that like what they're doing - they aren't looking for a way to enjoy their horses - they've found it.

Because of this, the type of rider who is most likely to be attracted to polo is the man or woman who is either bored with the lack of competition or the constraints of the show ring, or the person who rode in his youth but had given it up due to the pressures of time and responsibilities, and would be interested in riding again.

## **FINDING NEW MEMBERS**

**Through new members** - Enthusiasm breeds enthusiasm, and new members are an excellent source for finding others who might like to give polo a try. Encourage your membership as a whole to bring out guests, and make them aware of clinics or lessons that are available.

**Place an advertisement** - either a small display ad or one in the personals column in local magazines, horse tabloids, or newspapers whenever you offer beginner-level clinics, a series of polo lessons free, and emphasize that it will be a lecture and a demonstration on foot.

**Inquire at local fairgrounds or horse facilities** about the possibility of having a 2 or 4 chukker exhibition match during the lunch break. Set up a booth or table nearby to sign up people interested in lessons, clinics, or joining the club. Be sure to have them fill out an information form, so you can call them later on. Be sure maps with the season's schedule are also available to give away. A quick printer can produce these inexpensively.

**Talk to local veterinarians and farriers.** They might have customers who once played polo, or might be interested in playing. Don't overlook the fact that many vets and farriers play polo themselves.

**Post a notice** - in the local feed stores and saddle shops - English and Western.

**Approach local hunting or riding clubs** about having a guest polo speaker at one of their next meeting or have them present a polo video to their members. Some excellent videos are available from the Polo Training Foundation office. You can reach the PTF office at: {Address: 70 Clinton Street - Tully, NY 13159 Telephone: 888-783-7656}

Polo is likely to be attractive to western riders who enjoy the events and gymkhana classes. Roping, reining, barrel racing and polo bending are all natural lead-ins to polo, so don't overlook this group just because they ride a different saddle.

While the riding population that may be interested in taking up polo is relatively small, it certainly has the advantage of being knowledgeable about horses - and already mounted, even if not on made ponies.

Beyond horse owners is a large group of potential enthusiasts, people who are open o polo, and excited about it, but don't ride themselves. Finding these folks can be as easy as placing the aforementioned ad, but chances are, it's going to take a more concentrated effort on our part to make polo players out of non-riding men and women.

It's going to take a plan, and effort on the part of all members of your club. You must have something to offer new players, and that should be polo lessons on safe, quiet, reliable horses. You must provide not only horses, but helmets, mallets, possibly gloves, chaps and boots, or polo bandages for leg-wraps, and instructions that are made fun and relatively easy. You don't simply stick a man who has never ridden on a horse and tell him to hit the ball, you must teach him HOW to hit a ball, HOW to ride and still keep it fun.

This instruction can be as informal as a private stick-and-ball session at your mutual convenience, or as organized as the schools in Florida and California. The Polo Training Foundation underwrites some of the cost of clinics and will help secure competent instructors. For more info on polo clinics, contact the PTF at [info@polotraining.com](mailto:info@polotraining.com).

## **OTHER SOURCES FOR MEMBERSHIP**

**Non-riding members** can be found in all sorts of places. As mentioned, some might be friends-of-friends, or people who have responded to your earlier efforts. If the ranks aren't filled from these sources, consider:

**Giving talks and showing a polo video** at Rotary and JC meetings, Fraternity and Sorority meetings. Tell them about polo and invite them out to a Sunday game. Emphasize the first lesson is not on horseback. This will allow people who are unsure of their riding ability, or sure they have no ability at all, a chance to get a taste of polo without embarrassment.

**Approach local television or radio talk shows.** Go to the show's producers and tell them about your polo club and lessons. Local programs are almost always receptive to anything new in a community, and will generally be willing to have you on as a guest.

**Invite local reporters and anchors out to take polo lessons.** This is great free publicity for you, a good story for them, and occasionally, actually produces a polo-playing member of the press.

**Call newspapers.** Life-style sections are usually the best bet, but start with the sports desk anyway. Try to promote polo as a sport, and not a social event, but don't overlook the social aspects of polo - it's still a good drawing card and can attract members by the glamour of the game - but the social side of polo should not be the only base of appeal.

**Have your Sunday game announcer mention at halftime that the club has polo lessons available and where to sign up for them at the field.**

**Set up a hitting horse or cage** at Sunday games and give spectators a chance to hit the ball themselves. Have a table set up nearby where they can sign up for polo lessons or membership on the spot.

**Try to have polo lessons and regular polo matches listed in the weekend section of Friday's newspapers.**

# **CHAPTER II**

# **POLO LESSONS**

The United States Polo Association maintains a list of instructors who will conduct a clinic at your Club. Under certain conditions, the Polo Training Foundation will reimburse a portion of the clinic cost. Contact the USPA for more information about this most valuable service.

Having acquired some beginners who want to learn how to play polo, what do you do with them? You will probably become their instructor unless you have a high-goal player willing (or paid) to take on the task.

**For your Polo School, you will need:**

1. One or two quiet and reliable horses that STOP. If you plan on holding group lessons, you will need more suitable ponies.
2. Variety of helmets, mallets, hand mallets, chaps, gloves, and leg bandages for wrapping unbooted horses.
3. A release that has been drawn up by your attorney.
4. Possibly, an insurance rider. Check with your agent about the right kind of coverage.
5. An arena or short polo field. On the grass, set goal posts on the sides to make a proportionate, but smaller field.
6. At least one hitting cage/wooden horse. Two is better. (Plans for a hitting cage are available from the Polo Training Foundation)
7. Students should be able to sit a horse at a canter before they begin polo lessons. If they cannot do so after the first, on-the-ground lesson, send them elsewhere to learn how to ride. You cannot teach a person to ride and play polo at once, despite occasional evidence to the contrary.

If your club is small, it has been suggested that charges for polo lessons be truly minimal on the theory that many players might be willing to buy horses and join the club, but would be reluctant to pay for formal instruction. This is a decision each club must make, realizing the time and costs of providing lessons must be balanced against the importance of gaining members to play polo.

## **STRUCTURING A SERIES OF LESSONS**

Decide upon a price for lessons -- \$100-\$400 is about average - and offer six to eight sessions. Consider making the first lesson (which is unmounted) free. This is the time to sort out those who need to be sent elsewhere to learn to ride, but encouraged to return once that step is accomplished.

There should be no obligation on the part of the student beyond paying for the lessons, but at the same time, you should feel absolutely no obligation to continue mounting beginning players beyond the instruction period. If they are interested, they will buy horses and continue to learn to play. There is no reason for club members to carry a horseless player. Even if you provide club ponies on a by-the-chukker basis, all efforts should be made to create a sense of urgency for each player to purchase his own horses and become committed to polo.

“By the chukker” polo should be costly enough so that horse ownership makes economic sense - there are no free rides in polo.

Every effort should be made to insure that new players buy good, made horses. A beginning player on a green horse is no fun for anyone, especially him. There are professionals who have reputations for selling good low-goal ponies; they should be sought out, and invited to bring up a selection of ponies once or twice a year.

## **PROPOSED SERIES OF POLO LESSONS FOR BEGINNERS**

1. (Thirty-minute lecture) Discussion on rules and tactics, demonstration of mallet use. Exhibition of standard polo equipment: saddle, bridges, knee-guards, helmet, etc. If convenient, a polo pony can model desirable traits in a mount: i.e., long neck, short back, clean legs, roached main. Practice session in hitting cage, or using had mallets.
2. Practice all basic shots in hitting cage or with hand mallet. Practice off-side shots on pony at a walk and lot. Learn how to bandage legs, tie up tails. Afterwards, have a discussion on tactics and critique of hitting.
3. Practice, near-side shots in cage. Practice near-side shots at a walk, off-side shots at trot or canter if students are comfortable at those speeds.
4. Practice all basic shots in hitting cage, work on all other shots on horseback at walk, trot and hand canter.  
*Scrimmage:* Emphasis on tactics, ride-offs, position play and avoidance of fouls.
5. Practice back-hands in hitting cage.  
*Scrimmage:* On horseback with other players at a “comfortable speed”. *Discussion:* Tactics and theories.
6. Practice all four corner shots in cage.  
*Scrimmage:* At a canter. Throughout, stress the importance of position play over hitting. Everyone, even beginners, know they hit well; position is far more important than hitting, and stressing hitting early stages of learning only produces players who chase the ball rather than marking their man as they should.

## **BEYOND INSTRUCTIONS: Beginner Polo Player**

Assuming the students that finish the lessons remain excited about polo and want to play, they'll each buy a horse or two, if they don't own horses already. This is perhaps the most crucial state in the task of cultivating new poloists, for your club **MUST** have polo geared to the B (-1) level, once or twice a week. Green player polo should not be confused or intermingled with pony polo. It should be controlled, **well umpired**, and kept fun. This means you don't throw a 5 or 6 goal player in the middle of a bunch of B (-1's) and allow him to run up and down the field with the ball while your beginners trail hopelessly in his wake, reinforcing bad habits and becoming discouraged about their abilities.

### **BEGINNER POLO SHOULD BE:**

1. Slow, with coaching during the games and lectures on strategy available for weekday matches. This may only be two chukkers for those playing that day.
2. Good umpiring is mandatory for developing good players. Bad habits learned early are hardest to break. Umpire clinics are available through the USPA.
3. Use a short field for beginner players, the whole field for green-pony games.

4. Practice games can be slow. Each player may hit the ball twice, then another must hit the ball before it can be hit again by the same player, (encourages marking opponents) and observing game play. Speed can be continuous (slow canter) or medium speed.
5. Set up matches with nearby B (1) goal teams. Outside competition encourages improvement faster than continual home vs. home games.
6. Hold regular video sessions and clinics.
7. Insist on beginners helping with umpiring.
8. Have 4-chukker games if there are not enough adequately mounted low-goalers to make up 6-period matches.
9. If a higher-goal player plays in a beginner game, emphasize that his job is to keep the ball moving for the other players, and not his own practice.
10. Encourage time in the hitting cage. Two cages side-by-side can cut down on boredom in practice.
11. Encourage green players to help with the main game. Keep them involved with the rest of the club and not segregated by their lack of skill.
12. As soon as their ability allows, begin moving them up to regular matches on a full-size field.
13. Encourage beginners to play as often as possible, limited only by their horses' endurance. (Two chukkers per horse, three times a week, is a reasonable maximum for most).

# **CHAPTER III**

## **POLO FIELDS FROM SCRATCH**

The most important element of any polo club is the playing field. If you don't happen to have the 15 acres or so of flat land needed to play polo, start looking around you. In fact, even if you do own the land, several fields are a tremendous advantage and can make the difference in playing throughout the season, allowing you to save the best (and most visible) for tournaments and Sunday matches while using the not-so-great or more remote ones for practice games and stick and ball.

Public lands are a good source for polo fields. Parks especially offer easy access and high visibility that attracts spectators and potential new players alike. The more accessible your games are to the public, the easier it is to arouse local interest in the form of members and sponsors. Visiting teams from out of town also like playing before a crowd rather than just on a back field in the remote parts of the county.

## **FINDING FIELDS**

Other than your back meadow, there are many possibilities for field locations in almost any community.

Airport property, especially in smaller cities is an excellent location of public polo fields. Out of the direct flight path, but not build able, this land is often available to polo clubs. It will probably be necessary for the club to erect a perimeter fence to insure horses don't end up on the runway, but this property is generally flat and easily accessible. Approach the city commission or the airport commission about availability. Airport property in Mobile, Alabama and Atlanta, Georgia is currently being played.

### **Public and National Parks**

The National Park Service has over the years looked favorably on polo. Polo is currently played on The Mall in Washington, D.C., in City Park in New Orleans, Golden Gate Park in San Francisco and in parks in San Antonio, Nashville, Tulsa, and Sheridan. Mayors or park commissioners are the people to first approach, pointing out that polo is an activity of public interest.

### **Condominium Developments**

Many new upper-income condo communities have land scheduled for development down the road, but presently idle, as well a greenbelt that will not be built upon. Polo is a chic sport right now, capable of drawing people in the right demographics to these developments. Polo matches played at a condo community are an asset—and are free advertising. The image of Palm Beach Polo and Country Club in South Florida has greatly helped smaller clubs in their approach to local developers.

### **Flood Plain**

Unbuildable, flat and generally with good footing flood plain can afford cheap, nearly-perfect conditions for summer polo fields. While possibly a bit deep for early spring games, flood plain is wonderful in dry summers where irrigation is not in the budget.

Fair grounds are also a possibility, especially for arena polo. While schedules might have to be worked around other uses and horse shows or rodeos, with a minimal amount of modification, most reasonably-sized show arenas are suitable for polo. Most important modifications are adding a wire mesh to the railing to keep the ball in play, and creating solid goal posts that can be erected at either end.

In attempting to acquire public lands, it is wise to consider that most publicly-held fields will require that an insurance policy be carried by the club for liability. Advantages of an incorporated club should be discussed with an attorney to determine what problems might arise with injured spectators, players or loose horses.

It is also a good idea to determine from the outset the policy for charging admission, especially in parks. Admission on private fields is always a good idea for Sunday games since it is a way of assuring spectators of their welcome.

The lack of admission fees will turn away more spectators than it will attract. If a person has to pay to watch polo, he knows he's welcome, but if there is no charge, most people will hesitate before intruding on private land.

With public land, find out if it will be possible to sell permanent parking spaces for games, and whether these parking signs can remain in place during the week. It might also be worthwhile to explore the possibility of bleachers or erecting a small grandstand at some point down the road.

Revenue from parking spots can be applied toward field maintenance, which can help keep your club's costs down. While most clubs maintain their own fields, even on public lands, find out what percentage of this maintenance is to be picked up by the club. Some parks will keep up with the mowing, especially in multiuse situations, but in general, field maintenance falls on the polo club.

Place near recycled sewer water plants to lower field irrigation.

## **CREATING A POLO FIELD**

It cannot be emphasized too strongly that good design with regard to grading and adequate drainage when fields are put in can make all the difference in how well and how safely a field plays. Safety and maintenance costs should be the primary concerns of the design of a polo field, and problems that you might not encounter until years after the field has been put in can crop up with bad design. It pays in the long run to do it right, and wait on using the Sunday field, even if it means you play on skin or a cow pasture for a season. The rewards of having a good playing surface are worth the effort, expense, and time.

Most experts agree that it takes at least a year, but usually two, for a polo field to mature, so do not expect overnight excellence.

Measurements for a full-size polo field are 300 x 160 yards. An additional 10 yards to each side are needed for safety zones, and 30 yards at either end of the field for ample turning room.

Safe and attractive goal posts are important for any club, both from the aesthetic and practical points of view. Uprights should be easy to maintain, lightweight and do minimal damage to horse and rider if they are hit in the course of the game.

Traditional lathe and canvas goals are used at many clubs, and are relatively easy to construct. They may require more frequent maintenance. A removable canvas cover design is easier to maintain.

Construction tubes, heavy cardboard of varying diameters are available from building supply stores and lumber yards. They are light and inexpensive. Foam cores and canvas covers are also made specifically for goal posts.

Alternative goal posts of empty carpet rolls made of heavy cardboard are used by some clubs. These can be acquired, usually at no cost, from carpet or department stores. Painted, they are an acceptable alternative, though a bit firmer when bashed than the lathe and canvas posts. PVC pipe, though light in

weight and durable, is an unsafe choice for goal posts. PVC is brittle and can shatter when hit with a strong potential for causing serious injury. If the PVC pipe is covered with three firm inches of foam and then covered with canvas, a low maintenance goal post can be built.

The field should run north-south, with the west side reserved for spectators. Trailer parking can be on the east side, or at either end of the field, well away from spectators. If permanent picket lines are installed, the ties should be high, 6' or so, and strong to prevent pony injury. When a new field is put in, it should be graded with a crown of 18" to 24" to facilitate drainage and help prevent wet spots.

Depending upon local soil conditions, a top dressing of 3" to 4" of sand or sand/loam should cover the field. The soil or the footing is far more important for safety and playability than the type of grass used. While a layer of sand might seem a tremendous expense, it can be most important, since it provides improved drainage and better footing. Both of these factors can give you additional playing-days in a wet year, and cut down on leg and foot injuries in a dry one.

At the end of each playing season, it is a good practice to top-dress each field with an additional half-inch or inch of sand to keep the footing light. Frequent aerating with a shovel or tube-type aerator can approximate top dressing as well as helping to remove thatch. Thatch buildup can cause drainage problems and inhibit root growth.

Advice about soil and grasses can come from two sources. The most obvious one is the County Extension Service. Be sure to ask for someone who has experience in turf management. Another excellent source of advice that has experience with traffic and turf maintenance is golf course maintenance professional. Keep in mind that golf traffic is considerably different from horse traffic, but even so, there are many parallels.

Grasses and soil conditions will naturally vary with the area of the country, but a number of grasses have proven their worth under the taxing conditions of regular play. Check with local sources for detailed information on locally suitable grasses or new hybrids that could do well in your part of the country.

Keep in mind that the procedures to care for a Bermuda grass field in Texas with a playing season from May through October is very different from the care needed for the same grass growing at a polo club in South Florida where the playing season is November to April with almost no freeze problems.

There are no hard and fast rules that will fit all conditions. Grass is a living thing, even when it browns out in the winter, and stress to your grass should be kept to a minimum whenever possible. High or low pH, salt content, drought, climate extremes after too-close mowing, routinely mowing too closely, lack of necessary nutrients, thatch buildup, compact soil from over playing a single field are all stress factors that can cause major traumas and inhibit grass growth.

## **MAINTENANCE**

For the grounds keeper in charge of a field that has been properly designed and laid out in the first place, one that has good drainage as well as a good cover of the correct turf, maintenance should be a fairly easy task through the playing season.

Once the turf is in good condition, with deep roots, it's not hard to keep it that way if you follow an adequate schedule, for regardless of variety; most grasses chosen for playing surface are durable.

Key elements of concern for polo fields should be the preparation of the surface long before the season starts and again at season's end. A good routine of mowing, fertilizing and watering is equally important once play has begun.

An ideal time to assess the condition of a field is in the fall. Much can be accomplished at this time toward improving the quality of the turf and soil conditions. Spring and fall fertilization are the most important things that can be done for improving a field. The success or failure in many cases of fertilization depends on accurately determining the precise needs of the soil. Most turf grows best in soil that has a pH of 6.5 to 7.5. The pH of a soil designates its degree of acidity or alkalinity, pH of 7.0 being neutral.

## **SOIL TEST**

It is always recommended that you have a soil test made (usually available free of charge through a county extension service agent). A single test is not as important as a series of tests over time that shows problem areas improving, confirming that your present maintenance program is helping alleviate problems.

## **LIME**

Acid soils require applications of lime to reduce acidity. Lime also supplies calcium, or calcium magnesium, to the soil. Both calcium and magnesium are essential plant food elements. Lime applications have also been known to correct or improve the soil of heavy or clay-based fields. This improvement on structure also leads to improved aeration and water percolation.

If you choose not to have a soil test, a rule of thumb for lime is 50 lbs. of limestone per 1,000 square feet. Equivalent amounts of burnt or hydrated lime can be used (100 lbs. of ground limestone is equivalent to about 75 lbs. of hydrated or 50 lbs. of burnt lime).

Ideally, the lime should be incorporated into the top 4"-6" of the soil. As lime moves downward very slowly, it is important to thoroughly mix the limestone throughout the root zone. Working the limestone into the soil is most easily accomplished just prior to seeding or sprigging a new field, but some incorporation into the soil can be obtained by deicing. The slicing blades of the disc cut thin grooves into the ground through which the lime can penetrate.

This lime application need be done on an average of once every three to five years. Lime can be safely applied to turf any time during the year, but the fall and winter are preferred because the alternate freezing and thawing helps to move the lime into the soil. In hot weather, hydrated or burnt lime can cause foliage burn on turf to which it is applied if it is applied when the ground is wet. Any summer application should be made when the turf is very dry and after aerating the soil - followed by a thorough irrigation to insure the lime soaks in and does not remain on the surface.

## **FERTILIZER**

Of all essential elements that are important to good turf, nitrogen is the one that has the greatest effect on the quality of the grass. If used properly, it will produce an excellent playing surface. In cold season grasses, application of 1 lb. of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet of turn in March, May, September and November are adequate for most soils. Excessive application leads to increased succulence and possible winter injury.

In areas where turf has been heavily fertilized with complete fertilizers for several years and soil tests indicate substantially high levels of phosphorus and potassium, it is a sound practice to use only nitrogen.

Warm season grasses such as Bermudas grass should be fertilized during the summer months, May through September.

## **MOWING**

Mowing is one of the easiest ways to improve a polo field. It is also the single greatest expense in maintenance when time, manpower and equipment are considered.

Although grass height may vary because of local conditions and irrigation (or the lack thereof), the ideal playing height of Bermuda polo turf is  $\frac{3}{4}$  to an inch and quarter. Ideal grass height for cold weather grasses is  $1\frac{1}{4}$  to  $1\frac{3}{4}$  inches. If fields are cropped too closely, the sun will burn the grass and the root system will suffer, causing the turf to be easily torn during play. Longer grass is hard to hit on, tires horses faster, and makes for slow play.

A brush hog mower cannot adequately cut grass for polo since it leaves it too long and uneven. Reel-type fairway mowers are preferred though they are a considerable expense. Used fairway mowers can some time be purchased from a golf course or golf course supply companies, though it might take some searching to find them.

## **MOWING GUIDELINES**

**Mowing frequency should be regulated by the growth of the grass rather than by a rigid schedule.** Try not to cut off more than  $\frac{1}{4}$ " to  $\frac{1}{2}$ " of grass at any one cutting.

**Use a top-dressing**, a mixture of  $\frac{2}{3}$  high quality top soil,  $\frac{1}{3}$  coarse sand and rye seed mixed in to fill cutup areas of cold weather fields. The rye sprouts quickly and will keep your field green while permanent grasses revoke from playing scars.

**Mow in a different direction each time:** North-south one week, east-west the next, to prevent patterns and ridges from developing.

**Irrigate and fill divots as soon after games** as possible to help fields recover more quickly and to encourage the rye seed to sprout and take hold. A word of warning: too frequent irrigating with small amounts of water causes shallow root development, so it is often best to reserve irrigation for Monday mornings when a good soaking will have time to settle in.

**At the end of the season, allow grass to grow a bit longer.** Longer grass helps insulate roots from the cold, and encourages deeper root growth.

**Frequent mowing will help to stimulate growth of desired grasses** while helping to kill off undesirable weeds and broad-leaved grasses which cannot grow well at shorter lengths. Mowing can vary from as little as once a week early or late in the growing season, while during the peak growth period, with ample water and fertilizer, fields can be mown as frequently as three times a week. For frequent mowing, be sure to heed the caution of removing only tiny portions of grass with each cut.

## **IRRIGATION**

While many summer polo clubs forego irrigation altogether, it can be well worth the expense in insuring the excellence of the turf even during dry spells. In-ground irrigation systems can be installed most economically when a new field is put in, but there are alternatives to this costly system.

Rainbirds are far cheaper, though requiring more manpower. One rainbird can serve several fields, making it a practical system for most clubs.

If Bermuda grass is used, irrigation could be mandatory. This variety of grass is sprigged in, rather than grown from seed, and it must be watered regularly until it is well established, as well as routinely during the playing season to maintain a good playing surface.

Some varieties of grass survive quite well without irrigation, notably, Bluegrass and Bahia in the Deep South (Though tough and drought-resistant, it is not the grass of choice if there is a practical alternative).

Grasses that do not require irrigating will not stay green all summer long, for though they may be alive and healthy; most grasses go into a semi-dormant state during periods of heat and drought for survival. The turf may have a good root system and when irrigation or a good rainfall soaks in; the field will show a marked recovery in a very short time. Naturally, when grass is in a dormancy period, wear and tear can be a serious problem, for the turf does not regenerate, and damage is compounded with each game played.

When you irrigate, remember to do so not only on the actual playing field, but also include the area outside the sidelines for approximately 10 yards, and past the end line by 30 or 40 yards to avoid accidents caused by different and slippery footing going from the irrigated sod to the harder - and drier - sidelines.

It is best to put an inch or more of water per application in the ground with a single watering, as opposed to twice as many applications of a half-inch or less.

As a rule of thumb, you need 5 gpm (gallons per minute) of water per acre to be on target. To irrigate a polo field, you'll need a delivery of 60 gpm from the water source; it takes 27,000 gallons of water to put one inch of water on one acre.

## **SOIL AERATION**

Aerating can best be described as the process of altering the soil structure by removing plugs of soil or by slicing grooves into the soil, thus improving the movement of air, water and nutrients through the soil. Fields should be aerated on a regular basis to keep the playing surface from becoming too compacted, killing grass and making them dangerously slippery.

Over-compaction in heavy soil is caused by the structure and composition of the soil itself, and worsened by horses, tractors and traffic. This results in a hard slick playing surface, poor drainage, shallow root growth and a lack of deep moisture and fertilizer transfer into and through the drought.

To overcome these problems, aeration on a regular basis (two or three times a month) during heavy play, before each fertilization and irrigation as well as at the end of each season is extremely beneficial. Aeration can also be used to help dry out fields more quickly after rains, and to act like top dressing to smooth out marks. The best type of airifier to use is the small shovel type rather than the blade type.

If you are dealing with a loose or very sandy soil, there isn't a need to aerate as often as if the soil were dense, or heavy. Once or twice a season will probably be adequate for sandy ground. Aeration can also help alleviate problems caused by thatch buildup of grass clippings. In loose soils, rolling polo fields on a regular basis may be needed far more frequently, to help the fields remain smooth.

## **THATCH**

Thatch is seldom a problem for the first three or four years of a polo fields' existence, but thereafter it is good practice to occasionally de-thatch, for a heavy accumulation of dead grasses will interfere with the active growth of the turf by inhibiting movement of water, air and fertilizer into the soil. A very dense thatch can completely repel the heaviest rainfall, and make irrigation and mowing difficult. Thatch also harbors disease organisms and insects that can cause severe damage to a field.

There are several good methods used to help alleviate thatching. The best course of a club is to rent a street sweeper or concrete cleaning brush and actually sweep the dead grasses off the field. Another method is to rent an airifier, cutting through thatch and tearing it up enough to allow the free passage of water and nutrients.

## **ALTERNATIVES TO GRASS FIELDS**

### **DIRT OR SKIN FIELDS**

Skins fields are an inexpensive solution to outdoor full size polo fields. While these playing surfaces can become too hard without proper disking and maintenance, they offer a good solution as either a temporary site for polo, or as a stick-and-ball or scrimmage field, saving the grass for matches.

Caution should be used in the design, and it is important to channel runoff around the field, with a crown assigned into it to facilitate easy drainage.

### **POLO ARENAS**

Another alternative to a grass field or an additional way of extending your polo season is with a polo arena. Maintenance on polo arenas is far less complicated than keeping up the grass, needs less room, and in some instances, can offer year-round sport. Although there is no hard-and-fast rule on the size of an indoor ring, a regulation USPA arena is 300' by 150', encircled with solid board walls to a height of 4".

## **ARENA GUIDELINES**

Build your arena above the drainage patterns; hilltops are best. To channel rainwater away from your playing surface, lay stone on the outside of the arena. A light screened topsoil for the surface. Rocks will work to the surface and prove more costly in the long run to terms of both man-hours to remove them and injuries done to ponies.

# Construction of an Arena

Footing and safety are the two key elements in a playing surface, be it grass or an arena. It is recommended that good, clean topsoil mixed with sand be used for an arena surface. Clay is too hard, compacts too quickly and offers little “grab” for horses’ hooves. Topsoil has a higher absorption for shock and, especially when mixed with sand for better drainage.

Once the area is constructed, 6 to 12 inches of footing should be laid. It should go down in layers of approximately 3” at a time, with watering and roto-tilling to acquire an even blending with subsoil. The first three inches of footing should be roto-tilled into the base so the two surfaces will adhere to one another (this allows for better, safer traction, for a soft separate surface will give way if it is not bonded into the sub-base. Once the roto-tilling is done, the arena should be watered and the surface allowed settling. The process is repeated with additional soil every few weeks, with an expected time frame of three months before the arena is in playing condition. Regular watering and dragging is, of course, an integral part of surface preparation and maintenance.

## BOARDS

Walls for a polo arena should be four and one half feet to five feet in height. Slanted boards are going out of usage in newly constructed arenas in favor of straight walls. Slanted walls have been proven to encourage horses to jump out, and offer no help in keeping an animal upright if it is overbalanced by a bump. Round corners are safer design than those set at right angles, and in addition to the safety factor, keep the ball in play. Some clubs have experimented with spacing between boards and report that the increased ventilation, which aids the arena in drying more quickly after a rain, and the slightly cheaper cost are attractive features. Do not allow more than an inch between boards for safety reasons.

## GATES

There should be gates at either end of the arena, set into the walls, usually as goals. Hinges on polo gates should be as heavy-duty as possible, and the gates themselves large, solid and securely hung and braced, for they will take a great deal of abuse and use.

Two gates allow separate entrances for horses and the equipment that must enter the arena for mid-match maintenance.

If practical, a small paddock off the horse’s entrance, with tie rails nearby, is a nice addition, facilitating the catching of loose horses, and making changing mounts easier for groom less players. A paddock also keeps spectators at a safe distance from the animals between chukkers.

## WIRE

While wire completely surrounding an arena cuts down somewhat on spectator visibility, its use at the end zones is virtually mandatory in order to keep the game going. Mount wire from the 25-yard line on either side of the goals, to a height of six feet above the boards. Galvanized chicken wire is probably best, for it is lightweight, easy to work with and less likely to cause injury if an animal or rider ends up entangled in it. The wire should be mounted flush to the wall, with no exposed edges on the horse side of the fence. If spectators are not a major consideration, wire the entire arena for faster play.

## **GRANDSTANDS**

Though they can be added at any time, grandstands can be put in quite easily when the arena is constructed. A single walkway with one or two rows of seats may suffice if small crowds are expected, but a more elaborate system can be built or purchased. Remember when bleachers go up to have the seating start around four feet off the ground. There's little point in having seating below or just at eye level in arena polo.

## **LIGHTING**

Lighting can extend your playing time far beyond the capabilities of an outdoor field. Arena polo lends itself to nighttime play; an advantage in the heat of summer as well as when days grow shorter in the fall. For best results, contact the local electrical utility company for expert recommendations on your needs.

## **MAINTENANCE**

Arena polo needs as much maintenance, or perhaps more, than a grass field. Since it is smaller, the time consumed by maintenance is, of course, less, but perhaps even more important.

Dust is a chronic problem in arenas. There is no such thing as a dust free polo arena, and regular, consistent watering is needed to settle the dust, provided good footing and keep the surface consistent. Fire hoses, a water truck or another system of your own devising work, but attention must be given that water does not pool or that one area is over watered for this creates dangerously slippery conditions in the arena.

A tractor with a spike-tooth harrow drag will be needed to drag the arena before and midway through each match to keep the surface even.

Other pieces of equipment needed will be a roto-tiller, roller, knives or disk harrow if the field is clay, and a York rake. Since much of this will be used only occasionally for annual or semi-annual maintenance, it is possible to rent it from local farmers until the club's budget can afford the expense of purchasing its own.

**CHAPTER IV**  
**TOURNAMENTS**

Probably the single most important factor in putting on a successful polo tournament is careful organization. Everything from checking the schedules of nearby clubs to be sure your dates do not conflict with a major event elsewhere, to arranging for stabling accommodations for visiting ponies must be considered and arranged in advance. Hosting a polo tournament should be fun for everyone involved, but making things run smoothly requires careful planning and some hard work.

Deciding on the goal level of a tournament is the usual place to start; then pick a date after checking for conflicts at other clubs in your circuit. If planning begins early in the season, contact the USPA about holding an official or a sanctioned tournament. Contact the Tournament Committee (see Blue Book) outlining the specific event with date, ground fees, stabling and field facilities of your club. Circuit events of the USPA are awarded by the Circuit Governor.

Tournament Guidelines - Form a Tournament Committee to oversee tournaments. Use USPA rules. Even if the tournament is not sanctioned, use straight USPA rules. Local variations only cause dissent and hard feelings in close decisions.

Send tournament invitations to all nearby clubs as well as to those in neighboring circuits if you wish a large turn out. Alternatively, issue invitations only to as many clubs/teams as your field and schedule can comfortably handle.

Weekend-to-weekend is as long as most tournaments run. A smaller tournament can begin mid-week and end on a Sunday.

In determining the length of a tournament, consider the maximum number of games your fields can take at that time of year. Some clubs will play tournament games back-to-back, or use a single field heavily, but these factors should be taken into consideration as plans are made. A chopped up field won't be much fun for the rest of the year if it gets cut up at the beginning of a dry spell. Tired horses can cause injuries if they play too many games close together. Down time has to be planned into every tournament.

Hold the draw as soon as all entries are received. Inform players ahead of time of their schedules so they can facilitate travel plans.

Hire umpires from the outside whenever possible. Though the cost of doing so may be too great for a small club, expenses can often be recouped in tournament fees, and the grumbling that inevitably accompanies almost any series of games can be lessened with outside arbitration. The USPA maintains a list of certified umpires who may be available.

Make a decision about rain-outs. Will you play the following week?

Putting up players and ponies for a tournament also requires a lot of thought and planning, especially if your polo club does not have on-site stabling for visiting teams. Knowing in advance how many horses will be arriving is a great help in this, and a box might be added to the entry forms asking for this information. In general, for a low-goal tournament, expect four to five ponies per player. **ASSIGN STABLING BEFORE PLAYERS ARRIVE AND DO NOT ALLOW INDIVIDUAL PLAYERS TO MAKE UNAUTHORIZED CHANGES IN THEIR HORSES' ACCOMMODATIONS.** The easiest way to accomplish this is to include a map or directions to their assigned stable as well as a map to the fields from that barn, if ponies will be kept any distance from the club. Also include a list of local feed stores, and the phone numbers of a veterinarian and farrier who have been notified of our tournament.

Housing players is a far simpler task. Contact local hotels about arranging for a discount on a block of rooms or special weekend rates for the duration of the tournament, but **DO NOT** be personally responsible for them. If arranging for a package rate is not practical, include with your invitation a list of available hotels and their proximity to polo.

## TOURNAMENT DETAILS

Before each game, be sure your field, support personnel and equipment are ready. Have on hand:

- Striped umpire shirts (two)
- Pickup stick, whistles, ball bags
- NEW balls in ample supply
- The field freshly mown and lines chalked
- Have a veterinarian to be on hand or available
- A spare goal post
- A third man appointed, with Blue Book at field side
- Scorekeeper, flag boys, game sheets, timer, air horn, and bell
- Mark run off areas and keep cars and spectators the proper distance from the field
- Make arrangements with an ambulance service or paramedics to be either on hand or on call
- Award trophies for all games played, not just the finals. When players travel, trophies are especially important
- Have a photographer on hand for all trophy presentations. Copies of these photos make a nice, inexpensive thank-you for tournament participants
- Hold a consolation game, if possible, for teams knocked out in the first round. This insures every team a minimum of two games
- Check the Blue Book (United States Polo Association Events Outdoor Section) for details on organizing the draw and rules of play
- Mount umpires on good easy horses. If an umpire is riding a green or badly-behaved horse, his effectiveness is lost. If conditions are usually hot and humid, have two horses available for each umpire per game
- Make sure you understand how the tournament committee works. It is the last word on most everything

## THE SOCIAL SIDE

Social events are important to a tournament's success. While polo players come to play polo, a feeling of welcome and camaraderie are important in the overall success of a tournament. Consider these possibilities:

- A Calcutta the evening before the first match
- A more formal cocktail party
- A large, casual party on a non-playing day. (This can be held on the field, or on a lawn.)
- A ladies luncheon for visiting wives, sweethearts and/or players

It is generally not a good idea to plan a large party after the finals. Most people are anxious to load their horses and go home; of course, if your club has a large local following, do plan on a post-finals party, but also schedule visiting team entertainment during the tournament rather than after it.

## OTHER SUGGESTIONS

A type of tournament popular in Australia is the challenge trophy. A trophy is put up by an individual or a club with stipulations that define the level of the tournament and eligibility of the teams. Any eligible team may present a challenge to the cup-holder and a match must be held or the game forfeited. A minimum notice of two weeks must be given, with a maximum of four weeks, by which time the challenged team must play or forfeit. If the notice period is short enough, the cup can be played for several times a season. Organizationally, it rarely presents any problems, because there are never more than two teams competing at any one time.

# LEAGUES

Polo leagues probably provide the most fun competition for everyone. Competition at a predetermined level, a lot of games, and the advantages of playing with a fixed team are reasons why league polo is so popular. Set up on a round-robin basis, each team play the other, and the team with the most wins at the end is victor. Four to six weeks is the usual length of time for a league to run, depending on the number of teams entered; if there are not a sufficient number of local teams to run a league properly, consider combining with a nearby club, playing on alternate weekends.

## LEAGUE SETUP

Most leagues are played for a permanent trophy, with smaller silver being awarded team members. The American System is used (see USPA Blue Book for additional details) dividing all competing teams into one or more divisions, each division being made up of at least two teams, and each team playing one complete game against every other team in the division. Teams are divided as evenly as possible, with no division being more than one team larger than the rest.

The winning team from each division (the team with the best won-lost record) then meets teams from other divisions in elimination. Usually, there are only two divisions, so these two winners play to determine the league winner. Depending on the length of the season, several leagues can run throughout the summer. If fields and playing time allow, two leagues (a 0-4 and a 4-8, for instance) can be played concurrently. Even if your club can only muster 0-4 goal teams, consider having more than one league for the summer. The advantages to the club and players make leagues worthwhile. League play can be easier to schedule than match games, since the teams are already established. Players know in advance when and where they will play, and have no one but themselves to blame for missed games. Each game is equal in value, which evens out the effort for all concerned. Players leave their green horses at home on league days, and take their polo more seriously. Players on teams that play together regularly improve their game faster than if they only play match or pickup games.

# **CHAPTER V**

## **CREATING A TEAM**

While members can be left to their own devices in forming teams, there is an alternative method that works well, especially if several leagues are to be played in the course of the season. The club manager and two players who know their membership's abilities and ponies set up a Chinese menu. All players who plan on playing on the league are formed into possible teams: A, B, and C. {See Examples below}

**SELECTION A:**

Brown	2	Peter	0
Smith	0	Burke	2
Davis	1	Meyers	2
Green	1	Brooks	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4</b>

**SELECTION B:**

Byron	2	Davidson	1
Harrison	1	Davis	1
Peters	0	Burke	2
Richards	1	Jones	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4</b>

Richards	1	Jones	0
Harrison	1	Byron	2
Davidson	1	Van Nuys	1
O'Hara	1	Clark	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4</b>

Clark	1	Brown	2
Meyers	2	O'Hara	1
Brooks	0	Smith	0
Green	1	VanNuys	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4</b>

Each player involved, with the exception of the players who made up the teams, votes on the selection of their choice: First selection, 3 points; second selection, 2 points; third selection (not shown), 1 point. The ballot with the most points is the team setup for that league. While this method may not make everyone happy, and is hard to understand, it is the best system for making up even teams. It is a good solution if there are rampant complaints about one set team continually sweeping the leagues, and therefore, might be worth using for at least one summer series.

## OTHER DETAILS

Entry fees for a league can be assessed in addition to regular ground fees. Generally speaking, \$50 to \$500 per player per league is about average, but if two players are sharing a position, considers charging them a reduced rate.

Determine ahead of time what to do about substitutions. Both captains on the teams involved should agree on the substitutions. Please refer to the USPA Rules & Interpretation Guide.

Decide what to do about rain-outs. Will league games be played on practice-game days if there is rain, or will the league continue a bit longer to make up the matches lost?

Remember to continue to schedule practice games and match games for players not involved in the leagues, or to bring along green ponies or players.

If there are enough interested players, hold a B (-1) goal league with four chukkers of play for beginners. Be sure to have this type of league well umpired.

If Pros are used to upgrade polo, Pro fees are based on the amount of games played plus an adjustment up or down to reflect a players own rating. Example (the pro fee may calculate out to be \$1,000.00 for a zero player, \$500.00 for a one player and zero for a two goal player in an eight goal league when a four or five goal player must be hired to make up an eight goal team).

# **CHAPTER VI**

## **SPONSORSHIPS and BENEFIT MATCHES**

## **BENEFIT MATCHES**

Benefit matches can help a small club get underway, and gain a lot of local recognition for that club. A benefit takes work and careful planning, but the end result is fun and generally profitable for everyone involved. It is safe to figure that a well-run benefit game might take six or seven months in the planning and organizing, but fortunately a good bit of the organizing can, and perhaps should, be done by the charity involved.

Invitations must be sent, social events leading up to the game organized, parking places sold, tents rented and erected, food and sanitary facilities provided, and most importantly, teams invited. Halftime events, a band, and pony rides for children all make for a fun-filled and popular day, and should be considered.

## **CHOOSING A CHARITY**

While you might think that almost any charity would be grateful for the proceeds of a polo game, and you would be right, you need a charity that can bear some of the burden of organizational duties. Local charities are best for several reasons: one, they have an immediate recognition within the community, and probably a broader base of active volunteers and patrons, and two, they probably need the money more than a nationally-affiliated charity and will be willing to go an extra mile with you in planning an event.

- Hospitals, rehabilitation programs, mental health centers, orphanages, or even the performing arts all are likely and worthy charities to consider
- Public Service Announcements, radio, and TV
- Tents reserved. (A mid-field social tent is a nice touch for the VIP's and higher-priced ticket holders)
- Liquor license, if drinks are to be sold
- Specialty booths or tents for boutique, polo, and charity sales or solicitation
- A band for the social tent. Music during halftime and after the game can add to the day's festivities
- Check with local zoning board about food, liquor, sales booths, etc
- Arrange with local police for possible traffic problems
- Cleanup garbage disposal
- Directional signs and arrow for roads leading to field
- Banner and posters advertising event

If your club wishes to run a booth, popular items to stock are: cheap hand-mallet, polo balls, imprinted T-shirts, and sweat shirts, polo caps, polo jewelry, and scarves, posters and calendars. Information on lessons and membership should naturally be prominently displayed. It might be possible to share such a booth with a local tack store, expanding the available merchandise and keeping costs for your club minimal.

## LEVEL OF PLAY

For a benefit match, a 4-8 goal minimum should guarantee good polo. The greatest problem with polo being 4 goals is that the play is often sticky, and while fun for participants, doesn't make much of a spectator sport. Admittedly, the vast majority of the people attending a benefit match have never seen a polo match, and probably won't watch too much of the game. In any case, it's best to put on a match at a higher-than-usual level of play whenever possible.

## PUTTING TEAMS TOGETHER

Teams for benefit games can be found in two ways:

- **Tournaments**  
A benefit can be the final match for a tournament. If this approach is used, the number of invitational teams should be determined in advance, and arrangements made for stabling and housing players. Local hotels can often be prevailed upon to provide discounts for blocks of rooms. If a tournament with visiting players is the way you choose to go, consider having a consolation match before the main game, even if it's only four chukkers.
- **Match Games**  
Match games offer the benefit of being put together simply for the day, cutting down somewhat on the logistics of stabling several teams' worth of horses in the area. If you choose this route, start looking for professionals early in the season. Two professional players per team (or three for that matter) will help insure a higher-caliber of polo. Your club's best players should fill the other spots on the teams. Be sure to determine whether "hired guns" will bring their own horses or expect to be mounted locally.

## ADDITIONAL EVENTS

In addition to the game itself, consider the following additional activities:

- A Polo Ball - It can be organized by the club members or charity
- A Cocktail Party or Calcutta - Hold a Calcutta only in conjunction with a tournament
- A Pre-Game Brunch - Barbeque or square dance
- A Luncheon/Fashion Show - This can be held at a local country club or restaurant

## DIVIDING THE SPOILS

Many clubs have had success in giving charities the tickets for the benefit match to sell outright. The club gets a write-off on donated tickets, the charity gets the proceeds, and everyone is happy. The club is especially happy if it has a liquor license. Then, a pre-game happy hour can be held in addition to a post-game open-to-the-public party and enough revenue is generated in this matter to insure a successful day, thanks to the increased numbers of spectators generated by ticket promotions and sales. Not too surprisingly, this approach works best when there is a grandstand, since field-side parking doesn't always encourage the same levels of attendance. Even so, with some modifications, it can work very nicely for almost any club.

Especially for first-year benefit matches, the charity may receive all revenue, after expenses incurred by the club are deducted. Thereafter, most clubs take a percentage of the total, varying from a modest five percent up to fifty percent, depending on the amount of money involved and the amount of work and general wear and tear suffered by the club.

# SPONSORSHIP

Until fairly recently, corporate sponsorship was something polo people only dreamed of, but with the upswing in high-goal polo in South Florida and elsewhere, corporate sponsors are becoming increasingly involved with polo. While most small clubs will never host high goal tournaments, polo is still played and local clubs are benefiting by offering a niche audience for some companies.

Even so, the most likely form of sponsorship any club can expect is on the local or regional level. All sponsors including our Polo Plus partners (Dodge, John Deere, Sherwin-Williams, UPS, Office Depot, Toshiba) are involved for promotion of product and/or service. For example, the sponsor may pay for a



large display at the club entrance or fieldside on “**JOHN DEERE DAY**”, with gator, tractor and other ag equipment and offer a demonstration at half-time, present the winning team trophy along with gift vouchers to the local John Deere dealership. Or you could have a “**Dodge Day**” with a “**Dodge Day Parade**” of their newest line. These are just a few ideas with more below to consider:

- Naming a tournament after the sponsor’s business with title sponsorship opportunities.
- Have a “ \_\_\_\_\_ Day” as a separate sponsorship or in connection with the title or presenting sponsorship on the day of the tournament finals.
- Giving a block of tickets to the sponsor for him to hand out as he chooses and/or providing a hospitality tent for employees or clients, tailgate spaces, etc.
- Providing tickets (30 pairs or so) to a local radio station for prizes, good on the sponsor’s day, or having tickets picked up at his/her place of business.
- Complimentary champagne, etc. at sponsor’s box.
- Reserved parking space(s) near entrance.
- Making the polo club available for special promotions i.e. cocktail parties, seminars, etc.
- Admission to club’s hospitality tent for given number of guests to network with club members and their guests.
- Provide polo photos with permission of the photographer for sponsor’s print and/or online advertising.
- Award presentation photos and interview opportunities with local media or media sponsor
- Banner recognition fieldside and/or signage on award presentation stage.
- Company logo in local television and print advertisements .
- Company mentioned in marketing materials, media vehicles and press releases as a main sponsor of the event.
- Company listed as a sponsor on the club’s website and in the program.
- Company banner hotlink on the home page of the Club’s website.
- Promotional material for display and/or distribution during the polo tournament.
- One full page advertisement in the club or tournament program.
- Corporate entertainment opportunities with fieldside tent, table and chairs for guests who will receive admission passes.
- Live announcements throughout the polo match.

Feel free to create your own tailored packages with ideas above. Don’t forget to “do your math homework” to ensure your club is earning income and not losing money after expenditures for miscellaneous purchases i.e. printing, advertising, etc.

**Note:** Always remember that when speaking with potential sponsors, it is better to underpromise and overdeliver. We recommend starting out small with first time sponsors and then as you build rapport, you can build the sponsorship. Also, show your gratitude by providing the best hospitality possible for your sponsor and that may mean assigning a volunteer

host/hostess to take care of their sponsorship needs throughout the event. You want to be sure that they are well taken care especially in the event they do not receive a return on investment. If you have any questions, contact our Florida office at 561-253-5629 or [owen@uspolo.org](mailto:owen@uspolo.org).

## **PROGRAMS & MAGAZINES**

Programs can raise significant amounts of revenue for a club, and even produce enough income to cover the entire season's costs. A good-looking program is an asset that should consequently be considered by almost any club for several additional reasons:

- It gives spectators a reference and a source of identifying players and teams on the field through photos and biographies
- It acts as a reference for rules and how the game is played
- A program raises awareness of polo within the community. When your members go out to sell ads for the program, they are doing public relations work for your club, making local businesses aware that something is going on out there other than baseball and soccer
- A program can reduce dues costs for members. Many clubs give members a discount for selling ads - a real incentive for members on a tight polo budget. A common method is to require that each member sell one full-page ad (or buy it himself)
- Beyond that, 25 percent of the revenue of any ad sold goes toward the individual's dues
- A polo program can be a fairly simple, black and white affair, or as elaborate as a major magazine, depending on what you wish to spend and accomplish. Keep in mind that since only a relatively small number of books will be printed, the single-copy cost will be fairly high

## **PUTTING A PROGRAM TOGETHER**

Assembling and editing a polo program isn't all that difficult, but it does take some organization. If no one associated with your club has this kind of experience (or are willing to try) a good place to go for advice at the reasonable cost is a full-service printer. A printer can put the book together for you, doing virtually everything but creating the copy and taking the photos. All you need to do is determine what you want in the program, gather that material together in some vague semblance of order and turn it over. Advertisements should be, whenever possible, camera-ready. Discuss the additional cost (usually fairly minimal) with your printer.

### **WHAT TO INCLUDE**

- Photos and short bios of the players. This material should be all together, and not scattered at random throughout the book
- A calendar of the season, highlighting tournaments and special events
- A short description of how the game is played, rules and description of fouls
- A short explanation of all things polo: you don't hit the ball with the tip-end of the mallet. Horses' tails are tied up to keep them out of the way. Balls are plastic. The size of the polo field

If space permits, finish out the program with articles on polo, write-ups of last year's tournaments or a history of the club, a simple polo quiz or an especially popular item, descriptions and names of each regular player's horses. Novice spectators take an interest in the game if they know that Joe, in the red jersey, is riding Camden and that the pretty grey mare of Bill's is named Mary Rose. It makes the game more personal, and creates instant fans for unlikely "stars". Of course, it's a little disheartening to discover that your horse is more popular than you are.

## **AD SIZES**

Advertising can be a full page, half, quarter, and third page. If you choose to run smaller ads, do a business-card size and confine them to pages unto themselves to keep the cluttered look to a minimum. Charge a premium for these - 2 or 3 times the cost of a full-page ad divided by the numbers to fill ten pages. Generally speaking, the back cover (cover 4) is the most expensive spot. Next is cover 2 - inside front and back. They are full-page ads. If you can, try to sell this space to major advertiser as a 4-color either picked up by the advertiser, or printed at a reduced cost to you. A color cover adds a great deal to a program and makes even a simple black and white interior seem more special. Give players 30 percent to 50 percent credit toward green fees in return for guarantee.

Four-color artwork is expensive, but two-color is fairly reasonable. A second color can make attractive headlines or highlights and add a great deal to the visual interest of a program.

## **PHOTOGRAPHS**

Photos are all important in creating a good-looking professional program. Sharp, close pictures create visual excitement, while grainy out-of-focus shots offer little except filler.

A telephone lens is truly necessary in taking effective polo pictures. A photographer with an understanding of the dynamics of the games also helps. A good picture of a bunch of guys riding along isn't saying much.

If your photographer has never taken polo photos before:

- Tell him to always try to get the ball in the picture
- Ride-offs are exciting photos, especially head-on shots
- Avoid photos of players trotting along - not enough action
- Shots at the top of the swing are usually dynamic, as are follow-throughs on the neck shots, or back shots
- Urge him to take many photos. Having contact sheets printed save costs in choosing which frames to use
- Be willing to crop a photo down tight for more drama. A lot of green with two tiny horses in the middle isn't very exciting
- If all of this sounds like more work than your club is willing to go through, you may have a club member or friend who will undertake the project for a piece of the action

# **CHAPTER VII**

# **CLUB POLO and the MEDIA**

Polo is a rare sport: if it is covered at all by the media, it is generally covered in the society rather than sports pages and treated as an excuse to drink Gatorade out of Champagne glasses or as a “dirtballs-take-up-a-gentleman’s-sport” story.

While any coverage helps a local club, and society/life-style sections have traditionally been good about covering polo, a new club should do everything possible to educate sports editors and television sportscaster about polo as a legitimate sport. This is not an easy job, and is one that should be taken on by a member with either time to spend on the task or prior expertise in publicity. It is not an impossible task by any means, but does take a concentrated effort. Polo has a lot of going for it: it’s a colorful sport with excitement and tradition to spare, one that lends itself to both team work and individual talent. No one expects miracles of a volunteer publicity director, just a few press releases and contacts with the local media people.

## **MAKING MEDIA CONTACTS**

Making contacts within the media are all-important for recognition as a newsworthy sports club. This isn’t as hard as it sounds, for editors and producers at television or radio stations are generally open to new events within the community and willing to listen. But they will not know about your club unless someone tells them about it, and that is the job of your publicists.

The duties of a publicity person are threefold: make contacts with the media, issue press releases about games and events, and do write-ups of matches to send to the local media, Polo Player’s Edition, as well as other polo and equestrian related publications. As far as Polo Player’s Edition goes, if your publicists sends them game sheets and a little additional information, the writers there can turn out a creditable story, so style or the lack thereof needn’t be too great a concern.

## **TOOLS OF THE TRADE**

Just as playing polo is easier and more fun when you have good equipment and horses’, performing as a media representative is simpler and easier with the proper tools. Your publicity person will need the following:

- A computer. Stories and reports should always be typed, double-spaced. Keep a copy or carbon of every release to build a reference file.
- A biography on each club member. Bios should contain the player’s name (noting special titles or nicknames), USPA rating, and pertinent polo information: years in the sport, past wins, occupation, residence, business address and phone numbers, height, weight and biographical notes (schools, children, wife’s name).
- Photo file of all members. Head shots without helmets. Identification on back, preferably in light blue felt-tipped pen. Add “please return to your club”, if you want the pictures back. Most papers are very cooperative about returning pictures.
- Score sheets for the season as well as season past. These records will prove helpful in writing advance stories by providing past records, etc.
- A list of media contacts, with names, telephone numbers and addresses.
- A clipping file or press book. Date clippings, noting the paper and insert in a scrapbook in chronological order. Keep a separate book for each season (or index one book).

## CONTACTS WITH THE MEDIA

Getting the word out about your club involves telephone and footwork. Personal contacts with news editors and reporters are invaluable. The following suggestions might prove useful in getting started:

- Call local media people, introducing yourself and your club. Ask if it is a convenient time to talk, as many are on a tight daily deadline. If it's not a good time, ask when you might conveniently call them back
- Invite them to come to a game or to send a reporter
- If personal coverage proves to be unlikely, offer to call in game results when the match is over, or to do a brief write-up of the match. Again, don't worry about style. They'll almost certainly rework it in any case
- If submitting a story is acceptable, FOLLOW THROUGH! Hand-deliver the information if necessary to be sure it arrives in time for publication.
- Ask about photographs: Will the newspaper send a photographer out even if they don't cover the game, or will they accept photos taken by a club member?
- If your photos are accepted, be sure to follow through. The paper will be saving a slot for your photograph, and if it doesn't show, don't ever expect a favor from that editor again. Black and white pictures are best; deliver the film rather than waiting to have it developed. Newspapers can do this far quicker than a commercial establishment, especially for black and white
- Have your photographer shoot the whole roll, saving a few exposures for trophy presentations in case nothing else comes out
- If you are approaching television news producers, stress the action and color or polo, since visuals are extremely important in television
- Don't be shy about asking an editor or sportscaster for a meeting. You will find the vast majority of them are anxious to meet their public, especially when that public arrives bearing a solid story idea. An appointment is almost always necessary, especially for television or radio sports directors, but call first in any case - you want to be certain they have the time to listen to you

## STORY IDEA

- The opening of the season
- A higher-goal-than-usual match or tournament
- League championship
- Benefit or charity games, celebrity matches, visiting celebrities
- An especially old/young player. A women's team or league
- Locally prominent figures that play polo

Naturally, some of these suggestions would be best being presented to feature writers. Despite the fact that you probably wish to attract sports coverage, feature writers are generally willing to do color stories on polo - such as young/old players, life-styles-of-the-rich, and women's polo. Don't overlook this coverage. Everything helps, so go for it all.

## WRITING PRESS RELEASES

While special club stationery is nice, it's not necessary. A press release usually has typed in the upper right-hand corner, FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE, or the date the story is to be released. It has a headline: Copper City Polo Club to Host Visiting British Team, and then, double-spaced, the story, with the most important information first. The W's should be included in a release: who, what, where, when and why. If the information is not printed on club stationery, be sure to give a name and phone number of

who to contact for further information. If the release is going to television or radio stations, consider phoneticizing names in parenthesis: Ylvisaker (ILL VA SOCKER).

A sample mailing list for a polo press release might include:

- Newspapers, daily and weekly. Sports editor, features editor, weekend section editor, calendar of events editor
- Television sportscaster, news producer, local talk-show hosts and producer
- Radio sportscaster, news producer, local calendar of events producer
- Wire series: AP, UPI and local state wire service
- If you have a good, sharp action shot that is pertinent to the event (a player or a photo of last year's game) by all means have copies printed up and include with the mailing

## **BIG STORIES**

Occasionally, you're going to have a story idea that warrants sport-wide or general national attention. Getting that attention takes some work, but can be worthwhile. Decide where the story fits best: Polo Player's Edition, a general-interest horse publication, wire services, magazine section of a newspaper or general-interest magazine, television or radio? Make a list of your target audience, or potential audience. Get on the phone, call key people at those publications and try to interest them in your story. Promise exclusivity on the story if necessary. P.M. Magazine is a good way to get national coverage through the local edition. If the story warrants, it can go national from that source.

## **OTHER WAYS TO GETTING THE WORD OUT**

- Posters - Supermarkets, drug stores and libraries often allow organizations to put up posters. An attractively printed poster can draw a lot of attention to your club. If the poster is sufficiently good-looking, you might consider having an additional number printed for sale
- Counter-cards in the lobbies of local hotels, restaurants and motels. Shops will occasionally permit counter cards as well
- Window displays in retail shops or empty windows in shopping centers. Your display might include a poster, tack, mallets, boots, helmet, balls, picnic hamper, and a variety of blowups of action shots. Don't forget a prominently-displayed season schedule
- Message Boards. Almost every bank has an electronic message board for time and temperature. Prevail upon one or more of them to hype your seasons opening game or a big tournament or charity match
- Race Tracks. If there is one in the area, write a message and have it flashed on the Alpha Board
- Banners. A banner across Main Street can be an excellent advertising tool for a club about to begin a season. Most city councils in smaller cities will permit this, and with proper care and storage, a banner can be used for several years
- Cross promotional plans between a polo club and local businesses: Example - McDonald's advertises the club on tray liners, the club does a give-away of coupons, and field-side signage of McDonald's

Once a club is established, there is still much to be done to keep it running smoothly. While playing polo is the reason for the club, there must be more than just a field to keep it operating as a cohesive unit. As this book has reiterated time and again, polo must be made as easy as possible, on as many levels as be considered. If there is not something in polo for the whole family, eventually problems develop that can cost a club members.

## **MAKING IT EASIER**

Hire a professional club manager. Even with a limited operating budget, every viable polo club should consider hiring a professional manager if only for one or two months of the season. This is especially important to a new club, for a pro can help set up and organize the club, get leagues started, and coach beginners and more experienced players alike. This takes the burden off the members and allowing them to have fun playing polo - not running the club. Costs for a professional manager can be assessed on a per-horse basis if necessary, giving a break to players on limited time or money budgets.

Host PTF clinics throughout the season. Player and umpire clinics are invaluable teaching tools. A good clinic is an inspiration for all participants involved and good for the club as well as a whole, since it generates excitement about the game.

The Polo Training foundation will help defray the cost of putting on a clinic, providing that a proper application is filed with the office and certain requirements are met. In order to apply, contact the PTF at [info@polotraining.com](mailto:info@polotraining.com) or call 888-783-POLO (7656).

### **Social Activities**

Extremely important to the viability of any club are social events. Wives and children eventually resent the time spent with polo unless there is something for them to do other than just watch daddy play. While many women have taken up polo and should be encouraged to do so for marital harmony if nothing else, non-playing family members need to be more involved in club activities.

### **Post-game Tailgates or Cookouts**

Begin and end the season with cocktail parties or a polo ball. Perhaps organized fund-raisers are all events that can make the passion of polo more livable for non-players.

### **Off-Season Video Parties**

Showing the Rolex film, PTF Umpire film or tapes of the Argentine Open, for instance, can be friendly events and a good time for introducing potential new members to the club.

### **Work Parties**

These can be very productive at the beginning and end of the season. Preparation of fields is a labor intensive venture and club members make up the cheapest (or most expensive) labor available.

### **A Friends of Polo Organization**

This organization can be made up of non-riding fans and enthusiasts and is a worthwhile support group. They can act as official greeters at games, explain polo to first-timers and generally swell the ranks year-round.

### **Social Membership**

Give free social membership to neighbors who may be stressed over polo activity. "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure".

**Thank you for taking the time to review this booklet and please do not hesitate to contact the United States Polo Association at 800-232-USPA (8772) if you have any questions regarding getting your club started.**

# NOTES

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## **THINGS TO DO** **In order to register your club with the** **United States Polo Association**

- ◆ Complete a USPA Club Registration Form with payment of \$300.00 payable to the USPA.
- ◆ Submit the following provisions with your Club Registration to the USPA office:
  - a) Registration fee
  - b) Club Constitution
  - c) Club By-Laws
  - d) A written letter from the Club President designating a Club Delegate
  - e) Certificate of Liability Insurance for the Club
  - f) Photo and Description of the field(s) or facilities
  - g) Must have three (3) USPA Player Members registered through the Club

### **New USPA Members**

Must complete a USPA Player Registration Form and submit the \$200.00 registration fee to the USPA office.

### **Current USPA Members**

Current USPA Members must complete a Club Transfer Form.