

The Popularizing of Polo

POLO is undergoing a transformation in this country, with the ends in view that the horse may not perish from the earth, that one of the greatest of games may no longer labor under the handicap of classification with purely "rich men's sports," that the mystery surrounding its generalship, its apparent scramble, may be dispelled, and that one of the greatest of all pleasures may be spread among the many instead of being confined to the few. In other words, the game is being slowly but none the less steadily popularized—not accidentally, but by design. Many of the best sportsmen in the country, wealthy and otherwise, are concerned in this agreeable conspiracy, and their work is showing excellent results. Witness the crowd of more than 5,000 daily at the national championships at Philadelphia—though held on dates that conflicted with the national tennis championships; the bringing together of the younger element in new and interesting team combinations in the recent tournament at Meadow Brook, and the preparation of the Army fours at Camp Vail, the site of the old Monmouth race track, in conjunction with tournaments held at the Rumson Country Club. This last is situated in the heart of what has come to be known as a "polo centre."

So firmly is the game entrenched in the public favor in the Rumson section that members of this club said recently, with every appearance of confidence: "Give us the national championships just one year, and we will guarantee a crowd of 20,000 and build the stands to accommodate them."

There is already a "polo wise" following in New Jersey, in and around Philadelphia, in and around Boston, in certain sections of the South and West and on the Pacific Coast. New York has lagged, but the New York public has been taken in hand by Squadron A, and that organization's big indoor tournament last winter was a success in many ways. It tended to educate the general public to the beauties of the play, to promote competition among the colleges that have taken up the galloping game—Yale, Princeton, Pennsylvania and Cornell, so far; to provide a future home in its own ranks for the college graduate who has been debarred in the past because of the expense. It is building wisely and well.

Now all this activity naturally encourages the breeder of polo stock, and the polo stock of today is far different from that of the long ago. The present product is an all-round animal, designed for speed as well as handiness; the limit on his height has been lifted and the modern requirements are such that the polo mount may serve a cavalry officer as his second service mount, which was not possible in the old days of the 14.2 restriction, which now remains only as a show requisite. The modern polo mount will do for a ride in the park or over the 200 miles of bridle paths that thread their way through one of the prettiest sections of Long Island.

Polo is no longer played on "ponies" of the Cock Horse to Banbury Cross type, but on thoroughbred racers, and at the pace of thoroughbreds. The old cayuse and Water blood is no longer common. With the removal of the offside rule, and now the passing of the fractional goal penalties for fouls and safeties, the game has become one of tremendous pace, and the pace of the breeding must keep up with the pace of the game, which means more and more thoroughbreds in action. In any of the leading strings today, such as those gathered together by Averill Harriman, by G. M. Heckscher in the East; by Hugh Tevis and Carleton Burke in California, the preponderance will be thoroughbred

at least four-fifths, or, at the very least, part thoroughbred.

These will include weight carriers, for, with the offside rule lifted, there was an instant premium on long hitting, and long hitting was an inducement to bigger and more powerful men to take up the game. Devereux Milburn is a fair sample, and Thomas Hitchcock Jr. is a few sizes larger than the stars of years ago. The Army's best back, Major W. W. Erwin, rides at 182 pounds. With big men like these at back, the old job of No. 1, that of riding them off, became increasingly difficult. The result has been that there has been upon occasion a change in generalship, and the modern No. 1 has taken to putting on more and more speed, outracing the big back and cutting loose with the ball, taking over much of the goal shooting that was formerly left to No. 2 in the at-

triumph of horse-breeding, simplicity, and exciting personal contact. Truly a remarkable change from the old days when the sport was known as the "game of dust and bad language." Not all of the bad language has disappeared, but most of the calling from player to player is in the way of signaling, belonging to the generalship of the play, and the dust is found seldom nowadays save in India, where watering systems are at a premium.

As a further incentive to the spectator, the teams have taken to numbering their saddle cloths, as has been done in the international matches, and, thanks to Colonel Julian R. Lindsey, Chairman of the Army Polo Committee, the soldiers, who really are the champions of the public, just as the Army and Navy football teams are thus representative, now wear numbers a foot high on

downtown business man could witness them after closing up shop for the day. For the wandering automobilist parking space had been provided on the opposite side of the field from the clubhouse, and it is difficult to think of a more delightful manner of putting in an hour for the motorist on the way home.

From the player's angle a great change has come over the game. In a still somewhat limited but wholly true sense, it is possible for a man to play polo without owning a single mount, and in some cases at probably less expense than a season's golf. There are public fields.



trip would cost—yes, for a quarter or a fifth of the average outing in the Fall and Summer season.

Both in the Army and in the Squadron the game is being built up scientifically. The work is begun indoors, sometimes in the pen, where the stick work is mastered without running the risk of battering up a good horse. Follows then the instruction in equitation, the play indoors with the big soft ball which cannot be hit very far. Here handiness and combination are learned, and the fundamentals of polo generalship. Thence the game is taken out of doors and the players go into action well prepared to handle themselves and their mounts properly on the full-sized field. There is an ulterior motive in all this. Regardless of their ability to own mounts, the attempt is being made to turn out a large number of players so well taught, so thoroughly drilled in the avoidance of "hard hands" and other destructive features of poor horsemanship, that they will be welcome guests at polo clubs, and will be cheerfully mounted by their hosts.

Of course, the great fundamental thing that has made it possible to take up this popularization of the game is the international matches. In the old days, when Westchester was a polo centre and when the average citizen who could afford anything besides train transportation was driving everything from a sulky to a cabriolet, not to mention the popular family surrey, there was a love of horses bred in every family that led the head thereof to propel his family outing to the neighborhood of horseflesh. There was trotting, there was the old Fleetwood Park at its best, there was Jerome Avenue, with at the end of all these the spice and novelty of polo. The family of those days that could not "talk horse" was no family at all, just as later the family that could not discuss sprockets, gears and handlebars in the era of the bicycle was a lonely unit in the life outside the city limits, or within those limits for that matter. All that is gone, of course, and with it the drive that led to the margin of the polo field. Popular interest in the game languished, and the interna-

tacking formation. This excursion into the technique of the game is undertaken merely to show that every change in the rules and in the actual play has tended to demand speed, and more speed, and still more speed.

Thus the old-time No. 1 was able to go through a game on two or three mounts. Today he needs at least four, and these if possible thoroughbreds, as do the other players. The great pace of the game has limited the powers of the very best mounts to two periods. Exceptional mounts may stand the racket for three. The American international team played through one of the games that brought home the cup on eighteen mounts, fourteen mares and four geldings. With the possibility of accident in mind, no first-class team goes into action with fewer than twenty mounts at hand.

The old scramble that made the generalship of the game a mystery to the general public has given way to the stretching out of the formation in order to cover the terrific hitting, with the result that one often sees down a beautiful stretch of turf almost a quarter of a mile in length a series of four actual horse races, all going on at once.

The spectator is getting thoroughbred sprint horse racing in the guise of a game, with all the added fascination of team work and wonderful clouting of the ball. Here, combined with the extreme simplicity of the rules, which may be learned at one reading, are all the elements of a popular sport in the best and most exciting sense.

There are speed, horsemanship, manual dexterity, team work, the

backs of their polo shirts. As a further incentive to the spectator it may be said that many good matches are free to the public. To witness the recent play at Meadow Brook, in which appeared some of the country's finest players, including two of the internationalists, and in which were used beautifully trained mounts from at least two of the leading strings in the East, whence are certain to come four-footed internationalists of the future, required only cartage. The games were played so late that the

At certain of the colleges the War Department maintains a string of mounts in connection with all officers' training corps. Today, just outside the open end of the Palmer Stadium at Princeton, is the odd spectacle of a corral filled with army horses, which are the backbone of the student polo team. The Squadron maintains a string of mounts at Geaney Farms, and its members may indulge in a week-end of horseback riding and polo play either there or across the Hudson River for much less money than a week-end motor

(Continued on Page 14)

The Popularizing of Polo

(Continued from Page 9)

tional matches were needed to revive it.

To a much larger portion of the public than one would imagine the names of the international players and the names of at least some of the international mounts are household words. Because of her work in the international matches Louis Stoddard's Belle of All, called, probably with accuracy, "the greatest polo pony in the world," has become something of a champion to the general public, and if there is anything the general public loves it is a champion. In the international matches the periods were cut down to seven, of eight minutes each, which meant that the actual playing time was cut four minutes under the customary hour. There were in the two matches, therefore, a total of fourteen longer periods, and this famous Stoddard mount played in six of them, a unique distinction.

As a matter of fact, the performance of this mare was largely that of actual racing, which the general public hitherto has understood better than it has polo. Stoddard took out his superb mare for the first period and played her eight minutes. Just what she did

in that time is shown by a reference to the score—the overmastering sweep of the American attack. She played again in the fourth period, and again in the last. Remember, it has been pointed out that the modern No. 1 must have supreme pace, and the international No. 1 must bestride the fastest thing there is on four feet in the way of horseflesh. This animal, which holds the international polo honors, both for pace and endurance, was bred by E. R. Bradley in Kentucky, a State that has been tied up both in fact and fiction with the best traditions of the horse, and trained by Fred Post, who has done almost equally good work with other polo mounts. Here is the queen of polo ponies of today.

What a record to compare with the "Babe" Ruths of baseball, the "Ted" Coys of football. All the elements of international sporting drama. And then, Tenby. In spite of age, partly because of experience, partly because of love and respect for this great four-footed internationalist, Devereux Milburn, Captain of the American international team, played this old wedding present of his in the fourth period of the first game against the Englishmen.

It was Tenby's thirteenth period in international polo. Tenby played twice in each of the international matches of 1911, and he again aided the successful defense of the trophy in 1913. In 1914 Tenby for the first time tasted defeat. And he lived to participate in the games that brought the cup home to this country, after his owner had been in the great war. There was a story to the effect that on the way home Tenby committed suicide. Hardly. Tenby died, but enough sentiment has been built up legitimately around this faithful and famous animal to make mandlin sentiment a smirch on the history of a great polo pony. He was developed and trained by William Balding, in England, Mr. Balding maintaining that he was the best pony that he ever handled, which, on top of his record, is high enough praise.

There will be other great mares like Belle of All, other great old campaigners like Tenby, and with the spread of the game it is more than possible that these four-footed heroes and heroines will come from some obscure ranch that never would have continued in existence had it not been for the demand the game has made for mounts.