



Polo



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About the Tutorial

Polo is a game that requires the act of riding a horse and the perfect coordination of your body. Although it is not an Olympic sport still due to its wide popularity, the game is professionally played in many countries. This tutorial will teach you the basics of playing Polo.

Though the "how to play" section is not comprehensive but it is sufficient enough to understand the necessary points about Polo.

Audience

This tutorial is aimed at giving an overall knowledge to a person about how to become a professional in Polo. It contains step-by-step illustrations and guidance to help beginners learn the fundamentals of Polo.

Prerequisites

If you have the passion and eagerness to learn this game, then this tutorial will be highly beneficial for you.

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1. Polo – Overview

Polo is an action adventure sport that will give you a thrilling experience and nail-biting excitement simultaneously. This game is often difficult to play because it requires both controlling your horse and your body simultaneously while being focused on hitting the ball. This tutorial will help you understanding the basics from the grass root level.



In this game while riding on the horse, you have to score against the opposing team by hitting a ball towards their goal area with the help of a long handled mallet. Each team has four riders. A solid plastic spherical shape ball is used generally. Nowadays many organizers have replaced it with wooden balls too. Duration of the game is generally 2 hours and each game has been divided into periods known as **Chukkas**.

Polo – A Brief History

Polo is said to be originated in between 6BC and 1 AD in Central Asia. There is also proof of Persian Emperor Shapur II of playing this game. Even many emperors like Alexander, John I of Trebizond died from a fatal injury while playing this game. In Persia this game was known as **Chougan**. The Delhi Sultan Qutubuddin Aibak also died while playing this game.

In Manipur state of India, this game is known as **Sagol Kangjei**. It is one of the form of hockey. It was Babur in India, who popularised the sport and soon it got its fan following in countries like England and Australia too. Countries like Argentina has organised polo championship during the period of 1875-1880.

Participating Countries

The game of Polo has wide popularity all over the globe. Currently it is played in 17+ countries all over the world. United States, Australia, Pakistan, India, Mexico, Chile, Italy, France, Switzerland, and Argentina have dominating effect over this game.

The 10th edition of the World Polo Championship was held at Santiago, Chile. Till now by winning 4 championships Argentina is in the top of the ranking list. The top ten nations with their rankings are Argentina, Brazil, Chile, United States, England, Mexico, Australia, Italy, Spain, France.

2. Polo – How to Play?

It is not good to ride a horse directly without doing any warmup. A little bit of stretching of muscles before and after riding a horse is necessary. Stretching of important parts of the body like, back, arms, wrists and inner legs should be done.

Hitting Points and Angles

A rider should also be aware of hitting points of a horse body. Generally, there are four hitting points for horse. Left side of the horse is known as nearside. This is generally the side you mount and dismount. On the other hand, the right side of the horse is known as the offside. Nearside shots are very difficult to make because in this type of shots, you actually need to bent over and twist to hit, while making sure not to hit the horse.



The four hitting points can be summarized as follows:

- Nearside Forehand-Left Forward
- Offside Forehand-Right Forward
- Nearside Back-Left Back
- Offside Back-Right Backward

Apart from hitting points, there are also hitting angles for a horse. There are generally three hitting angles of a horse and they are:

- **Open** – Away from the horse
- **Neck** – Hitting is done under the neck of the horse
- **Tail** – Hitting is done at the backside of the horse

Let's understand this by taking an example. A statement like "Offside Tail" indicates the ball need to be sent to 7 o'clock position. Similarly, a statement like "nearside for open" will send the ball to a 10-11 o'clock position.

Position of Hitting

Hitting randomly is not going to fetch you any good movement in the play. Rather you should know about the exact hitting position and the perfect way to do it. Below are some of the important facts that you should remember.

First and foremost, thing that a rider should learn is the way of hitting the ball. Instead of hitting the ball hardly, you should hit the ball slowly unless, you are only going to injure your wrist and miss the ball too. The speed of riding and the swing are inversely proportional to each other.

The faster you ride the horse, the lesser will be the swing. It is important to know that while performing half seat position take your back off the seat. Turning of the shoulders should be parallel to the horse. To keep the elbow straight extend your arm backwards.

Squeeze the horse with your knees and by looking down, aim towards a particular point on the ball. Then slowly hit the ball. The right way of carrying the stick is to hold it vertically above your hand so that it will take less time to hit in all the four positions.

Apart from the above, a beginner should record a video of himself to know the faults and should improvise himself from time to time. Guidance under an experienced coach is mandatory. Below is a table depicting important points related to hitting positions.

Terms	Importance
Spot	Aim for a particular point on the ball.
Head	Position of your head should be above the ball.
Squeeze	Squeeze your horse hard with your knees.
Arm Straight	Position of your arm should be straight back with the stick holding vertically.
Half Seat	Rise up from the horse and position yourself in half seat position.
Stick	Never hold stick downwards. Hold it right in front of you and hold it above your hands.
Slow	Swinging should be done in slow motion to hit the ball.
Follow Through	Follow through with straight arm and at the end just break your wrist.
Shoulders	Position of your shoulders should be parallel to the horse.

Stopping the Horse

Stopping your running horse is also an art that requires little bit of practise only. When you feel like stopping the horse. Just lean back slowly and apply a little pressure on the mouth of the horse by pulling it backwards. This will help the horse to recollect himself and with the help of his back leg, he will begin to stop.

Now pulling the reins close to your chest, squeeze the horse with your knees with your feet going forward. In between keep giving a firm and gentle touch on the mouth of your horse. Some riders use both of their hands to stop the horse. Some even use their stick hand to pull the reins, thereby correctly stopping the horse.

Horses run with massive speed. So while stopping, they use maximum of their energy. Therefore; in many professional matches 10 stops maximum are allowed per chukka. So, unless it is important do not build a practise habit of stopping your horse again and again. Instead you can go for a gentle turn.

Turning the Horse

The process of slowing down the horse by putting the back legs underneath is known as collecting the horses. Before turning the horse, it is important to collect them. During the course of fast running if you will try to turn your horse, then it will take a long time to stop and in worst case it may slip also.



Therefore, it is a wise practise to slow down your horse gradually before turning. Look back to the spot you want to turn towards and your horse will follow you. But if you look at your horse then the funny thing is that he will also look back at you and the whole turning process will go in vain.

3. Polo – Terms

Generally, there are two types of polo horses used in the competition. One is Argentina Criolla type and another one is Thoroughbred type. The former one is very steady and can turn very easily. Due to strong physique Argentina Criolla type horses get injured very rarely. Whereas thoroughbred type horses are very fast but are not that much strong as Argentina Criolla.

Terms Related to Polo Horse

The following terms are related to Polo horse.

Bits

This is a kind of metallic structure used in the mouth of horse. There are two types of Bits which are Gag bit and Pelham bit. Gag bit is the circular bit used at the side of the horse to pull the head up during stopping. Pelham is nothing but a lever and chain arrangement that is used to pull the head down while stopping.

Martingale

This is nothing but one kind of strap that goes from bridle to the girth. Using this the rider can be assured of not getting hit by the head of the horse. Neither too much tightening nor loosening should be done. During rest position, it should be present firmly just below the neck of the horse.

Girth

This is used to hold the saddle on the horse. Tightening should be done in such a manner that, only two fingers can go inside it at a time. Before riding a horse checking the tightness of the girth is primary and necessary to avoid any future accidents.

Reins

To control the horses, reins are used. These are positioned in between the riders' hand and the saddle. Another purpose of the reins is to keep the head of the horse down.

Terms Related to Polo

The following terms are related to the game of Polo.

Line of the Ball

This is a line which is present at the hitting position of the ball and the destination. Line of the ball should not be crossed during the hitting process because it will cause a major foul.

Right of Way

This is different than Line of ball. While you are in the line of the ball you have a right of way in front of you. Line of the ball may change after hitting the ball but the right of way will be the same at that moment. During this time however, you cannot hit the ball.



Foul

If you cross the right of way of another player, then foul occurs. Some other most common fouls are:

- Riding into another player's swing
- Hooking above the shoulder
- Playing on the wrong side of the horse
- Standing on the way of the ball

Line-Man-Ball

This is one of the most basic rule that every rider should keep in his mind while playing polo. Do not go for chasing the ball at all. Your primary aim should be to join the line first. After joining the line, you can take a man. After joining the line and engaging the man you can finally look over to hit the ball. So keep this simple formula in mind "Line-Man-Ball".

Take a Man

Principle of polo says that in the field if you are finding yourself alone, then you definitely do not know how to play it. In the field always try to take a man. With open mind first find a man and ride your horse close to him. By pulling over the reins make sure that you are taking your horse close to that man. Now try to take your knees in front of him. This is the best way to help your team by controlling your man.

Tactics in Polo

Below are some of the tactics which a player shall learn while playing polo

Hit to the Right

During the time of approaching a defending player you should hit the ball to the right. By doing this he has to wait for you. Wait for him to make a foul or else go on again for hitting the ball.

Playing Diagonals

Polo is all about judging the angles. Running straight down the field should be avoided. Instead go towards the right hand side of the field so that your teammate can pass the ball to you. In some cases, if the left is open then the ball can also be passed to the left. From one end towards the board the ball moves in a diagonal pattern.

Train Formation

Between each player of your team an equal distance should be maintained. Number three can pass to number two and similar manner number two can pass to number one. In case one misses in the front, another will be at the back side. Number four should be at the back side of the train. By going over the ball you have two options:

- Go ahead of the pass in case you are up front.
- If you are at the middle or back, circle yourself to the left and join the train again.

4. Polo – Rules

The rules of Polo are decided by International Federation of Polo. Let's know the rules relating to various aspects of Polo.



Teams and Players

- The total number of players is limited to four in each team.
- The host country will decide the rules and regulations under the guidance of a proper governing body.
- Players should hold the stick in their right hand.
- If under doping test anybody is found to be using drugs, then he may not be allowed to participate in the game anymore.
- A handicap can participate in the game if it is under permissible limit.

Equipment

- For safety purpose, the players must wear protective headgear with a chinstrap.
- Equipment like sharp spurs, knee guards, studs on the boots are not allowed.
- Both the teams must wear different colour shirts.
- The list of allowed instruments do vary from country to country depending upon their rules created by the governing body.

Ponies

- Height is not a constraint for any pony to play in a match of Polo.
- If the pony is partially blind, then he will not be allowed.
- A pony is allowed in the game if he is properly controlled.
- Once a pony is playing for a particular team, then he cannot play for any other team in that same championship.
- For safety purpose, bandage on all the four legs is compulsory.
- Any instrument that obstructs the vision of the pony is not allowed.
- If any part of the body of pony shows blood, then he should be immediately removed from that match.
- No lame pony is allowed to play in the match.
- The umpires take the responsibility to remove any pony from the game.

5. Polo – Championships

Federation of International Polo is the governing body of Polo. Every participating country has its own governing body to organize the game successfully throughout the calendar.

Here is a list of some important tournaments held in Polo:

- World Polo Tournaments
- Land Rover International Polo Tournament
- Argentina Open Polo Tournament
- High Goal Polo Tournaments
- US open Polo Championship

A brief synopsis of some of the champions of Polo and their careers is given below:

Gonzalo Pieres Jr.

Pieres is a professional Polo player from Argentina with a 10-goal handicap. He is the eldest son of Polo legend Gonzalo Pieres Sr. Currently he is ranked number two in Polo. In 1999, he made his debut in Argentine Open. Pieres has won Polo tournaments in England, Spain, and France.

Carlos Gracida

Gracida was a Mexican polo player. Just at the age of 25, he reached 10-goal handicap. Chesney was the most famous horse of Carlos who won best pony awards many times. In a match injury, he died on 25th February 2015.

In 1994, Gracido won almost every possible tournament in Polo, including the Argentinian Triple Crown of Hurlingham, Tortuguitas and Palermo. In the same year, he also won the US Open and the British Open Gold Cup

Mariano Aguerre

He is a professional Polo player from Argentina. He also plays for the United States. In 1994, he achieved 10-goal handicap in US and in 1998, he repeated the same feat in Argentina. He has won Argentina Open 9 times. Currently Aguerre is serving as a coach.

He has won some of the most prestigious U.S. tournaments multiple times, including the C.V. Whitney (6 times) and the U.S. Open (2 times). In 2006, he was named "Best Mounted Player" in Palm Beach.