

ESSENTIAL TIPS

Justo del Carril

POLO





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
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HISTORY OF THE GAME

Many nations from modern day Iran to Mongolia claim that their forefathers invented the sport. The earliest known record is around 600 BC., with Persian noblemen engaged in a sport which is intricately described in old text, making polo the oldest team sport in the world. Persian military prowess took its armies throughout the lands of Central Asia, spreading their skill and coordination. Polo was brought to the West from India during the 19th Century when the officer class of the British Army began playing the game.

Polo has changed over the centuries. Today the sport is much safer than the rough-and-ready contest of the past. There are more rules and better organization, but what has not changed is its elitist nature. Polo conjures up images of high society mixing to enjoy afternoons of chukkas on the lawns at Windsor, (polo's smartest address) and the lush green pampas of Argentina.

Even though it has traditionally been played by the landed gentry, polo has become so socially desirable that the sport's high expenses are often sponsored by international companies and their luxury brands.



Introduction

Polo, the sport of kings and the king of sports. It is elegant, exclusive and dangerous. But, like many other sports, it is also becoming more popular. More and more people want to give it a try. If you are one of those people, this book will help you get started, learn the basics of the game and hopefully help you become a better player.

THE PLAYERS

Each team consists of four mounted players. Player Number 1 is expected to score the goals and carry out an offensive position. Number 2 is also an offensive player, but has to be more aggressive with the responsibility of the defensive plays of the opponents.

Number 3 is the pivot player, and is usually the long ball hitter and playmaker who takes the penalty shots for the team. The number 4, or back, is the defensive player whose primary function is to guard the goal and keep the opponents from scoring.

Each player in polo is rated with a handicap. This system is organized and maintained by regional and national committees of different polo associations. Players are rated with a handicap from -2 to 10. The higher the handicap, the better the player. A rating of 10 goals is the pinnacle of polo prowess. The term goal is a players' rating, not to be confused with how many goals he or she will score in a match. The four players' handicaps are totaled to arrive at the team handicap. Four 3 goal players make a 12 goal team. A player's handicap is based on horsemanship, quality of horses, hitting, team play, and game sense.

THE FIELD

The playing field is 300 yards long and 160 yards wide, the approximate area of nine football fields. The playing field is carefully maintained with closely mowed turf, providing a safe and fast surface. The goal posts are set 8 yards apart on each end of the field. Sideboards that are 8 to 11 inches high line the sidelines,

THE EQUIPMENT

Mallet shafts are made from rotan manau, which provides flexibility, and most mallet heads are made from wood of the tipa tree. The mallets come in lengths of 48 to 54 inches and selection is made according

to the height of the pony being played. The ball is struck with the side of the mallet head, not with the end. The ball is made from bamboo, willow root, or synthetic materials. It measures 3 1/2 inches in diameter and weighs about 4 1/2 ounces. All players must wear protective helmets with a chinstrap. Some players wear face masks and knee pads. The mounts are provided with bandages on the front, and sometimes rear legs. The polo ponies will have their tails braided or tied to minimize interference in making various shots.

THE GAME

Play commences when a mounted umpire bowls the ball between the players who line up opposite each other at center field. The game consists of six chukkers, or periods, each lasting seven minutes. Play is continuous and is only stopped for penalties, broken tack (equipment), or injury to a horse or player. The object is to score goals by hitting the ball between the goal posts, no matter how high in the air. If the ball goes wide of the goal, the defensive team is awarded a free knock-in from where the ball crossed the end line, thus putting the ball back into play. Teams will switch ends after every goal to minimize any wind, turf or sun advantage that may exist. There are two mounted umpires who officiate the match while a referee on the sidelines makes all final decisions concerning penalties or infractions of the rules. Penalty shots can be taken from the spot of the foul, from mid-field or from 30, 40 or 60 yards from the goal.

THE MOUNT

Today, most polo mounts stand around 15 hands, or five feet at the shoulder, and are as fast as racehorses. The term “pony” is a holdover from the sport’s earliest days, when less powerful horses were used. A polo pony has got to run as fast as he can, but he has also got to be able to stop, turn and start up again, for seven minutes straight. As far as animals go, the polo pony has got to be the best athlete of them all. Each pony plays one or, at the most, two chukkers, so players usually need six or seven mounts. A collection of polo ponies is called a string.

England, Argentina, Australia and the USA are the countries where polo is played most prominently, but in reality it is played in over 150 countries around the world, including the UAE, Oman, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, and Egypt – not forgetting India and Pakistan, of course.

Clothing & Equipment



1. CLOTHING AND EQUIPMENT

1.1 Essential Equipment

Helmets

The two most common types of helmet are those with a protective mask which keeps balls and mallets from hitting your face, and those without a mask.



(Be sure that you buy or have a helmet that satisfies the standard method of impact test and performance requirements for polo helmets.)



Knee guards

They provide good protection against bumps, mallet hooks, etc. Use them all the time as you never know when you will get hit



Boots

Choose boots that are comfortable and strong. They should be brown and knee high.



1. CLOTHING AND EQUIPMENT

1.2. Proper Clothing

Practice t-shirts

Always carry at least three different colored t-shirts for practice games so as to be able to recognize your teammates.



White pants

Usually, white jeans are worn, but you can use white britches or any other kind of riding pants, as long as they are white. This is part of the strong tradition of polo.



Game t-shirts

You should always have four t-shirts, one for each teammate, with the position number on the back. It is recommended to have an extra t-shirt with no number in case one is ruined or you need to replace an injured player.



Chaps

Chaps can be used when working the horses and for practice games.



1. CLOTHING AND EQUIPMENT

1.3. Players' Accesories

Gloves for grip

The purpose of gloves is to improve adhesion to the grip of the mallet. A lot of players like to wear gloves on both hands. Some don't wear them at all. If you do, make sure to have more than one pair in your bag so that you can change them if they get sweaty.



Wrist support

Wrist bands are usually good not only for support but also for protection when you get hooked by another player's mallet, which happens often throughout the game.



Mallet bag

A convenient item for travelling. It keeps mallets together as well as preventing them from bending and breaking.



Helmet bag

Make sure it is big enough to fit not only your helmet, but your boots and knee guards as well. It's good to have all your equipment together.



Whips

Always come in handy for long runs down the field.



Polo spurs

Spurs should only be used by experienced riders. Your horse will perform better without spurs than with them if you use them incorrectly.



Foot mallet

Foot mallets are good for warming up the shoulder muscles and arms before the game.



Balls

It is always good to carry 3 or 4 balls in your polo bag, so if you arrive at the polo field early, you can stick and ball and warm up before the game.



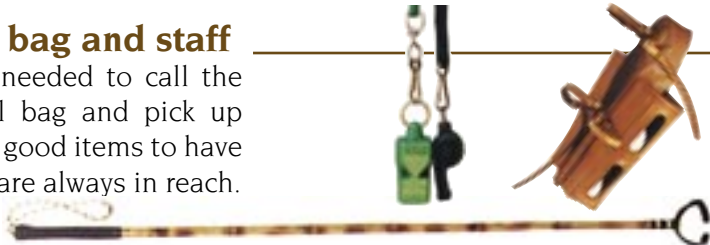
Umpire's t-shirt

It is always good to have a black and white striped referee t-shirt, or overshirt. This also comes in handy in winter or on rainy days to be recognized as the umpire.



Whistle, ball bag and staff

A whistle is needed to call the shots. A ball bag and pick up stick are also good items to have so that balls are always in reach.



NOTE Remember that when you umpire you'll need to wear white pants to look appropriate.

1. CLOTHING AND EQUIPMENT

1.4. Equipment Maintenance

1 Clean boots and leather parts as soon as you can after playing so that the salt of the horses' sweat won't damage them.

2 Straighten and hang your mallets after every game.



3 Those helmets that are stitched can be washed in the dishwasher. The ones that are glued will come apart, so it is better to wash them by hand.

4 Let gloves and helmet dry after each game before putting them away in a bag.



5

Try keeping your mallets always in the shade. The high temperatures and humidity can negatively affect the cane. When stored, they should always be hung upside down, not lying or piled on the floor or in the trunk of your car.



6

If you stick and ball a lot early in the morning, when there is still dew on the grass, you should tape the head of some of your mallets with any kind of tape, so they don't absorb the humidity in the ground and don't crack as fast.



7

Once your mallet heads start looking cracked and worn, send them in to be changed. The mallet will not lose any of the qualities it had before.





Before every game, check that your mallets are in good shape, not loose in the head. Do this by holding your mallet firm by the grip, and turn the head with your other hand to see if you feel it loose. Playing with a loose mallet head will make you lose your accuracy because the head will rotate at contact changing the direction of the ball.

It is very important that you have your grips in good condition so that they feel rough. When grips get old, ripped and sticky, that's when it's time to send them in to be changed and fixed.

1. CLOTHING AND EQUIPMENT

1.5. Horse Equipment

Saddles

There are two main types of saddles to choose from: the standard saddle and the suede saddle, which makes some riders feel more grip to the seat of the saddle. They also vary in size, from 16 to 19 inches, for different sized riders.



Stirrups irons

There are three main types of stirrups:

1 The endurance stirrup which has a wide platform.



2 The traditional stainless steel stirrup.



3 The break-away stirrup: the foot frees better in case of fall.



Girth

Leather or fabric, make sure they are always in good condition so that they don't rip.



Overgirth

This piece can save your life – if the girth happens to break, it will still hold the saddle in place.



Saddle blanket

The saddle blanket protects the horse's back from the saddle and the saddle from the horse's sweat. It also makes the horse's attire look more complete.



Full bridle

You will need these to put your bits together. Keep them clean and conditioned for a smoother ride.



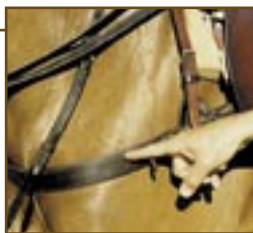
Stirrup leather

Make sure they are made from strong leather because you will be putting a lot of pressure on them, standing and swinging. Some stirrups are made of buffalo leather which is stronger.



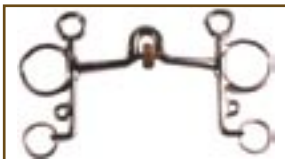
Breast plate

This piece of equipment stops the saddle from moving back, therefore keeping your horse's withers sound, and the saddle always in the same position.



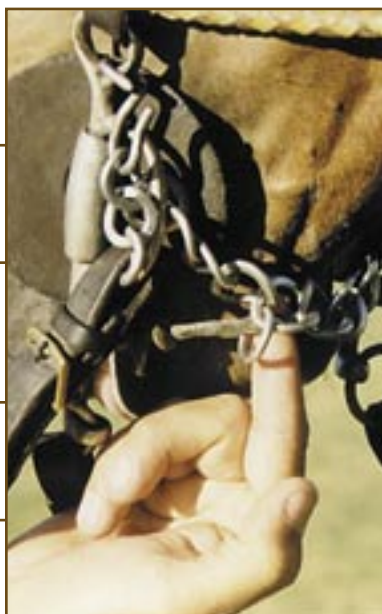
Bits

Each horse needs a different one. Make sure they are complete for proper function. Here are the most commonly seen bits.



Curb chains

They go on the bit and are very important to be able to stop the horse.



Rubber bit guards

They protect the mouth of the horse.

Lip strap

Keeps the bit in place so it doesn't turn over and the horse doesn't run away.

Halter

You will need them to keep your horses tied up. There are many models, made from leather to plastic.



Muzzle

Used to keep the horses from eating shavings in the stalls.



Hoof protector

These are good to use because they absorb a lot of impact. For example, balls and mallets hitting the horses legs, and other horses stepping on each other during hard bumps.



Wraps

They come in different colors, and you must use them to protect your horses when they get hit in the legs.



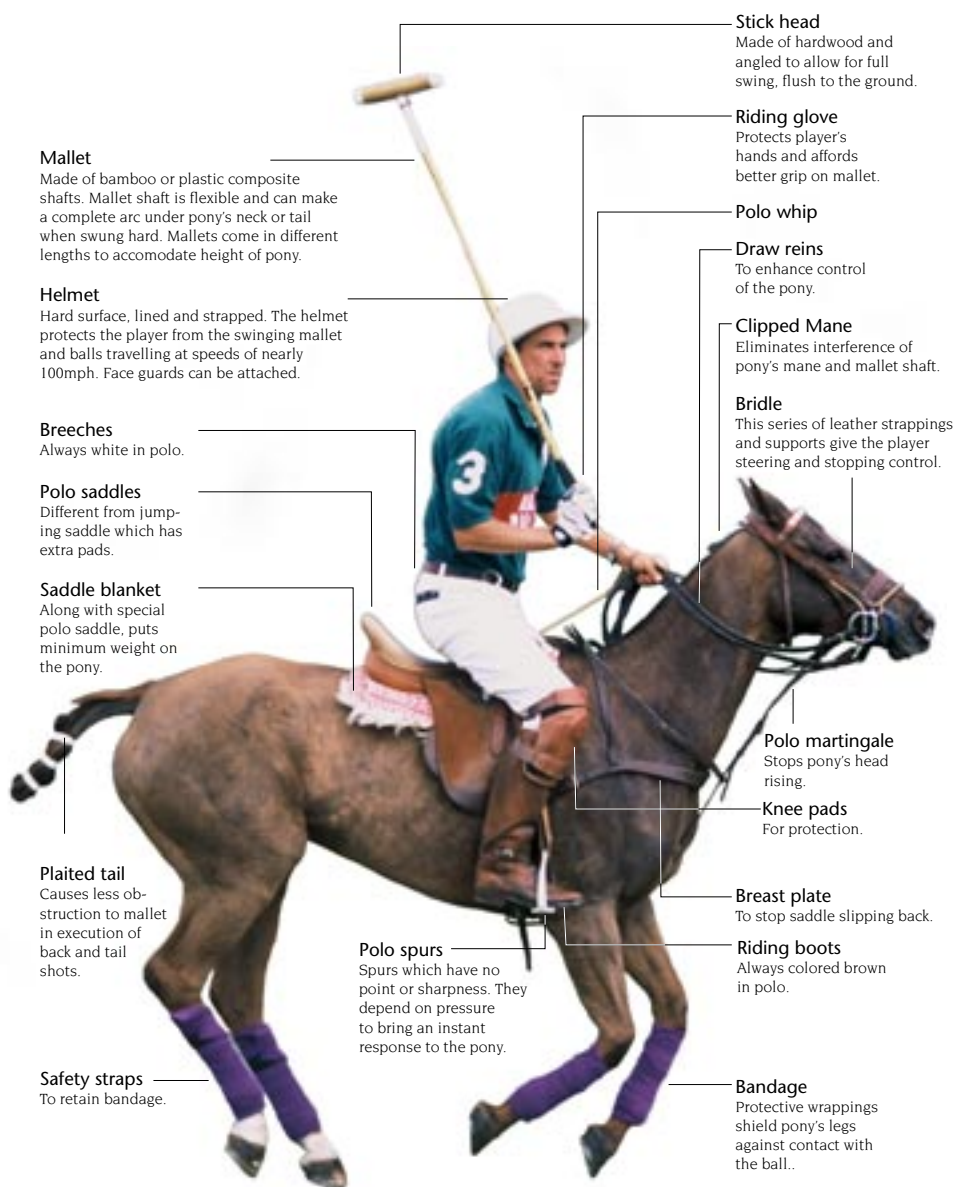
Vinyl tape

Used to wrap the horses tails. If you don't wrap them, you might miss the ball because your own horse hooks you.



Complete polo equipment

You and your horse should be fully equipped.





The Mallet



2. The Mallet

2.1. The Mallet

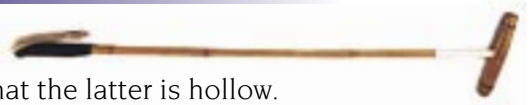
MALLETS

Mallets vary in length, weight and flexibility. The length depends on the size of the horse the player is riding. The weight and flexibility depend on the strength of the player to swing the mallet and hit the ball. Mallets have a sling, a grip, a cane and a head.

CANE

The cane of the mallet is made of manao cane, similar to bamboo cane except that the latter is hollow.

This cane has joints usually about 10 inches apart. Players always like to check to see how many joints the cane has, but this does not change the quality of the cane. It might, however, make it stiffer or more flexible.



HEAD

The head is made from a type of wood called TIPA, only found in Argentina. The players' initials are stamped on the head, and they can be painted any color.



SLING

The sling is a cotton string that helps keep the mallet steady in the hand, so if one happens to open the hand, the mallet doesn't just fall to the ground.

GRIP

A rugged rubber strip that can change in width depending on the size of our hands.

NOTE: *Mallets can be fixed, wherever it is they break. Heads can be changed. Canes can be split and fixed and still maintain the same length. Not only is this cheaper, but you will be able to keep that cane you like so much.*

2. The Mallet

2.2. What to look for in a Mallet

Mallets, just like tennis raquets and golf clubs, have to suit each player differently depending on his or her style and level of play.



1 MANAU CANE OR GRAPHITE CANE?

Some players use graphite in hot and humid climates because they maintain their consistency, which the manau cane loses when its natural fibers absorb humidity. However, graphite cane can cause tennis elbow as graphite doesn't absorb shock. Manau cane has been used for over 2000 years and is still used today by the majority of polo players in the world.

2 FLEXIBILITY

When choosing a cane, ask about or feel its flexibility, that is, how much it bends. A stiff mallet suits a player with a strong and powerful swing. A mallet with good consistency and resistance for the average player should weigh 520 grams, from which the cane is 320 grams and the head 200 grams. Flex or light mallets, usually made for women and children, are good for better control. However, the weight in these mallets should shift down to the head, at least 190 grams, for a stronger hit of the ball. Hold the mallet in front of you: can you feel the weight of the cane head responding? If so, that flex should suit you.

3 DIFFERENT KINDS OF Mallet HEAD

There are four main types of mallet head:

1. **OVO or Royal Polo Navy Association:** this is a head that a lot of #4 players like to use because it has more loft.

2. **Skene:** this head is similar to the RPNA, but its bottom is flat. This head also has more loft.

3. **Standard:** this is the most popular head used. It is 45 mm in circumference and 240 mm long.

4. **Override.** This is the biggest head there is, used lately by many pros because it has more hitting surface. However, these heads crack or break easily because the wood is softer so as to maintain the weight.



The weight of the heads varies between 160 and 230 grams. A standard mallet will weigh approximately 520 grams. You should always look for mallets that have a weight you can control. For beginners, who tend to stop their swing at the moment of impact (giving the impression they are only dragging the ball), the best kind of mallet is one with most of its weight in the head, making the swing go faster and moving the ball further.

4 DIFFERENT GRIPS

There are four grip sizes: from 1 (for children) to 4 for big hands.

1. very small, fit small children's hands.

2. a size that fits most women and players with small hands.

3. standard size, the most common grip.

4. big grip for those players with big hands.



The Grip

3. The Grip

3.1. Understanding the Grip

There is only one way to grip the mallet to be able to control all the different angles and shots. Your effectiveness will depend on wrist movements during the shots. You do not change the position of your grip when you hit a back shot and the position of the index finger is very important when holding the mallet.



Here are different tips that might help you with your grip:

1. The middle joints of the fingers should be holding the mallet in order for the palm to be pointing at the target at the moment of impact.



2. Think of your grip as if you are holding a gun. The index finger is in the trigger position

3. Also, imagine shaking hands with a friend. It is the same position that you can use to grip the mallet.



If you are also a golf player, try using the same grip technique as in golf.

First, grab the mallet grip with both hands as you would grab the golf club.

Then, slide both hands up toward the top end of the mallet grip.

Finally, let the left hand go. Your right hand will be left in the exact position you need for a good polo grip. Practice this way as many times until you get the feeling of a proper grip.



3.2. Grip Pressure

Control is transmitted to the mallet head through your hands, but for this to be effective, your wrist and lower arm must have the correct tension. Muscle strength has relatively little to contribute to this. In reality, exactly the opposite applies. The wrist, the lower arm and the hand must collectively transmit power from the larger muscles in the back and shoulder to the mallet head within a free wheeling action. This swing will require a right grip pressure.



HOW MUCH PRESSURE?

You must use the same amount of pressure you would use to squeeze tooth paste out of the tube.



It would also be like holding a pigeon. If your grip is too tight, you can hurt it, but if it's too loose, it will fly away



3. The Grip

3.3. Grip Size

WHEN THE GRIP IS TOO SMALL

The hand easily closes around the grip but the fingers dig into the palm. At impact, the mallet head may rotate, specially off center contact.



WHEN THE GRIP IS TOO BIG

This can cause a lack of control, and the wrist action in the swing will be inhibited. You will also have to grip too tightly to hold the mallet.



WHEN THE GRIP IS SUITABLE FOR YOU

The middle two fingers cosily fold around the grip when the grip thickness is ideal. The fingertips just meet the fleshy part of the palm, just beneath the thumb.



Note:: Once you determine which grip size suits you, make sure to have all your mallets made or fixed to that size.

3.4. Testing Your Grip

The grip must be **light** not **tight**. A light grip enables you to make a free uninhibited swing in order to achieve head speed. To get used to the correct grip, suspend the mallet from the heel of your hand and into the INDEX finger. You will feel the weight of the head, yet the mallet will be securely placed. then just wrap the other fingers around the handle.



TOO STRONG

A strong grip will interfere with the natural swing because the arm muscles will be tight too, so therefore you restrict wrist action and shoulder rotation. If the grip is too tight you will not be able to feel the rotation of the shoulder and the swing will be mechanical and not natural. Remember that a good swing has speed, not power, and putting too much pressure on the grip will make you lose speed.



TOO LIGHT

This isn't good because the mallet will rotate in your hand at the moment of impact, changing the direction and distance of the shot.

Note: You can release grip tension by releasing pressure from the ring finger, this way all the arm muscles will be more relaxed.

3. The Grip

3.5. The Sling

Someone put this piece of cotton on the mallet grips many years ago, so we had to find out how and why to use it.



1 We hang the mallet from the base of the thumb with the sling crossing the back of the hand.



2 We twist it around so that the sling shortens, and becomes firm around the hand.



3 We turn our hand clockwise and wrap it around the grip.



It is important to use the sling correctly for the following reasons:

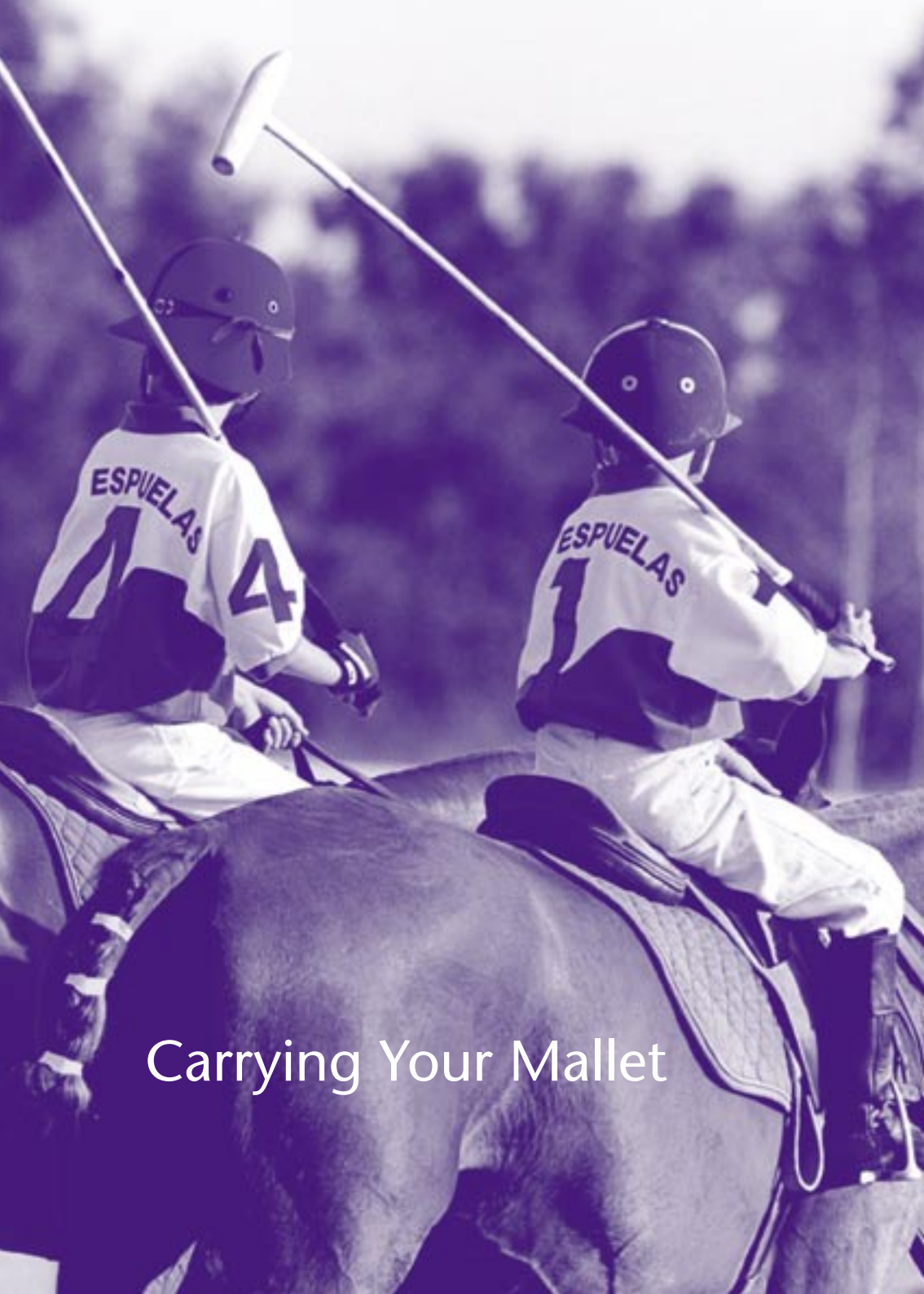
-If you open your hand too much when you hit the ball or hook another player, the mallet will not fall off your hand.

-It will help you not to hold the grip too tightly because you will feel the sling wrapped around your hand and therefore know the mallet is not coming loose.

-When you are running up and down the field, you don't have to waste your strength keeping the mallet in position because it can be almost entirely held by the sling. Just let the grip go and allow the mallet to lean against your hand, held in place by the sling. This way, you will save the strength of your hand, wrist and arm for when it's needed – to hit the ball, hook and so on.

How many times have we heard players complaining about their tired arms, when they've only hit the ball a couple of times during the chukker? That's because they were using their hand, arm and forearm muscles to hold the mallet straight. Make sure this doesn't happen to you, and remember to relax your arm when you're not hitting the ball or hooking another player.





Carrying Your Mallet

4. Carrying your Mallet

4.1. How to carry your mallet

WRONG WAYS OF CARRYING YOUR Mallet

In this picture, the player is holding the mallet incorrectly because he is using the strength from his forearm to keep it up. It is important for you to find a way of keeping the mallet up without using your strength. Your arm should be resting or at least in a relaxed position.



The “flag” position also makes you use strength uselessly when you hold the mallet up. It is very important to try and find a position in which you can maintain your shoulder muscles relaxed so as to keep an easy flowing swing



Try not to get in the habit of holding your mallet down because it will take you much longer to get ready for a proper swing when you come into play and need to hit the ball.

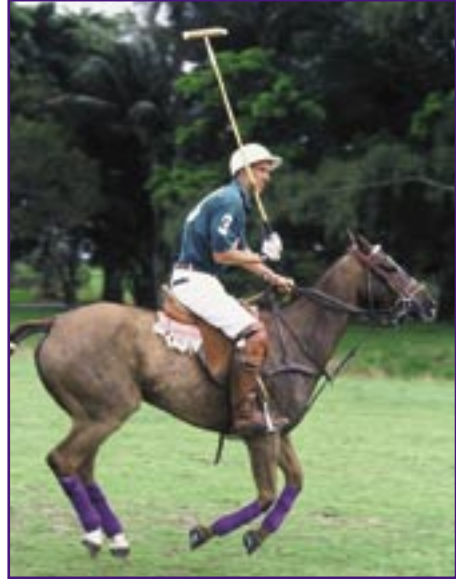


4. Carrying your Mallet

RIGHT WAYS OF CARRYING YOUR Mallet

This is the most common and proper way of holding up your mallet – resting on your shoulder.

It is important to carry the mallet with the head facing upwards. That way you will always be ready for your next shot.



Another good way of holding the mallet up is to rest it against the web of the hand. The web is the space between the thumb and the index finger. You will find that your arm will not be as tired after a few chukkers.





The Reins

5. The Reins

5.1. How to hold the reins

It is always good to use two pairs of reins because you never know when one pair might break. The second pair will always come in handy to stop the horse if this is the case.

These are the different ways to hold reins:

1 This is the most common way. The top pair of reins are placed between the thumb and the index fingers. The bottom pair go between the index and the middle finger.



2 The top pair of reins come around the index finger and the palm of the hand. The bottom pair of reins come around the little finger and the palm.



3 In this case, the left top rein goes in between the little finger and the ring finger, and the right top rein goes between the thumb and the index finger. Both bottom reins go between the middle finger and the index finger.



4 This is a good way to hold the reins together with the whip, so you won't have to worry about dropping it. When you need to use the whip, just switch the reins to your other hand.





TEAM
GALAPAGO

3

The Whip

6. The Whip

6.1. How to Carry the Whip

HOW TO CARRY YOUR WHIP

I recommend that you get used to carrying a whip from the start. The whip will not hurt the horse. On the contrary, when used properly, it enhances the horse's performance.

HERE ARE DIFFERENT WAYS OF CARRYING A WHIP:

TRADITIONAL:

This is the most commonly seen form of holding a whip. However, if it falls out of your hand and is hanging from your wrist, it is difficult to get a hold of it as quickly as needed.



AN IDEA THAT WORKS:

This is a very practical way to carry your whip as you will not have to worry about dropping it or getting it in position. It will always be ready.

- 1 Make a loop with the leather handle.



- 2 Slip your hand into the loop.



- 3 That's it, your whip is perfectly secure.



OTHER WAYS:

You will see many players carrying the whip without the leather strap. I do not recommend this because you will probably spend a lot of time getting on and off your horse if you drop it. It will fall when you need it the most – that's Murphy's Law.



You must pay attention to the position of your whip. It should not interfere with your swing.

In position #1

As you can see, the whip is in between the knee and the horse, allowing the swing to pass through.



In position #2

The whip is getting in the way of the swing, which is exactly what we should avoid.



In this picture we can see that the whip is next to the players' knee without interfering with the back shot.





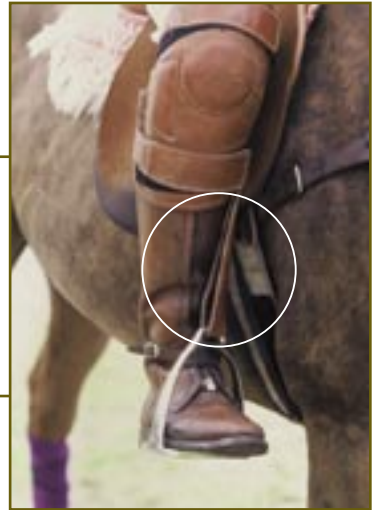
The Stirrups

7. The Stirrups

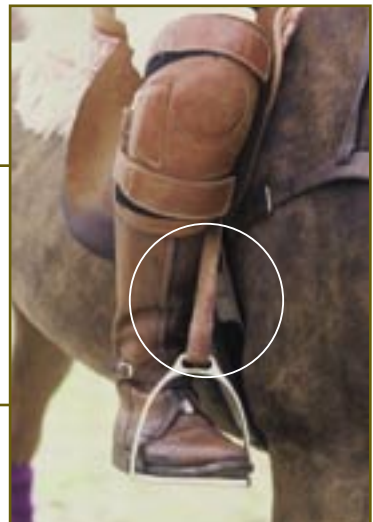
7.1. Leather Stirrups

It is important to understand how to use your stirrups in order to control your balance on the saddle.

Be sure that your leather stirrups are always in good condition. When you put your foot in the stirrup make sure the leather is in the right position .



This is what you don't want happening to you. The edge of the leather is rubbing against the boot instead of being flat against it.



7. The Stirrups

7.2. Stirrup Length

How long are your stirrups supposed to be?

This is one of the most common questions asked by beginners. But before explaining the pros and cons of long or short stirrups, I recommend you try feeling safe first, and then change their length to see which is better for your game.

The first step is to learn how to measure the stirrup according to your height.

1. The most common way to measure stirrup length is to stand next to your horse with your palm against the saddle at the point where the stirrups are sewn. Your stirrups are the right length when the iron fits against your armpit.



2. When standing up straight in your stirrups your fist should fit between your crotch and the saddle if they are set at the correct length.

None of these methods are exact but they can be pretty accurate.



It has been said that if you're slow, you should "ride short" and if you're out of timing, you should "ride long".

SHORT

If you use the stirrups too short, you will have less knee and thigh contact with the saddle. This will make you lose your balance easily, hold the reins too short, and limit your upper body movement.



LONG

If you are too deep in the saddle, when the horse stops and starts you will move back and forth as you do not have a good stand on your "irons". Your legs won't be able to grip to the saddle. This also makes it difficult to move around on the saddle to hit different shots and, therefore, limits your reach.



STANDARD

This seems like a good stirrup length for this player.



The Swing



8. The Swing

8.1. Swing Definition & Set Up

How much do you really need to know about the polo swing in order to play your best polo?

BY DEFINITION:

A swing is a fluid motion. As soon as you attempt to break all of its points down into perfect positions, you cease to be an athlete.

THE SETUP

If you can start from a quality setup position, then you are likely to make a good swing.

1 Good Grip:

You must hold or grip your mallet properly, as you learned in the previous chapter.

2 Good Posture:

Your legs should keep a strong grip on the saddle so that your upper body is held in balance.

3 Proper Aim:

You must aim properly.

4 Good eye Contact:

Always keep your eye on the ball!



THE FINISH

There is not one sport that can be performed well from an off balance position. When you finish hitting the ball, all your body weight should be leaning forward.



When you finish off-balance your upper body will be coming back to the saddle before you hit the ball. That will take all the power away from the shot and eliminate your chances of making proper contact with the ball.



To correct this, start the motion of your swing in a seated position. This means that you have to start standing up and leaning forward when the mallet is parallel to the ground or passing shoulder level. This way you will spend less time standing up trying to keep your balance. The idea is to use all the power of your upper body as its weight shifts forward at the moment of impact.

8. The Swing

A GOOD SWING



- 1) *Arm straight.*
- 2) *Left shoulder aiming at the ball (doing this will create good rotation)*
- 3) *The knees are gripping the lower body to the saddle, yet letting the upper body move freely.*

I believe, like I've said before, that balance is very important, and to get balance you must feel safe in the saddle. If you don't feel safe when you stand up to make a shot, you will lose your balance automatically, either missing the ball or hitting it wrongly.



HERE ARE SOME TIPS TO THINK ABOUT

- 1 - Firm grip on the saddle.
- 2- Eyes looking down to fully view the ball.
- 3- Chest facing forward, NOT down to the ground.
- 4- Don't let your chin get buried in your chest when looking down at the ball. This will interfere with your swing, not allowing the mallet to follow through.

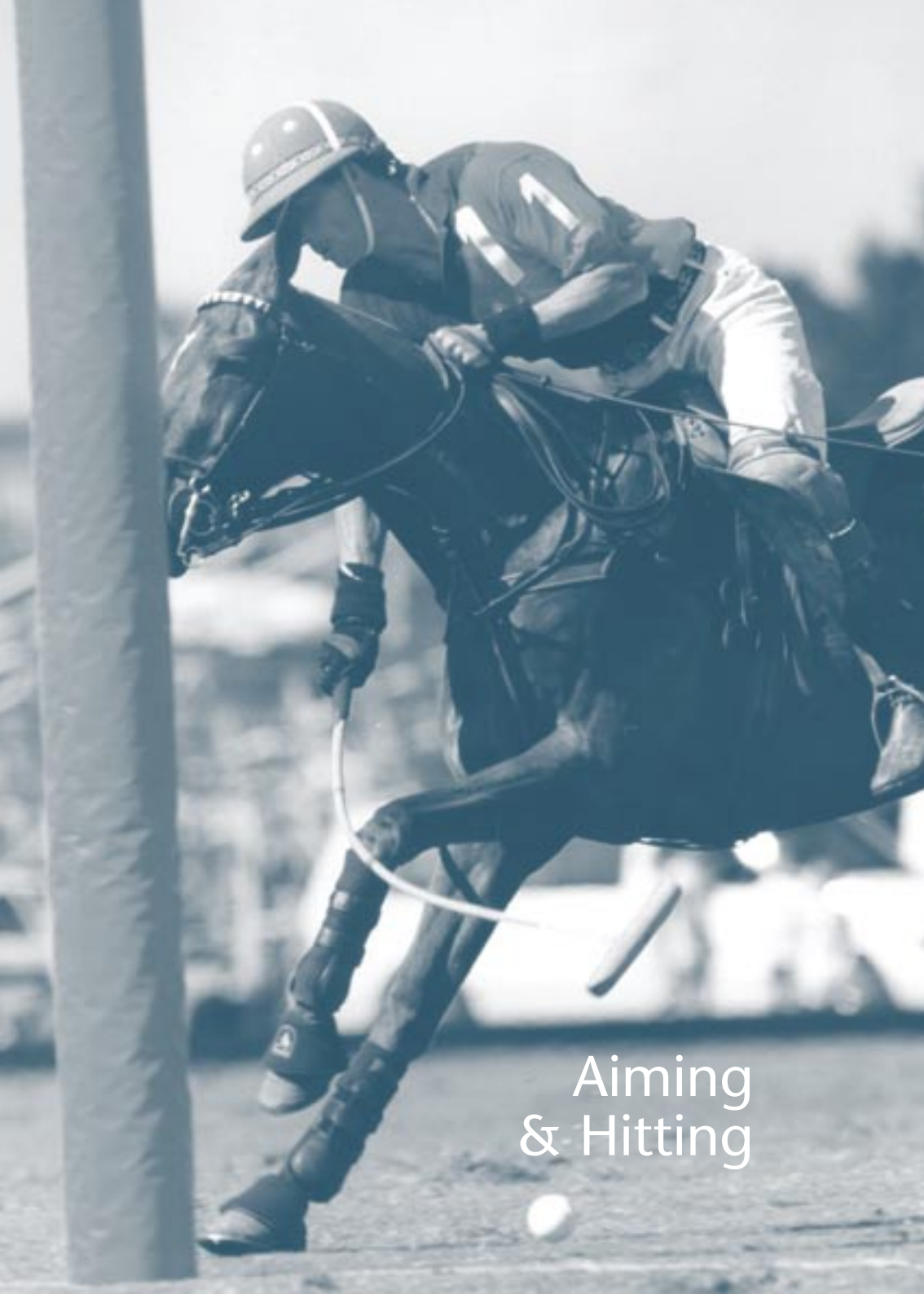
8. The Swing

8.2. Rotation

Your shoulder line should aim between the ears of your horse, so you must turn your shoulders enough to do so.



Rotating enough will allow you to point your left shoulder towards the ball. You don't necessarily have to put your left hand on your horse's neck but if you feel that might help with your balance, do so.



Aiming
& Hitting

9. Aiming & Hitting

9.1. Aiming

When you hit the ball, you always have to try to aim toward a specific point. For example, toward the goal or toward another of our teammates in a pass.

It is very important not to hit the ball just because it's there or because it's "your turn". When you hit the ball just because you can, 90% of the time you will give control to the opposing team.

Concentrate on sending the ball to a specific place. This may seem difficult at first, but will be more satisfactory when achieved and make you a better player.



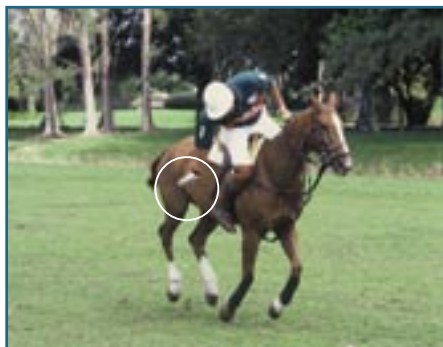
Here are some tips to think about when approaching the ball:

1 Look at the bottom half of the ball instead of the whole ball. When you look at the whole ball you end up topping it.

2 Point your left shoulder at the ball. That way you will execute a proper upper body rotation.



3 If you have the mallet in the right position, it will become an extension of your hand and arm. Therefore, don't think about the mallet. It's too long. Just aim at the ball with the palm of your hand as if you're trying to grab it. With the right grip, the palm of your hand and the mallet head will be lined up.



4 Every time you're going to make a shot, to the goal or to a teammate, you have to look at your target. You then form a picture of the scene in your mind so that you don't have to take your eye off the ball until after you have hit it.



REMEMBER

It's very difficult to see your own goal being converted.

1. *Form a picture in your mind.*
2. *Look at the ball.*
3. *Swing at the ball.*
4. *Keep your head down. Let the flag man let you know it was in. If you do look up before hitting the ball, it's likely you will miss.*

9. Aiming & Hitting

9.2. Hitting

A. Keep your elbow straight all the time. Think of sweeping the floor with your mallet. Your arm should be straight, creating a pendulum motion from the shoulder.

B. Don't let your wrist pass the line drawn between your shoulder and the ball until after hitting it. Don't think of hitting the ball, think of meeting it with your hand. Also, try to control the distance of the shot. You have to place the ball, not just hit it.

C. Your elbow and wrist should be fully extended. After hitting, imagine a string tied from the mallet head to the ball. This will give you more control, helping you follow through and finish the shot with the mallet head pointing towards the target.



TIPS TO KEEP IN MIND

1. Skip a Stone

Think of skipping a stone across the surface of a pond with your right arm. For the stone to skip and not splash, your elbow must lead your wrist in an underarm sweeping motion. Again, this emphasizes the extension and straightening of the right arm through impact.



2. Push a loaf of bread

Imagine trying to put a loaf of bread back together again, slice by slice, straight and in order. This will help you keep your head down and follow through.



3. Paint brush the ground

Imagine that you are painting a white line with your right arm through impact, as if you were trying to extend the line to your target. This encourages a long extension of the right side of your body, following the ball with the mallet head through impact.



9. Aiming & Hitting

9.3. Position of the Ball

It is extremely important that the rider have good posture and balance when attempting to hit the ball.

But it is also very important to have the ball in a good position before hitting it.



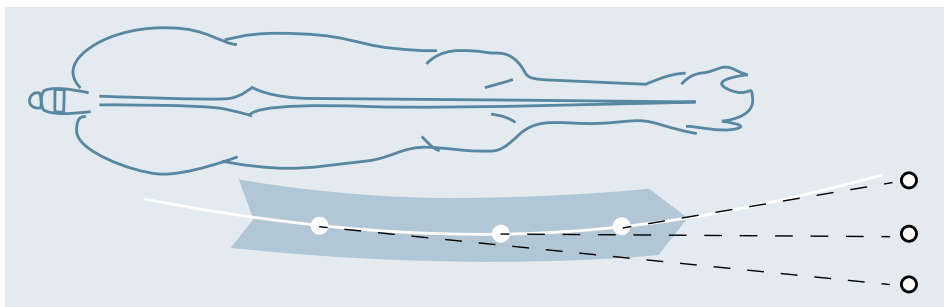
If the player hits the ball when it is ahead of him, in front of the horse's legs, the ball has a tendency to go to the left.



If the player hits the ball when it is almost under his stirrups, the ball will tend to go straight forward.



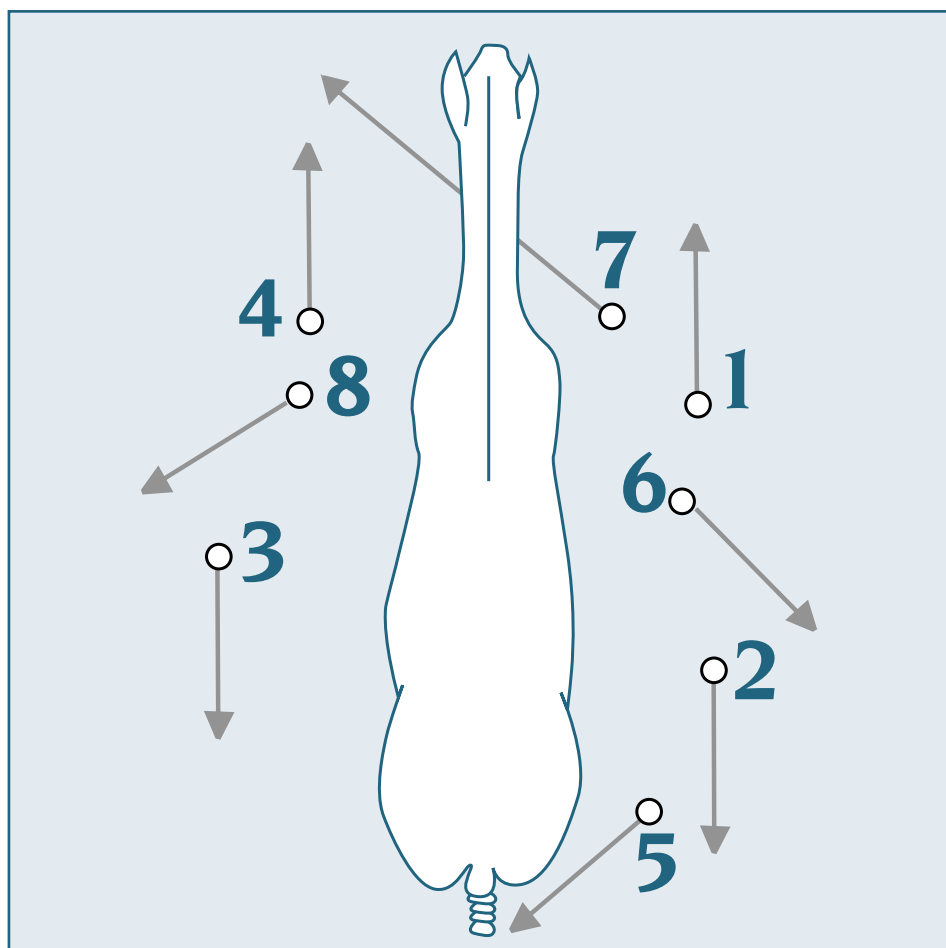
If the player hits the ball when it is behind his legs, it will tend to go to the right.



9. Aiming & Hitting

9.4. Understanding the different kinds of shots

- | | | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. <i>Off-side forward</i> | 2. <i>Off-side back hander</i> | 3. <i>Near-side back hander</i> |
| 4. <i>Near-side forward</i> | 5. <i>Tail shot</i> | 6. <i>Off-side open back hander</i> |
| 7. <i>Neck shot</i> | 8. <i>Near-side open or tail back</i> | |



BACK SHOT

This shot is the exact opposite of the forward shot, which is hit with the palm of the hand. In the back shot, pretend you are hitting with the back of your hand. The mallet should always be pointing toward the target and the elbow should be straight at the moment of impact and during the follow through.



It is very important to be patient when hitting this shot, because the ball must pass the line of your stirrups before you hit it. You also need to be able to rotate your body so as to follow through with your eyes. This will not only give the shot good direction, but will also give it more power, driven by the whole upper body as we see in photo #1. In photo #2 we see that the player just hit the ball, without even looking where it was heading.



When hitting a back shot, you have to decide your next move quickly:

- a. If it turns out to be a good shot and goes to one of our teammates, you have to turn quickly and get into the back of the play, the back of the train.
- b. If you miss or if the ball ends up in the opposing team's hands, you should keep going and quickly get into a defensive position.

Always try giving this shot some kind of angle: either open or tail. If hit straight, it is very likely that the player behind you will stop it. When you hit a tail shot, 90% of the times you create a new line which is taken by the teammate who receives the pass.

TIPS TO KEEP IN MIND

The action of the wrist is similar to that used by someone fly fishing or using a hammer.

1. Fly-Fishing



2. Using a Hammer



TAIL SHOT

The tail shot is a very important defensive shot because most of the time, you should create a new line for one of your teammates. Hit the ball behind the hind legs of your horse, following it through, and being careful not to hit the horse. If you do this correctly, you'll notice you have to use your abdominal muscles to be able to lean back to make the shot, and then forward into the saddle again. You control the angle of the shot with a wrist movement as if you were cutting the ball.



OPEN BACK SHOT

This shot is very similar to the straight back shot, but you must hit the ball at the line of the stirrups, away from the horse. You must turn your wrist as if you were trying to cut the ball.



NEAR SIDE BACK SHOT

During this shot, it is very important to maintain the motion of the mallet throughout the swing. You need to have a good grip on the saddle in order to feel safe enough to rotate your upper body without losing your balance and missing the shot.

This shot is very similar to a tennis serve.



Bring the mallet from above and behind the shoulder and rotate at the moment of impact.

In this shot, again we need to think about meeting the ball with the palm of the hand. It is very important to rotate the upper body and follow the ball through to increase its distance. I like to tell players that they should imagine there is a photographer right behind them who needs to take a picture of their face after they hit the ball, so it is important to rotate and keep looking at the ball even after it's long gone from their side.



THE NECK-SHOT

To make a good neck-shot, you need to understand that if you are trying to hit a 90° shot the swing starts almost at 3 o'clock and finishes at 9 o'clock. Depending on the angle of the shot, the starting and finishing points will change. For example, starting at 4 o'clock and finishing at 10 o'clock, the ball will move off forward and to the left.

It is important to note that this shot doesn't start from behind like a straight shot does. The ball must be at the chest of the horse or just a little to the right of it. It is also important to make a good rotation of the shoulders to execute the shot with power. If the ball is too far to the right of the horse, we won't be able to hit it at the center point of the swing. You also need to lean forward and hit the ball in front of you to keep the front legs of your horse from deflecting the shot.



THE NEAR-SIDE SHOT

When making this shot, you should place 80% of your weight on your left stirrup. It's very important to rotate your upper body and fully extend the elbow at the moment of impact. You should hit the ball when it is in front of your stirrup, following the shot through with a good finish. I like to say that the near-side shot is almost a kind of corrective shot. It is usually just a tap which places you in a comfortable position to start an offside forward shot. However, remember not to get your mallet ready ahead of time on the near side. To achieve a good shot, you need to make a full coordinated swing at once. When aiming for this shot, do it with the back of your hand.



9. Aiming & Hitting

9.5. HOW TO TURN THE BALL

UNDERSTANDING HOW TO TURN THE BALL

Turning the ball is a good play when your teammates are too far back and you know that you won't reach them with your back shot. However, first you must check that you are far enough from your opponent so as not to foul him.



When you start turning the ball, make sure you're holding your reins up, not letting them hang. The reason I say this is that it's important that your horse remain in a collected position to be able to achieve a controlled turn. Otherwise, your turn will be sloppy and you might even run over the ball.



The Hook

10. The Hook

10.1. UNDERSTANDING THE HOOK

Why is hooking important ?

By hooking your opponent's mallet you can prevent him from hitting the ball.

Be sure to be within reach of your opponent's swing before you start stretching yourself out to hook. Do not run down the field with your mallet in front of the horse's face – it will slow him down.

If your opponent hits the ball with a full swing, his mallet makes a circle. You don't need power to make a good hook, just interfere with his swing.

Instead of aiming at the player's mallet, aim at the rump of his horse. Just hold your mallet there firmly and you will surely hook him.



If you are beside your opponent, aim at his boot and hold your mallet there firmly until you interfere with his swing. (Be sure not to hit him).



The same concept goes for hooking a player coming from the near side. A good hook is simply interfering with your opponent's swing. Don't waste your energy trying to break his mallet.

Remember that the player that is hooking must be straight behind or next to the player taking the shot. You are not allowed to cross the mallet over the opponent's horse to hook him – that is a foul. The horse and the player are counted as one. That means that if your body is on the right side but half of your horse is still on the wrong side, a foul will be called against you.



You can't hook another player if his mallet is above shoulder level. Even if the head of the mallet is beneath shoulder level, if the grip is higher it will still be a high hook and a foul will be called. Be careful – these high hooks may cause serious shoulder injuries.



The Bump



11. The Bump

11.1. UNDERSTANDING THE BUMP

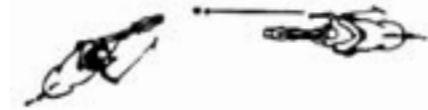
The bump is a very important play, both in attack and defence. It must be carried out safely. You can bump an opponent if you are riding beside him, in the same direction and at the same speed.



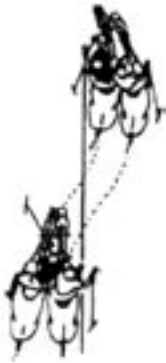
To win over an opposing player in a bump you must try to get ahead of him so that your knee is in front of his. Remember you can't use your elbow to push the other player. If you do, it will be called against you. The purpose of a bump is to make the opposing player pass over the ball and miss the play. If you can get a shot at the ball as well, so much the better. If not, one of your teammates can pick it up behind you.



BUMPING



A. If the black player goes towards the ball from this position, he will cross the line of the ball creating a very dangerous foul.



B. In this case the black player can bump his opponent across the line to make a near-side shot at the ball without fouling him.

C. Remember when two players are coming from the opposite direction, both must take the ball on their right.

