

KING'S HORSES AND KING'S MEN EAGER FOR POLO FRAY

There's No Dismay in Camp of Sturdy Americans Who Will Defend Cup.

British Players Training in Spain for Effort to Recapture Trophy.

There are a few million Americans who prefer seeing the home team come from behind and win out in a ninth inning rally to shoving their weekly pay checks across the cashier's counter. There are a few million more of the same breed who annually prefer to risk death by pneumonia and similar active and energetic diseases to missing the big football games.

These, differ as they may regarding the relative claims of their favorite games, present a united front against any claim advanced in favor of polo's right to the title "the king of sports." Be that as it may, and the writer hastily disavows any intention of saying how it may be, all contention is eliminated by the simple process of using a little reverse English on the aforesaid title and evolving thereby and therefrom the unchallenged statement that "polo is the sport of kings," likewise of princes and millionaires.

King Edward delighted in the game. His son, George V, is a player of experience and ability. Alfonso, of Spain and thereabouts, can hold his own with the Malacca mallet against the best.

There is no denying that it is a royally expensive pastime. Only the wealthy can afford to play it. None of the men composing the American teams who have played in international matches would be considered as worse than comfortably off, even in these days of high cost of living, but there is a story going the rounds in polo circles that it was considered necessary on a certain occasion to inveigle one of them into a poker game and frame it up for him to win \$25,000 to enable him to play on the American team.

BATTLE OF 1913 COST ABOUT \$1,350,000.

Last summer it was estimated that somewhere in the neighborhood of \$1,350,000 had been expended in staging the international matches, three games played on the polo field at Meadow Brook. Employing long division to divide this sum by 180, it is seen that each minute of actual play cost \$7,500. In 1911, when America successfully defended the polo challenge cup against an English four, winning the two games played, Mr. Herbert, chairman of the polo committee, estimated the total cost of the competition at not less than \$600,000, or an average expenditure of \$2,000 for each minute of actual play. No game at all for a piker to get involved in.

What the total cost of the international games to be played next month will be it is impossible to estimate with accuracy now. Startling amounts have already been expended by both sides in preparation.

Polo is a full-blooded man's game. It requires nerve, coolness, superb horsemanship and great technique. It's a fight every minute; a game of kaleidoscopic changes. One moment the three forwards are charging well down into the enemy's territory, threatening his goal; comes a slashing back-handed loft shot, the willow oval whizzes past their heads, a white streak, and, hotly pursued, they are dashing back to the defense of their goal, and a trifle later horses and riders are all tangled up again in a fierce mêlée at the other end of the field.

APPEAL THAT THE GAME HAS FOR AMERICANS.

The game, therefore, is typically an American game in its appeal. It is the kind of sport which Americans love to watch and to indulge in. And in part proof of this contention it may be well to recall that, though it was not until 1876 that polo was introduced in this country, through James Gordon Bennett, America won the International Challenge Cup on the Hurlingham polo field, in England, in 1909, and has successfully defended it since. An evidence of its popularity in this country is that over 70,000 people filled the stands and packed themselves around the Meadow Brook polo field one afternoon last June to witness the deciding game between the English and the cup-defending teams, this despite the very high price of admission.

Polo is the oldest open air sport known. A game which bears a striking similarity to modern polo was played in Persia centuries before the birth of Christ. The game was introduced into Japan, being carried there by the Chinese, as early as the sixth century A. D.

Continuing this antiquarian delving, it is on record that the Emperor Comnenus enjoyed the sport with the Byzantine princes and nobility. There is an old parchment in the British Museum which portrays vividly the King seated on his dais, flanked on either side by musicians, watching "with breathless interest" (old stuff, but it may get by) a polo match. The players are shown as mixing it up in a hot scrimmage. Their sticks resemble the present mallets.

PREFERRED HIS POLO PONIES TO HIS HAREM.

According to legends the game must also have been popular with the Arabians in the centuries long since gone by, and it's a safe bet that polo would have an irresistible appeal to these wild, reckless riders of the deserts. One of the most interesting of these tales which have been handed down to the present day is that a party of British cavalry surprised, attacked and routed a noted Arabian chieftain, capturing his harem and three or four of his best polo ponies. The following day this chieftain under a flag of truce sent word to the commander of the marauding party, then retreating with his booty, that he was welcome to his wives. He could keep or kill them at



AN EXCITING MOMENT IN AN INTERNATIONAL POLO GAME



PART OF AMERICAN STRING OF PONIES

his pleasure, and everything would be forgotten and forgiven if the English chief would only return his ponies.

But to get back to the more recent history of the game, India is considered as the old home of polo. The Muri-porees introduced it to British cavalry officers, and it soon became immensely popular with the latter. Although Englishmen played polo in India certainly as early as 1764, it appears that it was first carried to and played in England not until over a hundred years later, or in 1823.

Mr. Bennett played the game at Hurlingham, and thought so much of it that he went to considerable pains and expense to introduce it in this country. The history of the sport here may be briefly told. It was first played at Dicker's Riding Academy, in New York City; later the inside of the race-track at Jerome Park was used.

On March 6, 1876, the Westchester Club was organized. The club built stalls at the north end of Jerome Park, but its playing field was not of regulation size. H. L. Herbert, the present chairman of the polo committee, organized the Brighton Polo Club, which lived four years.

THE FIRST IMPORTANT GAME IN THIS COUNTRY.

In 1879 the Brooklyn Park Commissioners permitted a part of Prospect Park to be used as a polo field. On June 11 of that year the first important polo game to be played in this country was played there, Westchester meeting the Queens County Hunt Club. The Westchester team consisted of August Belmont, Jr., Captain H. Oelrichs, Carroll Bryce and William Sanford. Westchester won by three goals after a fast game.

In 1880 Mr. Herbert, backed by James Gordon Bennett and August Belmont, Jr., leased a plot of ground just north of Central Park, at 110th st., Fifth to Lenox ave., and \$200,000 was spent in leveling the ground, erecting stables and so forth. They formed an organization under the name of the Manhattan Polo Association. But two years later this field was abandoned because of the great difficulty experienced in growing grass.

In 1886 the Westchester Club offered the now historic trophy known as the International Challenge Cup. The cup had cost \$1,000 when it was offered for competition. Few then imagined that in less than thirty years millions would be expended in struggles for its possession.

The Challenge Cup has spent twenty-three of the twenty-eight years of its existence in the dominion of His Britannic Majesty.

The trophy was lost in its first season, on August 23, 1886, on the grounds at Morton Park, Newport, R. I. The English team outclassed the American four and won two straight games. Fourteen years later America sent a challenging four to England, which was easily defeated at Hurlingham by a score of 8 goals to 2.

Two years later another team, composed of R. L. Agassiz, J. E. Cowdin, Foxhall Keene and L. Waterbury, was defeated in the second attempt to bring home the cup. The Americans won the

first game by a score of 2 goals to 1, but lost the next two by scores of 6 to 1 and 7 to 1. M. Waterbury replaced Cowdin in the final matches.

FINALLY BROUGHT THE CUP TO AMERICA.

But seven years later the "Big Four"—Larry and Monte Waterbury, Harry Payne Whitney and Devereux Milburn—established American polo supremacy beyond question by winning two straight games, by scores of 5 to 5 and 8 to 2, on the Hurlingham field. Great was the chagrin of the British nation; great the preparations to retrieve the disaster. In 1911, after an expenditure estimated at \$500,000, an English challenging team met the "Big Four" on the grounds at Meadow Brook. The invaders put up a stubborn fight, but in both of the games played the reckless riding of the Americans and their loose but dashing play proved superior to the more cautious, more conservative work of the Englishmen, and the latter acknowledged defeat by 4½ goals to 3 and by 4½ to 3½ goals.

This defeat only served to fan the flames of desire for vengeance in the bosoms of our opponents across the water. The Duke of Westminster undertook the job of financing and preparing another team to play for the cup. English sportsmen dug deep into their pockets. The world was scoured for ponies; the empire for players. But the history of last year's attempt to carry the trophy to England and its failure is too fresh in our memories to justify recalling it here.

Surely not one of the 30,000 who were gathered around the field at Meadow Brook that glorious afternoon in last June will ever forget that eighth period of the third and deciding game. America entered it a fourth of a goal in the lead, and she held that lead to the finish—held it against the fiercest attack ever made on any polo field, for the English in sheer desperation threw every preconceived notion of the sci-

ence of the game into the discard and rode and played with an abandon before unknown. Time after time they carried the fight to the shadow of the American goal posts, only to be repulsed and only to renew the attack with superlative fierceness.

driven out of bounds on either side of the field it is put in play by the referee throwing it into the field at where it went out very much as the ball is put in play after going out of bounds in a football game.

A WORD ABOUT HOW THE GAME IS PLAYED.

The game itself? Well, the general answer to that question is "hockey on horses." But it will give you all the thrills of football, baseball and hockey combined, and you might throw in lacrosse, basketball and ping-pong for good measure.

It is played on a field 300 by 500 feet. At each end are two goal posts twenty-four feet apart and along the sides are white boundary boards ten inches high. A goal is scored when a player knocks the ball between the goal posts of the opposing team. If he knocks it between his own goal posts the play counts a quarter of a goal against him.

Eight periods of 7½ minutes each are played. Three minutes are allowed between periods to permit for changing ponies, and 7 minutes between the fourth and fifth periods. Each team consists of four players, three known as forwards and the fourth as the back. He is supposed to play back and defend his goal.

Ponies cannot exceed 14½ hands in height. The ball is 3½ inches in diameter. The mallets used are 50 to 56 inches long. They are generally made of Malacca cane, weigh 15 to 20 ounces, and have a cigar shaped head made of some tougher wood, two inches thick and eight to nine inches long. A loop of thin leather is attached to the handle and goes over the player's wrist. The ball, which cannot exceed five ounces in weight, is generally made of willow—in fact, the word polo is really the Tibetan word "pulu," willow.

The game is started by the referee throwing the ball into the center of the field. The forwards of each team strive to get possession of it and carry it to the opponents' goal. When the ball is

across the field in mad career, ever following the ball. It needs no hand on the rein to guide the polo pony. Off like a flash at top speed, he checks himself and whirls and turns with incredible agility and suddenness—all in the wake of the ball—with agility and suddenness so great that inexperienced riders would be unseated. Once in a while ponies and riders come together going at full speed, a sickening thud and rider and horse go down. But this does not happen as often as one might reasonably expect.

THRILLING MOMENT IN THE CONTEST.

Once in play the struggle surges up and down the field with startling rapidity. Occasionally there is a gleam of white as the ball, impelled by a loft shot, sails with meteoric speed through the air, sometimes checked in its flight by the head or body of a player. "Where the ponies are thickest there the ball is," said a veteran player in explaining the game to a fair companion. And that is about the truth. The ponies are taught to follow the ball, and they do. For a moment spectators see the ball as it skims along the ground or flies through the air. There follows a wild rush of ponies; one hears the pounding of hoofs; then comes the mêlée. Horses and riders are mixed together in a heterogeneous, tangled mass. There is a seemingly wild wielding of mallets, causing Mr. "Tomb Man" to wonder why the players don't prefer a more painless death.

Then from the mix-up shoots the ball. Perhaps one player has cannily sneaked it for himself and is driving it along in front of him with clean, sharp strokes, until he can get within fair distance for a shot for goal, trusting in his pony's speed and to his teammates to ride off opposing players. Or it may be that a wild backhanded stroke from a player whose goal is in jeopardy has sent the ball hurtling down the field, where an eager back and an equally eager pony are both nervously waiting to get into the play. Or again the mighty Milburn, the hardest hitting player of the game, has seized the opportunity for a full swing and has attempted to score on a shot from nearly the length of the field.

Ponies and players flash down and

ONLY ONE FATALITY IN MANY YEARS.

"I hope they all have their lives insured," remarked a young woman at one of the international matches last year. And any one who sees a polo match cannot help believing that the heirs of the players would naturally hope the same thing. Merely from appearances polo makes such strenuous pastimes as football or facing Walter Johnson when he is wild look as mild as croquet. A man has to have nerve and plenty of it to play the game. But rough as it looks and rough as it undoubtedly is, since the game has been played in this country only one fatality has been charged up against it.

HONORED EQUINE VETERANS OF FORMER CONTESTS.

This tragic happening occurred in a game between teams representing Yale and Princeton played at Van Cortlandt Park in 1904. In this match Henry D. Babcock, Jr., received injuries which resulted in his death and led to the abolition of the game at both universities. Daniel Chauncey, Jr., received a serious scalp wound in a game played at Great Neck in 1896 and Foxhall Keene had his collarbone broken and received other minor injuries when he went down during a mêlée in front of the Myopia goal in the first championship final game between the Myopia and Rockaway teams. But the list of accidents has been surprisingly small; of players seriously or permanently injured almost nil.

ROSTER OF THE GAME INCLUDES THE PONIES.

Polo is now played by teams of four men, as has already been stated. And the general impression is that eight players take part in a match game. Such is the general impression, but do not delude yourself with any such fallacious theory. There are sixteen players at all times in every game, and fifty-one took part in last year's deciding match between the American and British players. Get the distinction—fifty-one players; not men, players. For the polo pony is as much a polo player as the man who rides him—and often the better of the two.

No team can win if the ponies of the opposing side are much the better. In a recent interview Lord Wimborne, who has charge of this year's challenging four, stated unequivocally that in his opinion the ponies should be rated at 60 per cent of the game and the players forty. The Duke of Westminster differed slightly. He split it even

and let it go at fifty-fifty. Harry Payne Whitney put the reverse English on Lord Wimborne's statement, but has since qualified his views on the subject and conceded that "the ponies count at least 40 per cent of the game and probably more." Foxhall Keene holds similar views. And the tendency of the experts of the game to-day is to give the ponies a higher and higher rating.

Herein lies the chief cost of the game. Every country of the world is scoured for ponies. Enormous sums are expended in experimental breeding. In a match game each player uses anywhere from four to eight mounts. And the best polo ponies are worth nearly their weight in silver. F. M. Frazer, in one of the international games last year did ride one pony in three chukkers or periods; but, ordinarily, even the very best ponies cannot stand the strain of being ridden in over two periods in any single game. And there are comparatively few which retain their highest speed and efficiency through the length of the second period. In the final international match at Meadow Brook last year the two teams used between them forty-three ponies.

PONIES LOVE THE GAME AND UNDERSTAND IT.

Horses are natural born sportsmen anyhow. Ever watch an old hunter which, fallen upon evil days, was attached to a plough when the park is full of cry went by? Such a sight is worth taking a trip out of town to see and will convince you of the truth of the above assertion. Polo ponies are no exception. They love the game and—take a sure tip—they understand it. They put as much enthusiasm into their play as the most ardent two-legged player.

Foster Sanford, whose specialty is surgical operations on critically ill Yale football teams, was watching a game of polo last summer. Turning to a friend the famous coach remarked: "If I could teach an eleven to follow the pigskin as closely as those ponies do that willow ball, believe me, I would have a winner."

A first-class polo pony must have among other qualities tremendous bottom, great speed, be absolutely sure-footed, and able to handle himself with the grace and dexterity of a ballet dancer. It is not to be wondered at that the best of them are bringing in from \$5,000 to \$10,000 and, indeed, those who play the game and are so fortunate as to own a good string will not sell at any price.

The supply comes from America, England, Ireland, Algiers and India principally. And this country has developed some of the very best known to the play. Next month at Meadow Brook members of the English team will often be seen riding American bred ponies into action. The supply of first-class ponies is always short of the demand. Lord Wimborne has complained that out of some seventy ponies which he and his agents selected as suitable to send over to Madrid, where the challenging four practiced for thirteen weeks prior to sailing for the United States, he could find but a scant thirty-five which he considered classy enough to send over here for the international matches. Yet hundreds of thousands of dollars have been spent in combing the world for mounts for this four.

AMONG THE PONIES WHICH DID EXCELLENT WORK IN THE CUP GAMES AND SOME OF WHICH MAY AGAIN BE SEEN IN ACTION AT MEADOW BROOK THIS JUNE MAY BE MENTIONED DEVEREUX MILBURN'S TENBY, HARRY PAYNE WHITNEY'S BLUE RIBBON, STEN AND CARRY-DE-NEWS, LARRY WATERBURY'S LITTLE MARY, VETERAN OF TWO INTERNATIONAL COMPETITIONS, CHASTNUT AND EYE; CAPTAIN RITSON'S PRETTY BOY AND PIGEON, FRAKE'S MOLLY BEACH, HILDEN STAR AND POLLY, AND CAPTAIN CHASPE'S ENERGY AND SPRITE—a noble game of equine stars certainly.

JUNE 10-JUNE 11. Set these dates in capitals or black faced type. They are the dates which polo enthusiasts of the world have been dreaming of for weeks. Between them the Challenge Cup will once more be successfully defended or gloriously lost. This latest English team is primed for the fray, and determined to retrieve the disasters of 1909, 1911 and 1913. And as this article is written it is considered that it has something like an even chance to do so.

For thirteen weeks the British players have practiced on King Alfonso's polo fields at Madrid in preparation. Incidentally Alfonso himself has frequently declared himself in so the fracas and, from all accounts, is an adept in wielding the mallet. Also from the reports which have drifted from time to time across the water it seems that the British four has about decided to adopt that slashing, dare-devil riding, hard hitting and long passing game which our teams have used so successfully. If this be true there is much reason to fear the invaders this year, for they have always been noted for superb horsemanship.

Three of the four American players who triumphed last year will be on this year's defending four. But the king of them all, Harry Payne Whitney, will not play, and the man to take his place has not been decided upon at this writing. A peculiarity about the challenging team is that all four of its players are best known as backs.

"Yankee Doodle" is derived from the Persian "Yanki-dooniah," meaning the New World, or America.