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SPORT

“THE KING OF GAMES”

It all started in 1948 when, at a party, a group of “locals” argued, whether or not polo was played on the “Polowiese” (Polofield) in St. Moritz towards the end of the last century. It is unlikely that a tournament was ever held in the Engadine (the name of the alpine valley in which St. Moritz is situated), but the story goes that a number of English visitors had made all arrangements and had in fact already brought their ponies up to St. Moritz to begin their training. Then they all returned to England as the Boer War had broken out in South Africa. Whatever the substance to this story may be, we know for sure that the name “Polowiese”, given to the charming field on the lake shore, was no meaningless invention. So all that really remained of the game in St. Moritz is the name of the field.

Since 1948 interest never died in the revival of this princely game of polo, said to have been originated by the Persians some 2,000 years ago. Plans gradually matured for the re-introduction of the game in Switzerland, and in Spring 1960 preparations had progressed far enough, so that the organisation of the first Polo Tournament in Switzerland could be put in hand.

Polo is very often called “the King of Games”, and its players, while requiring a high degree of skill and fitness, certainly get their full share of excitement and enjoyment. But polo as a spectacle is equally supreme. It need not even be played by the very best; all tournament games are usually contested by teams manned by at least some experienced exponents of the game. The spectators’ interest is kept wide awake during a game by the constantly and suddenly changing scene, as attacks change into defence and vice versa, bringing about those exciting aspects of the game: the wonderful sight of well-bred horses flashing past at a furious pace, displaying their own great understanding of the purpose of the exercise in chasing the white ball across the field, the stopping and turning, the banging and bumping and perhaps a harmless fall here and there.

All this, for player and spectator alike, provides the impressive spectacle from which all come away feeling more fascinated and appreciative of the very reason why polo is and will remain the game of games.

As in all other riding games or sports, horse and man make up a team, and while it is said that a vast number of polo ponies actually enjoy the game, they are certainly called upon to perform a considerable job of work during a chukka — as are called the playing periods, each lasting $7\frac{1}{2}$ minutes. During a chukka in tournament a polo pony

may cover 3 to 4 miles at a fast gallop, interrupted constantly by stops, turns and quick starts. The work the player performs, with his seemingly utterly dangerous weapon called a polo stick, does not trouble the well-trained polo pony in the least, although the hammer-like instrument flickers around its head and body frighteningly near and fast.

The name “polo”, by which the game is now internationally known, is derived from the Tibetan word “pulu”, meaning ball. The Persians used to call it “changan”, meaning mallet, the headed stick used to hit the ball.

Polo was brought to England from India only about 1860, and the centre of polo in Europe has remained in this country ever since. France, Italy and Scandinavia adopted the sport at the beginning of the 20th century. In Germany, too, attempts were made to establish the game about 50 years ago and, after an interval caused by the war, a revival of the game is now afoot, notably in Hamburg, Frankfurt and Düsseldorf.

Nowadays, polo is played throughout the world — wherever there are horses we find the game popularised in varying degrees. Polo is and will always remain a fairly expensive game, and so the extent of its popularisation has depended much on the availability of suitable ponies. Only in parts of Tibet and Persia, and of late in Australia and some South American countries, can polo be called a popular game. But wherever it may be, he who plays polo will benefit by its intrinsic qualities as a game — as a team game requiring discipline, fast thinking (it teaches one to “think at a gallop” as Sir Winston Churchill puts it), and responsible action. Thus, valuable human qualities and a team spirit are fostered.

Arabs have made the game, and the English, with their highly developed sense for sports, have preserved and developed it for posterity. Incidentally, polo is the original ball game, the father of all as it were, from which all further ball team games have been derived.

In spite of the haste with which we allow ourselves to be propelled through this present atomic age, the game of polo, prompted by man’s love for horses in general and for this superb equestrian game in particular, has been preserved for us and will, we hope, go from strength to strength.

Polo history was made in the summer of 1960 in St. Moritz, when a few teams played in a tournament which succeeded so well that the organisers decided on making it a regular feature during their short summer season.

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