

POLO IN AMERICA HAS ADVANCED

H. L. Herbert Tells of the Game from Its Start in This Country.

Polo in America dates back to the year 1876, when the first game, which was much of an experiment, was played on the tanbark ring of Dickel's Riding Academy, located at Thirty-ninth Street and Fifth Avenue, the spot now occupied by the Union League Club. Later the game was played outdoors for the first time at Jerome Park race track on the grass stretches between the steeplechase jumps.

The game at this time, although in its infancy, immediately found favor among the lovers of the horse, and the players banded together and organized clubs.

The first of these, from which the International Challenge Cup takes its name, was the Westchester Polo Club. From this time until the present day the game has grown in rapid strides, being successfully played by numerous country clubs and at many army posts, with the players registered and placed under rankings.

H. L. Herbert, Chairman of the Polo Association, has been actively engaged in various capacities with polo since its inception, and relates many interesting reminiscences of the game. In describing the game of polo in this country for The Field he says:

"One of the many good things which have been handed down to us from 'Merrie England' is the grand old game of polo—centuries old in Persia and Japan, comparatively new to us of the United States of America. It was the year 1876 that James Gordon Bennett brought to New York from London a number of forage caps, jerseys, mallets, and balls, and, with about a dozen of his sport-loving associates, had a try at the game on the tanbark of Dickel's Riding Academy, then located at Thirty-ninth Street and Fifth Avenue, where the Union League Club now stands. A few days later, with such ponies of about 13 hands as were owned by the players, or their friends, or could be jobbed from the riding school, another attempt was made at the Jerome Park race track on the grass between the steeplechase jumps. The players soon organized themselves as the Westchester Polo Club.

"Two teams of five players each were chosen by the two appointed Captains, who tossed a coin for first choice, then alternated the choice until the teams were made up. The formation of the teams, however, was of little consequence, for team play was then little known, and the hero of the day was the individual who could score the greatest number of goals regardless of the others of his side. The play consisted mostly of a huddling, pushing, shouting mass, and few had the skill to race very far away with the ball. The sport, however, jumped immediately into popularity, and when fashionable New York moved to Newport, in the Summer of 1877, the Westchester Polo Club journeyed there also. An inclosed ground had been prepared within the town limits, very much smaller than the grounds of the present day, and from south to north somewhat down grade. Polo was promptly established as the popular pastime for spectators as well as for the players, and, with a band of music, the side lines and entire inclosure, would be blocked with carriages, and Dead Head Hill, overlooking the grounds, would be crowded with non-paying spectators. The newspapers gave glowing accounts of the daring and brilliancy of the players, also of the speed and cleverness of the ponies, and likened the sport to shinny on horseback.

"In the early Summer of 1877 it was a newspaper account which brought about the formation of the Brighton Polo Club at Long Branch, N. J., which at that time was considered a rival Summer resort to Newport. It happened that a number of ranch ponies from Texas had arrived at Long Branch to be sold. Some of them were saddle broke, but none had ever seen a polo mallet, nor had the half dozen men who were sitting on the porch of a seaside cottage any more knowledge of the game than the newspaper account of shinny on horseback had given them.

"The game had also been started at Buffalo, and in August, 1877, their team journeyed to Newport and played the first real match game in the United States. The Westchester team, with more experience and better ponies, gave the Buffalonians a sound beating, and promised to play a return match at Westchester the year following. In 1878 a Westchester team, true to its promise, made the trip to Buffalo with its ponies. The Buffalo team, having profited by its experience at Newport, and its own ground being much more rough than Newport, 'turned the tables,' and gave the Newport team a good beating.

"In the following year (1878) a playing ground was marked out on the military parade ground at Brooklyn, N. Y., now a part of Greater New York. It proved to be so much better than the one at Fordham that stabling was built there, and the second public match was played between Queens County and the Westchester Polo Club teams. The parade ground being open to the public, it was estimated there were 20,000 spectators. Almost the first attempt at team play was an arrangement between Mr. Belmont and myself, who were in the Westchester team, by which I was to ride into the scrimmage and pass the ball out to Mr. Belmont, who would rush away with it to the goal, with the result that the Queens County team was whitewashed. The game continued at Prospect Park until 1880, when an effort was made to establish it within the city limits by the construction of a clubhouse, stable, and ground at 110th Street and Sixth Avenue, by the Manhattan Polo Association, which, it was expected, would be to New York what Hurlingham was then to London. The game, however, had been started at three or four of the country clubs, which attracted the players from the Manhattan field, and at the end of the second year the game was discontinued within the city limits, and the ground was turned over to baseball, football, lacrosse, and games of that sort.

"Between the years 1880 and 1885 polo clubs had been formed at Meadow Brook and Rockaway, also at Pelham, and the game was continued by the Westchester Polo Club at Newport. In 1886 the International Cup was subscribed for at Newport, and a Hurlingham team was invited to compete for it. The team, captained by John Watson, won it handily, as is well known, and the cup was held at Hurlingham until 1909. The playing of Capt. Watson's team was not only a surprise, but was very instructive to the American players, in consequence of the backhand stroke, of which they had had no previous knowledge, while the systematic team work of the English team was an education by which the Americans have since profited. In 1888, two years before the Polo Association of America was organized, the system of handicapping individual players was first tried in the events for the Herbert Trophies for teams of four of that year.

"The interest in the sport in America has steadily increased for twenty-three years under the auspices of the Polo Association. The game can now be played from May to October at the Eastern clubs, and from October to May at the Southern and Western clubs. There are forty-four civilian clubs, which are members of the association, and thirty-seven military posts where the game is played, and the men are honorary members of the association, making a total of about 1,100 players."

Trojan A. C. Scratch Games.

The Trojan Athletic Club of Harlem held a scratch set of games yesterday at Crotona Field. Two club records were broken, the 100-yard dash by R. Fichtelberg, and the shot put by J. Goldfarb. M. Cohen equaled the 440-yard club record.

Big Handicap Helps Levine.

Lewis Levine of Bayonne High School yesterday won the 600-yard run from the 22-yard mark at the Jersey Harriers' invitation games. J. E. Harris, the Loughlin Lyceum star, started from scratch, but found the handicap too severe. The winner won by a yard from Smith, while Harris was about five yards back.