

Dating from 15th century

Polo comes to North Carolina

By EDITH WOOTEN

Several horseback riders thunder down the field in a mad but elegant chase after a ball no larger than a softball. They raise and swing mallets, sometimes missing and sometimes keeping the ball in play.

The riders and the horses are all athletes, each gracefully coordinated yet powerful, quick and forever reacting to the ball, their opponents, their teammates and each other.

The game is polo and it has been enjoyed by horse, rider and spectator since the 15th century in Persia. But this summer Bill Douglas brought the sport to North Carolina.

Douglas, a North Carolina native, started teaching lessons at Quail Hollow Farms outside Durham in an effort to generate interest in polo in this state.

Douglas said that he saw the Triangle area as a potentially good market for polo because of the people's interest in new things and its recent growth and development.

By purchasing over twenty polo ponies, teaching lessons and publicizing the weekly

games, Douglas said he hopes to start a base for polo in the area.

The object of the game is to make as many goals as possible without injuring oneself, one's mount or other players or their horses. To prevent accidents, there are many rules that apply to the direction of the ball in relation to the horse and rider.

Because the game is played more for love of polo than competition, teams are often interspersed so they are evenly matched as possible. The clubs, traveling from Florida, South Carolina and other Southeastern states, come to Durham to reciprocate the traveling that Douglas and the NCPC has done to play with them.

Each team consists of four horses and riders, some playing offense and others defense. All perform certain functions and cover certain players or areas.

But because of the game's speed, each player may change his position as the game progresses, so there is constant movement. Horses and players must be alert, flexible and, above all, fast.

Suddenly one pony breaks away and the rider takes the ball down field controlling the ball with long graceful smacks of the mallet. Another player challenges him as he tries to "bump" him out of position for a goal. But the first rider persists.

Now keeping the ball in control with short even strokes he slows the pace down as he tries to maneuver his horse into a better position. He is finally driven to the corner of the field, exactly even with the goal but 75 yards to the right of it.

The rider is pretty much left alone as he tries to gain a more strategic position. Every-one else is seeking the most advantageous spot to defend or make a goal.

After shuffling the ball around, the lone player hits a long drive which goes through the goal posts at a seemingly impossible angle.

The announcer calls out the name of the scoring player and there is a round of applause from the audience.

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Bill Douglas straps on boots

...he readys for another exciting game of Polo

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Polo player strikes ball

...game played for love of the sport

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