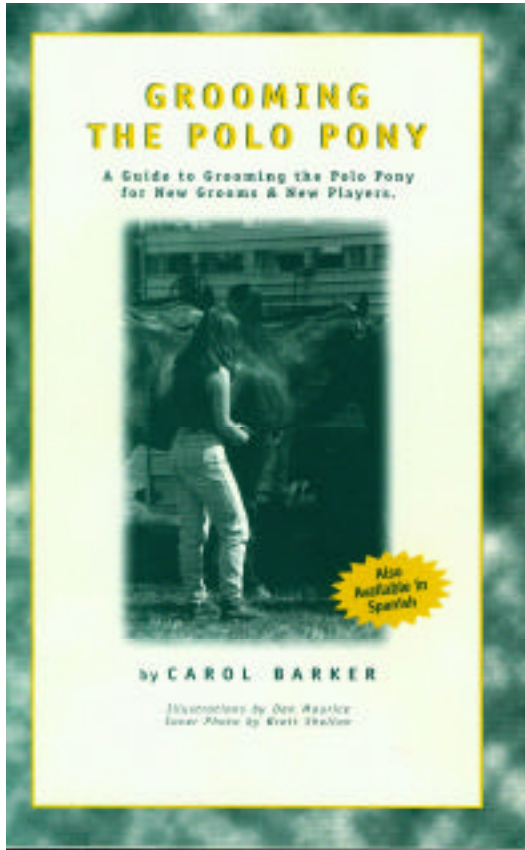


Part III – Grooming



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“**A Guide to Grooming the Polo Pony – for new grooms and new players**”

Forward by Carol Barker

(Contents for print out available on web site www.pccpolo.com)

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Introduction

Grooming is simply the ritual of caring for the polo ponies before, during and after the match.

The job of a polo groom is extremely demanding and requires you to be organized, possess initiative and quickness, and to a certain degree aggressiveness. The groom is one of most important beings around the trailer, (except for the horses.) A lot of responsibility comes with the territory that requires your full attention.

The best grooms are organized, anticipate well, and, of course, love to be around horses. They must be truly concerned about the horses' and their bosses' well-being and cannot be afraid of hard work or getting dirty.

This handbook is written for the beginner polo groom (and player), not for the beginner horse person. We assume that you know some of the very basics of being around horses, but not necessarily being around the sport of polo. As you become more experienced, you'll develop your own system or routine, which is encouraged. What separates the exceptional groom from the good groom, is his or her capability of finding better ways of completing tasks and the ability to anticipate needs. I'm not suggesting shortcuts, but I urge everyone who takes on this job to look for ways to improve on a process.

This handbook is a compilation of several polo player's and groom's tactics for getting ready. This is the way we do things - which is not to say it's the only way. Don't be afraid to make suggestions to your boss. You'll have to see what is comfortable and acceptable to him or her. Polo players aren't shy, so they will tell you if they think it's a good idea or not. Each experienced player has their own way of doing things and you will learn many lessons from them directly.

This book is geared for the low-goal player's grooms, because in the high-goal leagues, the grooms themselves are rated players and have been around the sport for a long time. The big name professionals probably don't need my advice. If you're grooming for the weekend (club) polo enthusiast, then I think you'll find this book covers the basics to get you started. Take this handbook to the matches with you and refer to it as necessary. Make notes in it. Use the pages at the back to list your bosses' line up for the day or to just keep notes on his or her requirements. On game day, things can get pretty hectic and you may not be able to get answers to your questions on the spot.

Go ahead, take control, get your hands, clothes, hair and face dirty but do a good job.

Some other notes of importance that don't really fit in a chapter:

I interchange the words ponies and horses a lot. In the context of this book, they mean the same thing.

For the sake of reading simplicity, I am going to refer to your boss as being male. Many women also play this sport and you could very easily work for a woman or husband and wife team.

I have no idea who you will actually be working for, however, I do know there is a specific personality type that is lured to this game. Typically the people who play polo are independent, very assertive if not aggressive, and sometimes lack patience. Words are accidentally said on the field and around the trailers that may offend you. If you're thin-skinned, find a job in a library. Game days, especially tournaments, can be tense. Your boss may be unhappy with the score or the way a pony wouldn't respond, or maybe his boots are too tight. Who knows. Hopefully, whoever you work for knows that you are doing the best job possible. Remember your boss shares some of the responsibility for coaching you during your job. Do not let these people bother you. Find another boss if necessary, but please don't take anything personally -especially during match play!

One more note before we begin that holds true for all you do around the stable and the trailer. You have to work fast. You cannot spend a lot of time on each horse. You may have anywhere from 4-7 horses to clip, bathe, brush, and tack on a typical polo match day. This sport is different from others where the competitor has only one horse to be concerned about. In some rare cases, you may even be asked to help out a neighbor trailer if they are short-handed or if a problem arises. So you do not have time to dally. You must work through your string of ponies quickly and efficiently. If it takes you too long to complete certain tasks, your boss will be unhappy. (understatement) Being quick does not mean you can be sloppy. As you become more familiar with the processes and the horses, your speed will increase. Practice on your part and good coaching from your boss are key.

Tips on what and what not to wear. We had a groom one time show up in a silk outfit with at least ten necklaces and bracelets. I think there was even a ring on every finger. Great for a spectator but not practical for a groom. Let's just say, if you don't care about getting something dirty, then wear it! As for jewelry, don't wear any, for safety's sake. Because you're dealing with little hooks and chains and buckles and snaps, a ring could easily get caught with potential devastating damage. Also, wear shoes that provide more protection than sneakers. (Sandals a definite no-no) You're working in close quarters and occasionally your horses like to use your foot as a foot rest.

Since a lot of matches take place in the hot, humid, summer, you need to drink plenty of water or sports drinks before, during, and after the match to keep from overheating and dehydrating. You are working hard and sweating fluids out of

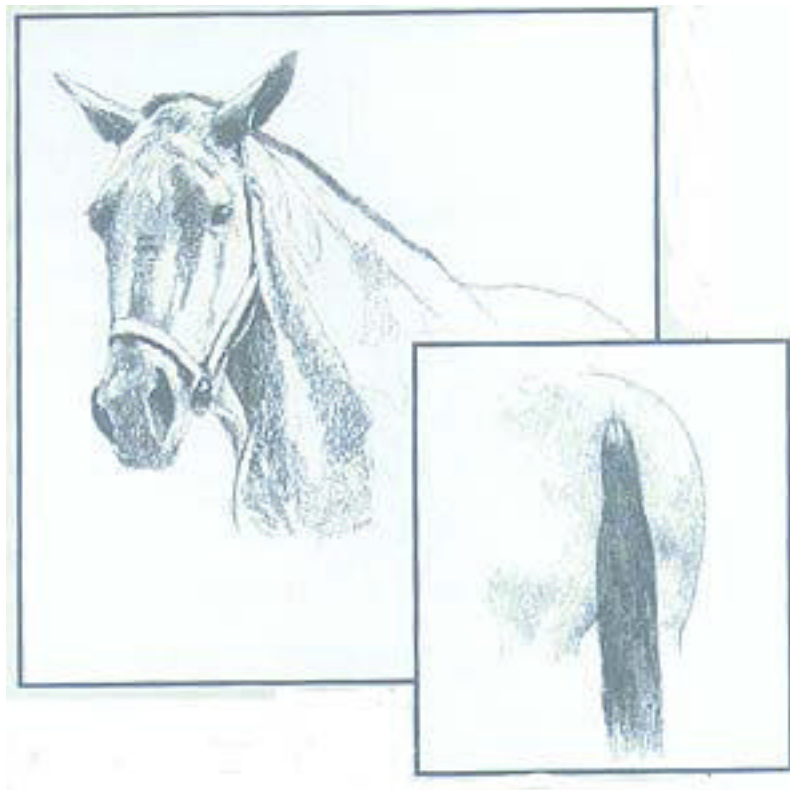
your system so you need to keep replenishing just as you would do with any other strenuous work or exercise.

Chapter 1 - Cleaning the Horses Before the Match

Because polo ponies are not typically stabled, they tend to get just a little dirty! Cleaning the horse is a simple process. There are specific tools to complete this task which we will outline later in the chapter. A polo player always wants his or her horses to look their best. Prospective buyers are always present at the polo field so you never know if you will be loading one more or one less after the match.

Clipping

On the morning of the polo match, I bring all of the horses in for their morning feed . Your boss may have already done this for you and you may arrive at the barn to find them ready for the next step. After they have eaten, I check to see if any manes or tails need to be shaved. If I think they look sloppy, I usually start clipping. Until you get a feel for how these horses should look, a good rule of thumb to follow is, if the mane is over 1" long, it's time to clip. Same for the tail hairs. Polo ponies manes and the tops of the tails are clipped down to the crest of the neck and the shaft of the tail. (See illustration of points on the horse) This is also referred to as "roaching" or a "roached" mane and tail. The forelock is also shaved.



Shaving the mane serves two purposes. It keeps the horse cooler and there is less interference for reins, whips, martingales, etc. It also makes their necks look leaner and more athletic.

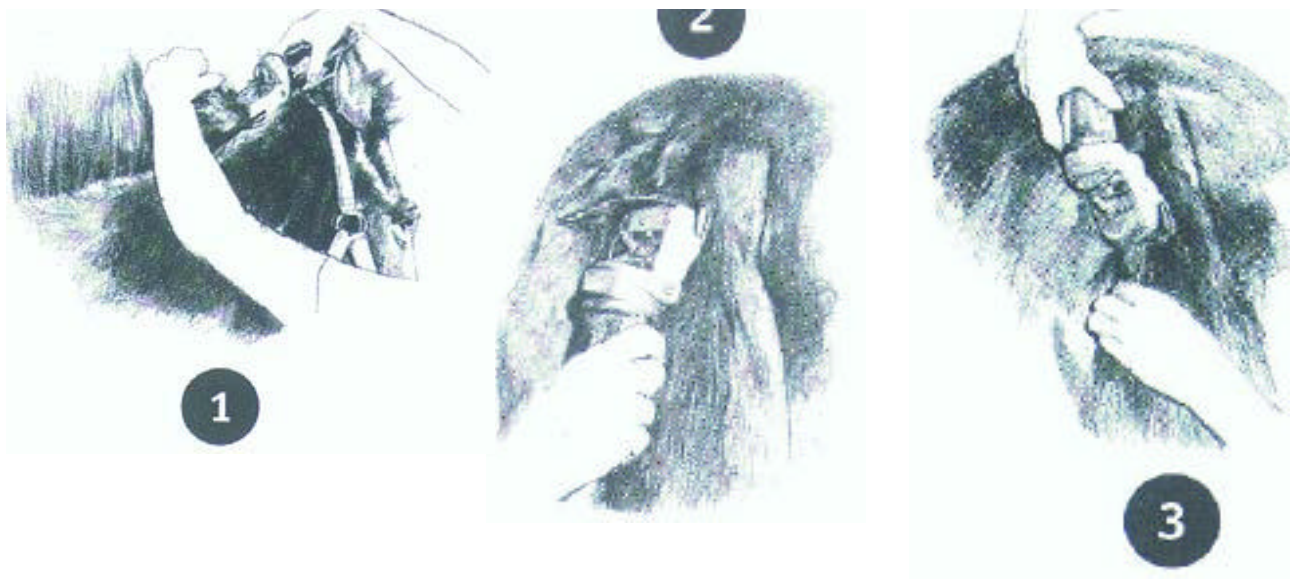
We have one pony who doesn't like the noise or sensation of the electric clippers, so we clip her with scissors. Before you begin clipping, check with your boss to see if any horses are timid or if they will spook or shy away.

To begin clipping, make sure the blades on the clipper are sharp. You should also have a can of a cooling product. The cooling aerosol keeps the blades from becoming hot, causing the horse to be uncomfortable with the process. Remember anytime you do anything with a horse, it must be a pleasant experience or you'll get resistance from them the next time.

Holding the horse's lead securely with one hand, begin clipping at the base of the neck by the withers and begin shaving upwards towards the ears. You'll have to make several passes in both directions to get it trimmed close enough. For the forelock, you can either shave from behind the ears forward or from the front of the face back towards the ears. Some players like to leave a little tuft of mane at the base of the withers. This is called the "Oh God" patch and gives the player something to grab for in case they feel a tumble about to happen.

For the tail, shave in a downward motion from the base of the tail. Shave down about five to six inches. This will make the tail look neater when braided.

In the spring, after the winter coats are shed, some horses will have a tuft of hair on their fetlocks and some additional hair on the back of their cannon bones. Even some have hair on the underside of their cheek bones. Clip this hair to make the overall appearance of the horse less shaggy. You usually only have to shave these areas one time in the spring.



Bathing

After everyone is clipped, now it's time for a bath. This is actually a fun process and one I think the horse even enjoys. Depending on the time of year and the shape of the horse's coat, I use either an iodine shampoo or a shampoo formulated for bringing out the luster of their coat. You'll have to use what's available at your boss's stable. I take the horses out one by one for this task and usually tie them to a post so I have both hands free.

First I soak the horse's body entirely with a garden hose. In a separate bucket, prepare the shampoo according to the directions on the package. With a sponge, take some of the prepared shampoo mixture and begin to massage it into the horse's coat starting at the neck and continuing down the body of the horse. By using a circular motion with your hand, your horse also gets a nice massage and appreciates the attention. Continue this until the entire horse is lathered. Pay special attention to the belly and legs as these areas are sometimes neglected in routine grooming. Next, untie the horse and rinse him completely with the hose and make sure all traces of shampoo are gone.

In order to get the excess water shed from the horse's coat, you must use a tool called a "sweat scraper". There are two types of sweat scrapers: the old conventional type and a newer rubberized tool. I personally prefer the rubberized tool. Some of these Thoroughbreds have more sensitive skin than other breeds of horses, so I think this tool is less harsh on the horse.

(Illustration)

Starting at the top of the neck, take the sweat scraper and push the excess water in a downward motion until you've moved completely down the length of the horse. Again, don't forget the belly, however, do the shoulders and forget the rest of the legs. The tendons and boniness of the legs prohibit the use of the sweat scrapers.

After the bath is complete, return the horse to its stall. Most horses, after a bath, will want to roll and get dirty all over again. It's not that they aren't appreciative of

your hard work, it's just that they prefer to be dirty. To prevent them from rolling, simply tie them with a lead rope.

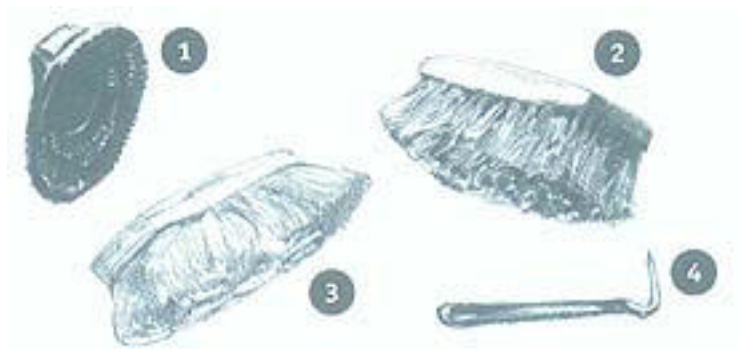
Bathing is a luxury because it can cut down on your work considerably once you get to the field. Now that they're clean, all you need to do is take a soft brush and go over their coat to smooth it out.

However, if you happen to be in a place where bathing isn't possible, you need to start the brushing process.

Brushing

There are four basic grooming tools you need to complete this task.

1. Round, soft rubber curry comb
2. Hard bristle brush
3. Soft bristle brush
4. Hoof Pick



Rubber Curry Comb

Begin with the round, rubber curry comb. Start at the top of the neck and work in a circular motion toward the back of the horse. This curry comb loosens dried dirt, sweat, and hair and feels great to the horse. They get another massage! The belly is one area that tends to be neglected because we can't see it, but this is where much of the dirt and mud accumulate as it gets kicked up from their hooves. It is important to make sure the belly is clean, because later you are going to put a girth on that horse. If the belly is dirty, the girth can rub the area and cause irritation to the horse. Saddle sores and these kinds of irritations are usually preventable.

Do not use this comb on the legs. Again, they are too sensitive and bony to do this without causing discomfort to the horse. After you're finished, if you've used this brush correctly, your horse will have a lot of loose hair and dirt laying on top of the coat.

Hard Bristle Brush

The next step is to use the hard bristle brush to sweep away the debris left over from the curry comb. Use tiny strokes and sweep downward to push the debris to the floor. You can use this brush on the legs but use it very lightly to eliminate dried mud. If you use it in a quick back and forth motion, applying light to moderate pressure, you can usually eliminate the dried mud easier.

Soft Bristle Brush

The soft bristle brush finishes the job. It whisks away the final traces of dust and dirt and should leave the pony feeling smooth and clean. Use this brush on the pony's face, of course moving gently, carefully, and brushing away from the eyes. If they're still dusty after completing the brushing, sometimes I use a damp cloth and go over the entire body and face of the horse to eliminate the remaining dust.

If flies are in season, using a cloth dampened with fly wipe will also cut down the dust and help to relieve the pony of these irritating pests. Some fly wipe comes in a spray bottle and some you have to mix up. Always keep plenty of this on hand especially when at the field. When the ponies are tied to the trailer, their defenses are limited because they can't fully swing their head around to get a fly so you must keep an eye on them and treat accordingly.

Hoof Pick

Each hoof should be picked out with a hoof pick and any loose shoes or problem areas should be noted to your boss. Start with one of the front hooves and work around the horse until you finish on the opposite front hoof. Start at the widest part of frog (at the heel of the hoof) and work outwards towards the toe of the hoof to dig the mud and debris. I've seen some folks be very timid with this instrument. It's okay to dig with a little force just so long as you're not digging into the hoof!

On game day, we try to do all of the brushing and cleaning at home before they're loaded into the trailer and taken to the field. This way we can complete this task in the shade of our barn rather than being out in the hot sun any longer than necessary. However, if you're running late, you have no choice but to perform this task once you arrive at the field.

Loading into the trailer, traveling, and unloading

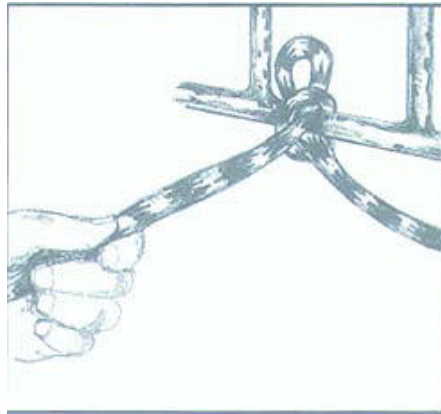
You'll have to check with your boss on the order the horses go into the trailer. Sometimes horses are buddies and others are not. Once you know the order, begin by taking the first horse into the trailer and tie them so their head is tied to the left side of the trailer. (See overhead view of trailer) Next, lead the second pony on the trailer, this time reversing his position so that his head is tied to the right side of the trailer. Keep loading the ponies each time alternating their

direction. This helps to more evenly distribute the weight in the trailer and keeps some of them from biting each other's noses.

The horses that are loaded always attempt to spread out while you're bringing the next one into the trailer. A gentle nudge usually suffices to move them back in line. You actually want them fairly close to one another because this gives them more support as the trailer goes around corners and up and down hills.

Some people like their ponies to wear muzzles, especially for long trips. Muzzles are usually made out of leather and simply slip over the halters, still allowing them to breathe, but not bite.

The knot used to tie the ponies inside the trailer is the same kind of knot you should use anytime you're tying. Use a quick release knot.



Always have a buck knife handy in case of a panic or a knot that becomes too tight to release the horse.

Sometimes we haul our ponies 2-3 hours to a match. This can be a long, tiring trip for you and the horses. When we arrive at our destination, I like to walk the ponies around a bit to let them stretch and get familiar with their surroundings. I'll walk them for a couple of minutes and let them grab a bite of grass or two. Then I tie them up to the trailer and offer each one a drink of water. In tying them up to the trailer, again, use the quick release knot. Space them out so that you have enough room to move all around the horse comfortably. (approximately 2-3 feet in-between each one.)

After they're tied to the trailer, then comes the fun part of shoveling the manure out of the trailer. For some reason, they wait until they are loaded in trailer to "unload" themselves. If you are parked in a field without a good place to throw the manure, just put it under the trailer as best as possible so you're not walking around it or dodging it all afternoon. As they relieve themselves during the day while tied to the trailer, shovel it away as quickly as possible so as to not attract any more flies than normal.

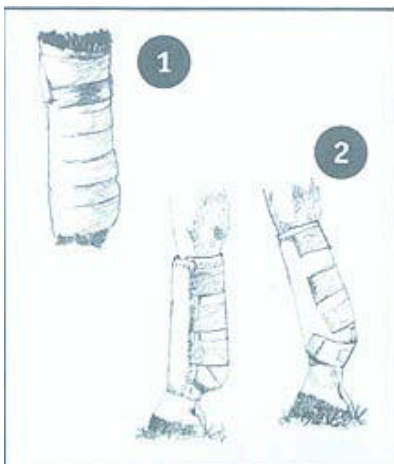
Chapter 2 - Wrapping Legs and Braiding Tails

Once you arrive at the field, your work becomes non-stop. (For those of you familiar with computer lingo, Multi-tasking is a good trait to possess.)

Wrapping the legs

This is one of the most important parts of the grooming process. So important that many players prefer to do it themselves. If you're not so lucky to have a boss like this, you're going to have to learn. The reason it's so important is because the legs are very delicate. They have many critical tendons that need to be protected and supported as they run hard, stop fast, and turn in all directions on the field. If you wrap a leg too loose, you will do the horse no good, because the wrap will not support the tendons and could actually prove dangerous if it came loose on the field. The game stops immediately if a pony's well being is in danger. If the wrap is too tight, the tendons will be under too much pressure and can actually cause a bowed tendon. If a bowed tendon occurs, it can take up to a year to heal.

With that said, don't be afraid to try wrapping. However, make sure your boss is teaching you and observing your work until he thinks you've got it.



There are the traditional style of leg wraps that are made of a heavy felt and are secured with a Velcro strip. Then there are the newer style of leg wraps that do not require rolling around the leg like the traditional ones, but rather come as a complete unit that entirely wraps around the leg.

The new ones provide a lot of support, they're easier to put on, easier to clean, but they cost a lot. Some players will buy maybe one set if they have a pony who needs extra support and wrap their other ponies in the traditional style.

Sometimes during a tournament weekend you'll have to re-roll dirty leg wraps to finish the match on Sunday. After playing, the wraps will be wet, so hang them up to air dry through the night before re-rolling.

To roll the wraps, begin at the Velcro end and make sure you match up Velcro to Velcro to start your roll. Roll them as tight as you can because it makes it much easier to wrap the leg with a tight roll as opposed to a loose one. When rolled, tuck the end into the roll so as to keep it from coming undone. See illustrations:

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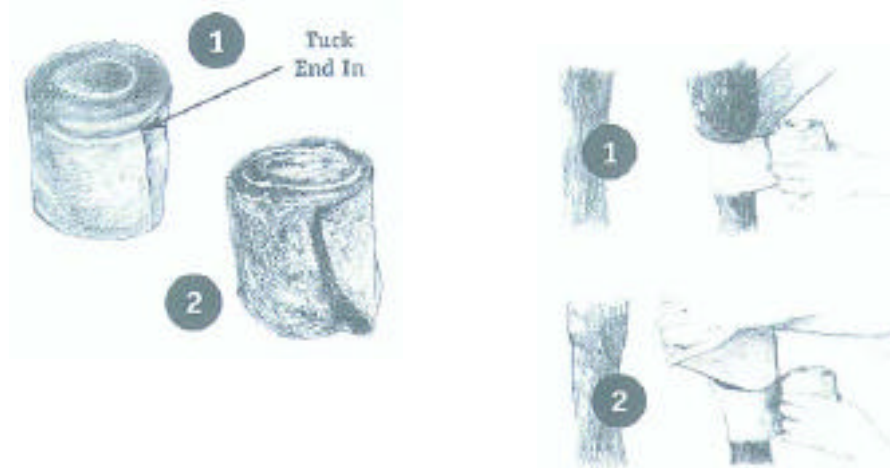
Velcro to Velcro: Tight vs. Loose

Tucking in the end:

To become good at wrapping the legs, you'll have to practice. Again, have your boss observe your work and help you until you become proficient.

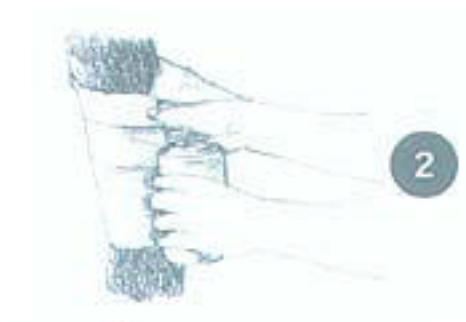
Wrapping the Front Legs:

Always wrap in an inward direction so as to help support the tendons.



Pull a flap, approximately 7-8", and lay it down the back of the tendons for extra protection.

Continue wrapping inward and downward covering the fetlock then start wrapping back up the leg until you reach the Velcro strip. If done properly, you should have the Velcro strip secure back up at the top of the leg.



You'll feel like you're all thumbs at first. You'll drop the wrap and it will start unrolling on the ground. The horse will lift the leg that's being wrapped to get a fly and you'll drop the wrap again. Don't get frustrated, just keep trying.

Wrapping the back legs:

Same procedure to use as front, its just that the cannon bone is longer on the back legs and you'll have to adjust accordingly or you'll end up with the Velcro securing strip at the bottom.

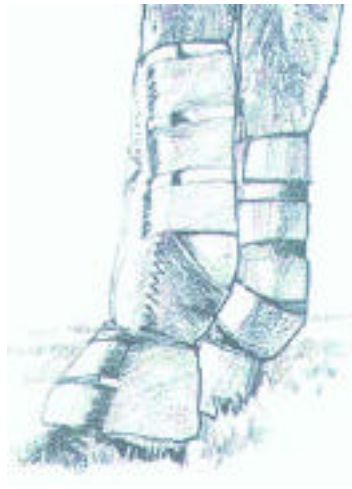
For added security, your boss may have special strips that are used on top of the already secured leg wrap just to make sure the Velcro stays put. If these are not available, I've used black electrical tape and wrap once or twice around the Velcro strip just to make sure it doesn't give way.



Bell Boots

Bell boots are protective coverings for the hooves and particularly the areas around the hooves such as the pasterns and coronary bands. On the field, players can get into some tight plays where another player's horse can actually step or clip another pony causing damage. These boots are easy to put on and guess how they are secured - you got it - Velcro!

If your boss has bell-boots for each pony, you may as well put them on now. If you do not have enough to go around, then start with the first pony in the line-up, and just remember to switch them to the next horses as they're ready to go on the field.



Braiding (or tying) the Tail

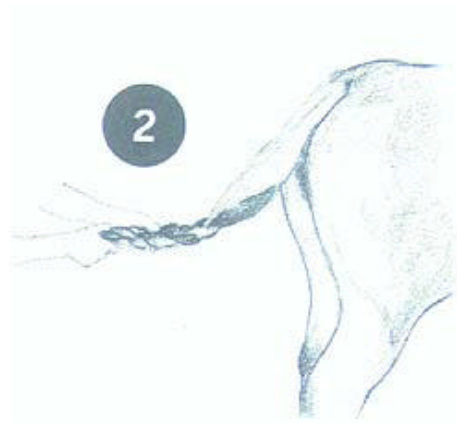
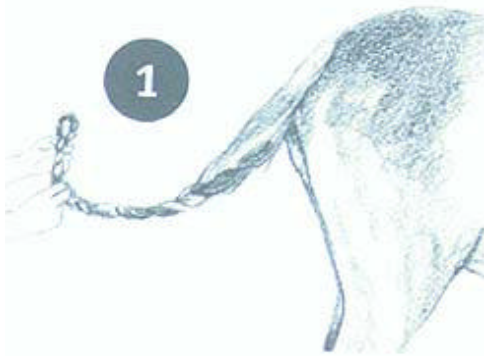
The reason the tail is tied is to prevent a mallet from getting caught in the tail hair.

There are two methods for tying the tail. One method uses tape to secure the tail, and the other involves tying the tail. Sometimes on game day it's best to use the taping method to make sure it stays secure. For scrimmages or practices, tying the tail will suffice.



Let's go over the taping method first. Stand closely behind the pony and braid the tail down to the end and place a small amount of tape at the end to secure. Depending on when the pony is to be played, you can leave the tail down for a while to give them a defense mechanism against flies.

Next step is to take the tail and fold it upwards, (once or twice, depending on how long the tail is) with the braid showing, then, while holding it firmly, place three bands of tape around it to hold it securely.



To tie the tail, follow these steps:

1. Braid the tail about half way down, leaving a strand hanging out of the braid. This strand will be used later.



2. Separate the balance of the tail into two sections. Fold the tail upwards and wrap the sections around the tail being sure to include the strand when wrapping.
3. Take the two ends and twist them until it forms a knot.
4. Securing the strand with your thumb to form a loop. Take the loop and begin wrapping it around the knot as many times as possible until it's tight.
5. Give a downward tug on the entire tail to clinch the knot.



Chapter 3 - Tacking up the Ponies

Your boss will first have to tell you which bridle and saddle goes on each horse. This is also a good time to ask your boss if the horses have any fetishes like being tied to the trailer, shying when the ears are touched, etc. Any ruckus around the trailer can cause other horses to panic. Before you know it, your whole string is prancing around the trailers with broken lead ropes and halters.

One thing you can do is take the bridle and saddle for each horse and lay it on the ground behind each one until you are more familiar with each horse and which tack it wears. Or, use your notes pages in the back of the handbook to write down the line-up for the day and which bridle each horse wears.

You will also need to know where extra reins, girths, stirrup leathers, etc. are in case of a breakage. There isn't a lot of time to get these things replaced in the middle of a game. A tack "time-out" is only allowed if the clock is stopped for some other reason, i.e., a penalty has occurred. Otherwise, unless a dangerous situation exists, match play does not stop for a tack problem.

Before you begin tacking up the horses, you'll need to know your boss's line-up - which horse he's playing in which chukka. For obvious reasons, start tacking in the order of the line-up. There are six chukkas in a polo match and many times your boss will play all six which means you are on guard all afternoon.

There is more tack that goes on the polo pony than for any other type of horse sport. We assume in this handbook you know the basics about putting on a bridle or saddle. Some of the other tack involved can be confusing so, we'll cover putting on some of those pieces in this handbook. While you are tacking up the horses, always be on the alert for any leather that looks especially worn out, thin, or cracked. Bring anything that looks suspicious to your boss's attention immediately, before he or she goes out on the field. All of the tack should be in good condition. It can mean the difference between enjoying a season of polo or sitting on the sidelines in a cast. Pay particular attention to the stirrup leathers, girths, billet straps and reins. Other pieces like nose bands or throat latches are not as critical, however, they should be noted and replaced later.

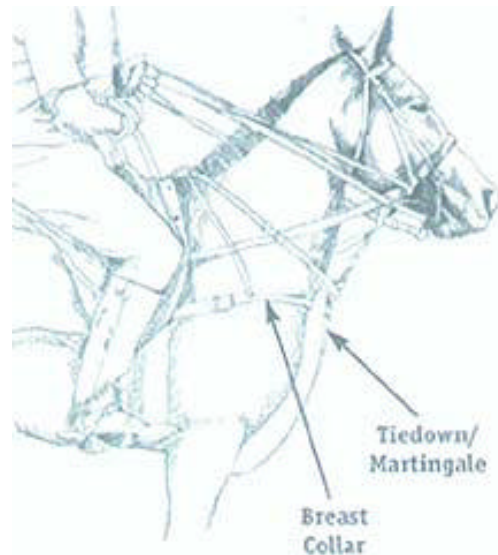
When cinching the girth, you probably are aware how horses can bloat out a little causing you to think you've pulled the girth tight enough. Well, guess again. Every pony we have pulls this little trick, so I never ever go out on the field until I've checked and rechecked the girth for snugness.

Let's discuss some of the other common pieces of tack you'll be using:

Standing Martingales:

The martingale is a very common piece of equipment that keeps the pony's head from coming back and hitting the player in the face. This should be attached to

your bridle by way of the noseband. There is a large loop that fits over the horse's head and rests along his withers and down to his chest. The connecting piece goes from the noseband through a small keeper and runs under the belly to be slid onto the girth.



Breast Collars:

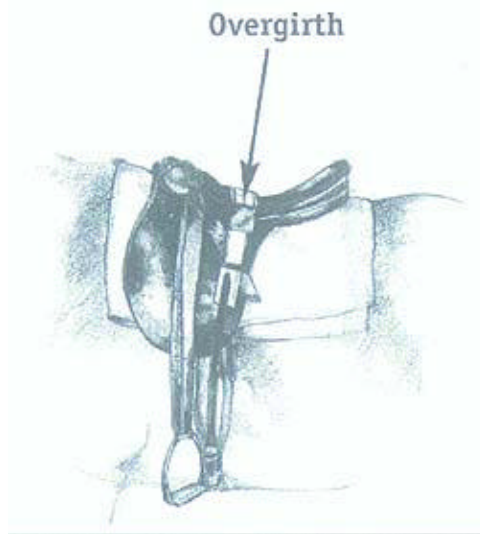
This is usually all in one piece and starts with another loop that goes over the horse's head and rests again on the withers. The leather that goes around the chest comes back and slides up the billet straps prior to cinching the girth. This piece helps the saddle stay forward on the horse so the chest piece should be snug, but not too tight so the horse is not impaired when running.

(Illustration of the piece alone and on the horse)

Draw Reins: These reins are mostly used with a bit known as a "gag" bit. This is a type of bit is commonly used on polo ponies. The purpose of the draw reins is to keep the horses from lowering its head too low or from carrying it too high. The best way to describe how to put draw reins on a horse is to illustrate it. See below:

Over girth:

This is the back-up plan to make sure your saddle doesn't give way. If a girth breaks, so does the player. One way to ensure that you will not have this happen is to use the over girth. These can be leather or fabric and simply go over the top of the saddle seat, and through the martingale girth loop and should be cinched tight after the regular girth is secure.

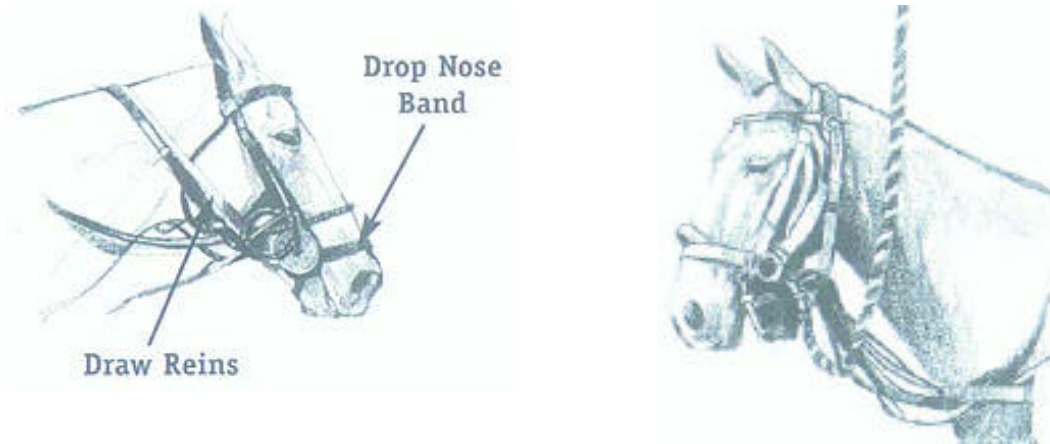


Drop Nose Band:

The drop nose band is used with a gag bit. Sometimes it is necessary to ensure the bit stays up in the mouth of the horse or it will serve no purpose. The drop nose band fastens over the muzzle of the horse and in front of the gag bit and secured underneath the horse's chin. If it is fastened behind the bit (incorrectly) the horse will not react to the pressure put on the bit and the rider will not have the control needed over that horse.

Some other tips:

1. Always put the loose ends of the tack in their "keepers". These are the little loops found on the adjustable straps of just about any piece of tack. They prevent the loose ends of straps from flying around, causing distraction to both the horse and rider.
2. If you are tacking up horse number 3 and it's the first chukka, you can leave the girth a little loose and the curb chain undone. Just be sure these things are checked prior to your boss going on the field.



3. After tacking each horse, put the halter back over the bridle and hook the lead rope back on the halter. Never attach a lead rope to the bit of the bridle.
4. When the horse is ready to go on the field, remove the halter from the horse, then remove the halter from the lead rope. Do not leave halters hanging on the trailer. The horse tied next to that one could get its hoof caught.
5. Be very careful attaching curb chains. Too loose and they serve no purpose. Too tight and you have a very upset horse which can cause an accident. While the horse is standing still, you should be able to fit 2-3 fingers easily. As the lower rein is pulled back you should be able to see the action it will have under the chin.
6. Now that the horses are tacked, it's a good time to stretch out those horses that need it. If you are also exercising these horses for your boss, you will know which ones need warming up. Keep it light, though, they've got enough work ahead of them.
6. Some people like to stretch their horses front legs before going on the field. Standing in front of the horse lift up one front leg and extend it out in front of him. Repeat on the other leg. This also relieves any pinching the girth may be causing as well.
7. Horses will always reach down to grab a bit of grass when they think they can get away with it. When they are tacked, the reins can fall over the neck and make it very easy for the horse to step on them or get caught in them. If you don't want to be buying replacement reins every week, keep a close eye and always keep their heads up while tacked.

8. When removing the bridle, go slow and allow the horse to spit out the bit. I've seen many people yank a bridle off a horse basically raking that stainless steel bit across their teeth and mouth. Ouch! How would you like someone doing that to you.

Chapter 4 - Your Boss is on the Field Now

After your boss goes out on the first pony, you should begin filling three water buckets. One will be used for bathing the horses after they've played, unless your boss has a pressurized hose on his trailer. Another will be designated as drinking water. The third will be filled with water and soap for cleaning tack. Murphy's Oil Soap is a good rinse to use. Mix about one third of the bottle of soap to five gallons water. The mixture will be cloudy. Set this bucket aside for later.

As you send your boss out onto the field on each mount, your job becomes trickier. Your eyes and ears have to be open because anything can happen. (If you can put your head on a swivel, you'll be in great demand!) Not only are you still tending to those horses that are tied to the trailer, or those that have just come off the field, but you're also making sure your boss has everything he or she needs to get back on the field promptly. You also have to be in tune to his or her voice in case they need something on the field during match play.

Sometimes, mallets get broken or whips get lost and you have to be ready to run to the edge of the field to hand them a replacement without scrambling around. It's a good idea to have all of the mallets in an easy to reach place in case this happens. Each mallet head is stamped with the length of the mallet.



If your boss uses multiple sizes of mallets (51" - 54") you should line them up in order of size. He or she should yell out the number as they're charging toward the trailer. If they're lined up properly, you should be able to grab the right size without fumbling around.

There's only a three minute rest between chukkas except at half time which is ten minutes. You've got a lot of scrambling to do in a short period of time. If you can take the horse that just played off your boss's hand as he or she comes off the

field it will be greatly appreciated. The players are hot, thirsty, and need to rest a minute.

Depending on how hot the horse is, you can choose to walk them for a few minutes. This is commonly referred to as "hot walking". Or you can immediately begin removing tack and leg wraps. If you're the only one working at the trailer that day, it may be tough to "hot walk" unless your boss says to go ahead in which case he will probably help out by getting the next horse in the line-up. If you choose to start removing tack, you can begin doing so, quickly.

Make sure you have the halter and lead rope handy. First remove the saddle then the bridle. These ponies are usually too tired to go anywhere, but in case they spook, it's always a good idea to put the halter on while the reins are still over the neck. This way you can still hold them with the reins. There is a proper way to remove the bridle so as to keep the reins and martingale from becoming twisted.



Place the tack in a designated area for cleaning later. The pony will most likely start nibbling on grass, so you don't have to worry too much about it going anywhere while you do this.

Next remove all of the leg wraps. You can place them in one spot also, but remember you're going to hang them out to air dry later. Get the bucket of water for bathing and with a sponge start at the top of the head and neck and soak the horse with the cool water. Don't forget to wash the face. You'll work your way down the horse just like before, paying close attention to removing all of the

sweat especially under the tail. Sweat scrape the horse off and return him to the trailer. Offer a drink of water to the horse, but only let him drink small amounts. Later on, when they're cool, they can have all the water they want. If your trailer has a pressurized hose, this task becomes a little easier and you stay a lot drier. Take the tail down so they can resume swatting flies. Also, reapply fly wipe to face and body. Offer water every couple of minutes. Check for any cuts that may have happened while on the field and treat with topical ointments. If something looks stitch worthy, tell your boss as soon as you can.

Each chukka lasts only seven minutes with a thirty second overtime. When penalties are called, the clock stops running so your boss can actually be out on the field longer than seven minutes. In case you can't hear the announcer, you'll know when the period of play or chukka is close to being over when the first horn blows. Thirty seconds later the horn blows again which ends the period.

Sometimes your boss may want to change mounts in the middle of a chukka. He will usually let you know that this is the case beforehand and will ask you to have a certain horse ready to switch to. I will usually ride the second horse along the side lines, following the play, so that if the change is to happen, I can minimize the distance my boss has to travel to get to his new mount.

During a game, your boss may want to change horses in the middle of chukka for other reasons, and you will have no prior warning about his intentions. In this case, you have to retrieve the horse he wants and get it to the field side as quickly as possible for your boss to make the change and get back into the play.

Your boss may tell you the reason for the change especially if the horse is lame. However, sometimes they're so focused on getting back on the field that you may have to wait until the end of the chukka to find out why. Then you can determine what to do with that horse; change bridles, un-tack completely, etc.

Tips:

1. If you dunk each bridle in the soapy solution after you take each one off the horse, your clean up time after the match goes a lot quicker. It's always best to get the sweat off the leather as quickly as possible.
2. Remember to make sure each pony is tied to the trailer in a quick release fashion in case of a panic. And always have a buck knife handy in case a lead rope won't come untied and a pony is in distress.
3. If your boss plans to replay a horse in a later chukka, still remove the tack and wash down. Keep the leg wraps on and tail up so you don't have to redo these things.
4. Some people like to use liniment in the bathing water to help relax and soothe the horse's tired muscles. Follow the mixing directions on the bottle carefully.

5. If you're lucky enough to park the trailer in a shady area, your ponies will appreciate it. Because of the size of these trailers, many times shade is only available on one side of the trailer for the afternoon. After a pony has played, put them on the shady side until they're cool.
6. We place rings of tape on the shaft of the mallet to help us designate the length. For instance, one ring of tape means it's a 51". Two rings of tape a 52", and so on. This way at a glance you can immediately grab the right mallet size when in a hurry. Also by using different colors of tape you can tell whose mallets are whose in case two people are playing out of one trailer, i.e., husband and wife teams!
7. It's not uncommon for a horse to occasionally come up lame or get a cut. If any injury happens, you must be ready to act. The more you know about first aid with horses, the better. I would suggest reading a handbook on this subject just to familiarize yourself with the terms. Suggest to your boss that he or she keep a vet kit with them at all times. (Most players have one, but maybe some of the newer players do not) If you notice any supplies getting low, make a note of it and let your boss know
8. Always ask questions. It's the only way you'll learn. Ask your boss, other players, other grooms for advice or help at anytime. Polo is a team sport and everyone is willing to help.
9. Move slowly around the trailer. Even though these horses are tied for a long period of time and tired after playing, they are sensitive to quick movements. Don't throw stuff around unless you want to be replacing halters and lead ropes.
10. Keep an eye on the horses at all times. If there is trouble to be found, they will find it.
11. If any of the horses start nipping at the horse tied next to them, separate them.
12. Keep spectators clear of the horses and ask them to keep their children close at hand. Polo ponies are typically calm. However, if one of them kicks or bites at a fly, this could cause an injury to an innocent bystander.
13. Dogs and polo go together. Sometimes I think a polo match is more of a dog show than a horse event. If your boss doesn't mind you bringing your dog to the match, keep it tied so it won't go out on the field. You will not have time to tend to your dog while you're grooming. Some dogs who are new to the sport think they need to go on the field and join in the fun. Some clubs will impose a fine on the owner if this happens. If it's a hot and humid day, leave them at home in the AC. Believe me, they're much happier.

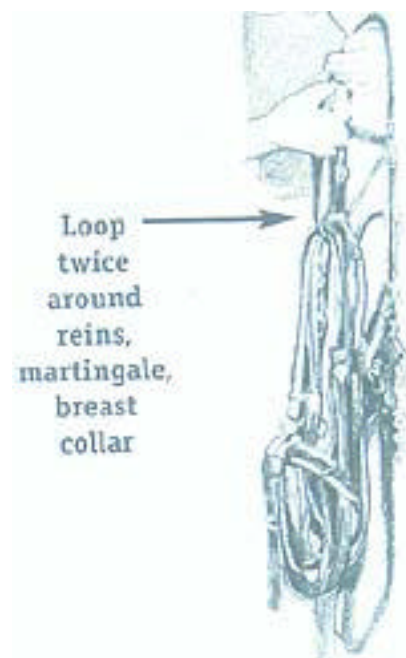
Chapter 5 - Cleaning Tack and Straightening Up

When play has stopped and all the horses are bathed and tied to the trailer, you might think it's time to relax. Not quite yet! Your boss will most likely be resting and discussing the game with his fellow players or, hopefully, partaking in an awards ceremony. If you are an organized groom, most of the tack should be in one place and some of it should even be washed by now. First things first. Make sure all the ponies have had plenty of water.

Dunk all the bridles, breast collars, and girths in the soapy water (we use Murphy's Oil Soap -- about third of a bottle to five gallons of water. The mixture will turn cloudy) to get all the sweat off. Swish the tack around a couple of times then hang up on a tack hook. Go over each leather piece with a sponge and use the Murphy's in a spray bottle for additional cleaning. Lexol is another good leather conditioner to use.

With a damp, soapy sponge, go over each saddle, underneath and on top and be sure to include the billet straps and the stirrup leathers. With a clean towel dry each piece before putting them back in the trailer's tack room. Don't forget to clean your boss's knee pads and boots if they are available.

Polo players have a nifty trick of handing their tack so that it is all contained and easy to grab by the head stall of the bridle. With the head stall of the bridle in one hand take the reins, the martingale, and the breast collar in the other. Now take the cheek strap/throat latch and loop it twice around the reins, martingale, and breast collar and then secure it in its buckle. Now each time you need that bridle for a certain horse, all you have to do is grab the top of the bridle and you're ready to go. This makes organizing the tack an easy process and keeps you from having to fumble for the separate bridle pieces.



Lay the saddle blankets out in the sun to dry until they can be laundered later and all of the leg wraps should be air drying. Now you can start putting everything else away. Gather up the mallets, whips, brushes, sweat scrapers, bell boots and put them back in its proper place in the trailer. Keep the refreshment cooler and the chairs out for your next step. Sit down, reach into the cooler and pull out something cold to drink and relax for a bit. You've done a great job and you deserve this rest. Your boss should allow you this tiny pleasure and may even serve you as appreciation for a job well done!

Chapter 6 - Feeding and Turnout

If your boss doesn't require any further help, then you're finished for the day. If you are expected to help back at the stable with feeding and turnout, here's what you can do to help.

Upon arriving back at the ranch, unload each horse from the trailer. Depending on how hot it is, I usually spray the horses off one more time with the hose just to make sure we get all the sweat off and to help them cool down even more. This is a good time to check again for other cuts, swellings, or signs of soreness. Report anything you find to your boss . Next, put them in their stalls and give them some grain. (Your boss will tell you how much grain and if any other supplements are to be used.)

If it's not that hot and you don't hose them down again, you can take a soft bristle brush and go over each of them to smooth out their coats. Not a necessity because they're going to roll once they get out into the pasture anyway! Make sure the water trough is filled with clean water since this will be their first stop as they enter the pasture. Take their halters off and turn them out. They're done!

The trailer needs to be cleaned out, especially after a long trip. You can help by hosing it out. You can also see if anything else needs to come out of the trailer's tack room and into the stable's tack room. Hang up the blankets and leg wraps on a nearby fence, sweep the barn, turn off the lights and get a cool drink! It's great if you can get a friend to help you on match days. Not only does it speed things along, but it gives you some company as well.

Congratulations! You're finally finished! By now you are probably exhausted, dirty and ready to relax. Hopefully you will continue on with grooming, and maybe even some day learn to swing a mallet.

Summary

Grooming polo ponies is a hard days work, but it can also be very rewarding. The pay ranges depending on your level of experience and where you're located. If you help out other trailers you may even get a tip from another player. Or, if it's an exceptionally hot day, your boss may even give you a tip over and above your regular pay.

If you are really good, you can go to almost any club and get a summer job grooming. Good grooms are always in demand and the only way to improve is to ask questions, observe others, and to practice.

As in any job, you have to please your boss, because they write your checks and have the power to keep you, recommend you to others, or let you go. Your boss most likely will have a true love of the sport and the horses, and will go to extremes to make sure the ponies are well cared for. Think of them first at all times and you'll be off to a great start.

Hang in there, get dirty, sweat, keep learning, especially learn about the game, and above all, have fun!