

Polo: The Exciting Sport of Kings is Alive Just Beyond the Traffic of Cabo

BY PEDRO BENITEZ-CRESPO

Just outside the bustle and traffic of Cabo, one can find a great escape to enjoy a different kind of fun and entertainment. Known as the sport of kings and immortalized by the millions of dollars spent each year by the United States Polo Association (since the late 1800s) and of fashion designer Ralph Lauren who immortalized the emblem, polo is one of the most exciting and highly regarded activities and games in the world.

Polo is one of the oldest team sports, originating in ancient Persia some 2,500 years ago. Rulers, soldiers, and battle champions adorned in decorative armor would practice cal-

vary duels to master the riding and battle skills they would use to dominate others in great open battles.

The activity was so highly regarded that it quickly transformed into a royal dueling spectacle that was so cherished and honored that it became the games of the King of Persia, playing first against nomadic warriors or those who believed themselves to possess horse lordship. (Enter the Mongols!) Then in India, it was played by military members of the royal maharaja courts and Kings of kingdoms from Persia to other exotic regions around the world.

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During England's occupation of India, British officers discovered the activity and brought the games and training to England to be organized into a standardized game while establishing clubs and competitions and events and horse safety conservation.

Now known as the Sport of Kings, it remains a symbol of the highest level of luxury, physicality, spectacle and athleticism, played professionally in numerous countries world-

wide and enjoyed by enthusiasts as an incomparable thrilling and competitive sport.

Yet our story is about a common man who discovered horses and polo, and realized others could too. Enter Tom Edwards, a middle-aged man from Southern California, with a surfer soul and an interest in golf and real estate.

Initially frightened of horses, not caring how or why to ride them, Tom had a chance encounter with a man holding a polo mallet who was on his way to practice.

The man invited him along. Tom was a sports enthusiast but suffered from the embarrassment of bad golf and other annoying and unfulfilling exploits. Tom ruminated about the invitation for a few seconds and then, respectfully declined.

Yet, a seed had been planted. The nostalgia of something so iconic found him quickly seeking out the man again to ask more questions even though it wasn't likely he'd be courageous, capable or rich enough to even try such a dream sport. After all, it was polo. Who plays polo? Not him, that's for sure!

Players seemed like a fever dream from some parallel universe. But the truth is he was also scared. What was he

thinking?

After a few days with this dilemma never leaving his mind, Tom inquired and was told that just beyond Cabo was a community called Rolling Hills Estates and inside it was an entire equestrian subdivision called "Club Polo Cabo". Founded in 2006 by Tony Yahyai, a local legend of the sport, he spent millions of dollars building a polo arena and the

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SPORT OF KINGS IS ALIVE...

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infrastructure that would care for and house a herd of majestic professional polo ponies.

Tony had a vision of bringing the joy and experience he and his family had enjoyed to those who want to play in Baja Sur at a low, medium and high event level.

So, Tom went to the arena and experienced an immediate love and connection to the animals. The whole experience blew him away. It was so unique that even today he still cannot describe it or compare it to anything else. The horses enchanted him and seemed the opposite of what he presumed which was wild, jumpy, dangerous, and unpredictable. The impressive level of care and importance the polo staff have for horses was nothing he had seen before. It was like the horses were sacred.

To become familiarized with these gorgeous animals, he first just coexisted with the horses. "I often lay my head

on them. There's some deep soul thing going on. There was usually a feeling of perennial emptiness in me that is no longer there," says Tom. This is also called equine therapy, an experiential treatment method that uses the connection between humans and horses to enhance physical or emotional healing for people with a disability, some kind of anxiety, depression or for people who just happen to be stressed out.

Tom's confidence began building. Each week he would be guided by two pros who would walk next to him while on a horse in the arena. Not long after, he found himself on horseback alongside the pros and forgot about his fears. Before he knew it, he was being taught how to swing a mallet and how to pass.

After several weeks of learning how to walk and canter a horse, he was now regularly hitting a ball toward a goal, learning the rules of the game, and practicing blocking, turning, intercepting, passing and drills. Tom is now not just a passionate polo enthusiast but

a big fan of the time he has with the horses, the game and the people who come and watch or ride and bring their love and hearts. "It's infectious," Edwards says.

"Polo is unlike anything you'll ever experience. It's exhilarating yet grounding and meditative, fun and exciting, yet important and personal all at once. The club, the people, the place, the experience, and the community are far beyond anything I've ever known," says Tom.

Tom defines polo as a mixture of hockey, soccer, and chess on a horse. From ages ranging from 12 to 80, polo is played in teams of 3 against 3 or four against four, during time periods known as chukkers.

Tom has also become close friends with a man he considers his mentor. Tony Yahyai is a local legend who has had over 500 horses in his lifetime and played polo all over the world with the greatest and best. Tony's dream to create an oasis where pros from across the world could share and showcase their skills in Los Cabos for

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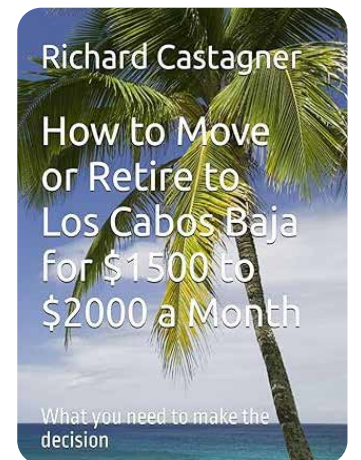
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