

# PLAYS & FOULS

## BOWL IN

A bowl in is when the umpire starts or resumes a polo match by rolling the ball down the center of a lineup of players, also known as a throw in. When a foul occurs, the other team is usually awarded a penalty shot. Depending on the infraction, penalty shots can be awarded from any position in the field the umpire chooses. The goal may be defended by a player on the opposing team, depending on the severity of the foul.



## HIGH HOOK

A high hook is when a player's mallet is hooked above shoulder height. To hook legally, a player must be either directly behind their opponent's mount or on the side on which the shot is being made. He or she may not reach over or under any part of the other player's pony in the process of the hook.



## RIDING TO MEET

Riding to meet the ball occurs when two players converge on the ball riding in opposite directions on either side of the line. Two players riding toward a ball must both give way to the left and take the ball on the right side. This play is one reason that left handed players are no longer allowed in polo. If a "lefty" and "righty" were to meet on their offside, there would be a head-on collision.



## ILLEGAL BUMPING

It is necessary for a player to come parallel, at the same speed and meet shoulder to shoulder before riding him off. An illegal bump is any ride-off that occurs and creates danger for the horse and/or rider. Any time a horse stumbles the ride off is considered illegal and a foul is called. A "sandwich", as seen here, is also an illegal ride-off.



## THE TURNING RULE

The turning rule states that once a player establishes the line of the ball, if another player is following close behind them on that line, the first player may not turn the ball creating a dangerous situation. The player in blue (below) is on the original line, but the player in white turned the ball.



# 101

EACH TEAM CONSISTS OF

**4** mounted players

THE FIELD IS

**300** yds long

**160** yds wide

enclosed by an 11 inch high board to keep the ball in play

A GAME LASTS

**90** minutes divided into

**6** time periods called chukkers that last

**7.5** minutes with a

**10** minute halftime

**THE OBJECT OF THE GAME** is to move a small plastic ball, which is 3 inches in diameter, down the field by hitting it with a 4 ½ foot mallet made out of a bamboo shaft with a hard wooden head. Players hit the ball with the side of the mallet head. The game starts with a "bowl-in" by the umpire. The teams line up at mid-field on their prospective sides, and the umpire rolls the ball down the alley created by the players. This bowl-in also occurs after every goal and to start each chukker, unless it is behind the end line. To score a goal, one must hit the ball between two goal posts which are 24 feet apart. After each goal, the teams switch directions so that no team is disadvantaged by wind direction or field imperfections. After six chukkers, if the game is tied, players will get a 10 minute break and return to the field for a sudden-death overtime chukker. The first team to score a goal wins.





**HANDICAP** Players are ranked based on their ability. The United States Polo Association (USPA) is the governing body of polo in the United States. A player's rating or handicap is based on their riding, hitting, quality of horses, and ability to strategize. The handicap systems works on a scale of -2 goals (complete beginner) all the way up to 10 goals (perfect). A player's handicap does not correlate with the number of goals they score in a game, but more accurately reflects how well rounded they are as a player. During a polo match, the handicap of each player on a team is added together to find the team's total handicap. Teams play teams of the same or similar handicap. If a team's total handicap is higher than their opponent's, they will award that team a number of goals to make up the difference. If a 6-goal team plays a 7-goal team, then the 6-goal team will begin the game with one equalizing goal on the scoreboard.

**THE HORSES** used in polo are often referred to as 'ponies', but they are full grown horses. Polo ponies are usually thoroughbreds because of their speed, endurance, and intelligence. Polo ponies must be agile, fast, have great stamina, and be highly intelligent to play polo.

**THE UMPIRES** are two mounted officials on the field called umpires, who help keep the game fair and safe. There is a third umpire, called a third man, who sits near midfield and serves as a tie-breaker if the two mounted officials are in disagreement on a certain call. Umpires are trained through the USPA and help to monitor play and prevent unsafe situations on the field. There are also 2 "goal judges" who help the umpires determine whether or not a goal is scored or if the ball goes out of bounds.

**LINE OF THE BALL** The most important thing one must understand about polo is the line of the ball. The game is completely dependent upon an imaginary line. When the ball is hit by a player, an imaginary line is established in the direction that the ball is traveling, and this line serves a similar purpose as the line that divides the highway. It establishes a right of way for the players and helps to keep polo as safe as possible, which is the ultimate goal. When a player hits the ball and follows its path, he or she has established their right of way, and their right to hit the ball. Other players must respect that right of way and not cross in front of the rider making a play on the ball. Other players on the field can "steal" the right of way in a couple of ways: "Riding the player off" the line, which means to ride along side the player and bump them off of the line using the power of ones horse. This is a completely legal move when done properly and is seen frequently in polo. It is similar to "checking" in hockey. In polo, you must be traveling at the same speed and meet shoulder to shoulder in order to make it as safe as possible.

**SHOTS AND STROKES** There are many ways to hit a polo ball. A skilled player can direct the polo ball in any direction and a distance up to 150 yards. There are technically 12 different strokes in polo. A player may hit a ball on both sides of the horse, but must keep the mallet in their right hand. There are NO left handed players in the US anymore. It is considered unsafe to have both left and right handed players on the field



## THE HALF TIME DIVOT STOMP

is a time honored tradition in the polo world and at The Villages Polo Club.



simultaneously due to the importance of the line of the ball. There are two main categories of strokes; the nearside (the left side) and the off side (the right side).

**OFFSIDE (1)** shots are the most common. This is when a player hits the ball from the right side of the horse. From the offside, there are 6 variations on the stroke; a player can hit the ball forward, backward, under the horse's neck, under the horse's tail, and an open shot both forward and backward.

**NEAR SIDE (2)** shots are taken from the left side of the horse, and are considered more difficult than the offside shot. The player must reach across their body to complete this shot. There are also the same 6 variations of this shot.

**OPEN SHOTS (3)** are a variation on the straight forward and straight backward shot. An offside open forehand or backhand shot is intentionally directed to the right, while a nearside open forehand or backhand shot is directed more toward the left. This shot is difficult because of the ball placement at the bottom of the swing. In order to get the ball to open up, the player must hit the ball later and slightly farther from the horse, while opening the angle of the mallet.

**TAIL SHOTS (4)** are an angled back shot taken under the horse's tail. This shot is difficult because of how far back one must hit the ball in order to accomplish the proper angle. The tail shot can be taken on both the offside and the nearside, although the nearside is much more difficult and requires a bit of flexibility.

**HOOK (5)** A player could win the right of way on the ball by "hooking" the other player's mallet, and in turn, stealing the ball. Hooking mallets is also a legal move in polo where one player uses his or her mallet to block the swing of another player's mallet. There are some exceptions to this rule. In order to hook an opponent's mallet, one must be behind the opponents horse, or on the side that the mallet is being swung, and one must wait until the mallet is in the downward motion towards the ball; one must only hook another's mallet when it is below shoulder height to prevent injury. A "high hook", or one above the shoulder, is extremely dangerous for the rider and their shoulder, and is therefore a foul.

**NECK SHOTS (6)** are when a player hits the ball under the horse's neck at a 90 degree angle from both the offside and the nearside. This is a difficult shot because of the timing involved in order to avoid the horse's front legs.

**POSITIONS (7)** The four players on each team have numbered positions (1, 2, 3, & 4), which represent their role on the team. The number one player is usually out in front of the play and is mainly responsible for scoring the teams goals. The number two player must be fast and aggressive to help move the ball up the field. The number three player is similar to a quarterback in that they make the plays and hit long balls up to the front. The number four is a defensive back position. There are no goalies in polo, but the number four's job is to stop the other team's offense and prevent goals. These players may shift all around the field and even switch roles during the game. Nothing is set in stone when it comes to polo positions.