

Hard-riding Ben Forney Still Playing Polo at 68

Ben Forney, a hard-riding senior citizen, swings a mean mallet. The 68-year-old cattle dealer and Rothsville resident has to be one of the oldest active polo players in the country. He's been playing the game for the past 35 years, and says he'll keep on playing until old age catches up with him.

Forney started playing polo in 1938, when he and three other local men accepted a challenge from a fledgling York team. There are four men on a polo team. Forney's quartet went to York, trounced their opponents, and launched a career that has yet to end, at least for Forney.

The game of polo was started many years ago in India by British soldiers. Teams consist of four men on horseback, and games are divided into six chukkers or periods, each chukker lasting 7.5 minutes. Players change horses after each chukker, and most team members have three ponies. Some players may have only two horses, some may use six in a game.

The Lancaster Polo Club, of which Forney is president and number one player, plays on a field in Rothsville. The field is 700 feet long and 320 feet wide. Games are usually fairly well attended. "People come to our games," Forney says, "because I have 37 Norway maples around the field. Most places they go and sit in the hot sun. Here they come and sit in the shade. It makes a big difference in attendance."

It costs a dollar to watch a game at the Rothsville polo field which is owned by Forney. But even with shade tree comfort, the gate doesn't begin to make the game a paying proposition for any of the players.

Does polo today live up to its reputation as a rich man's sport? "Well, it used to be a rich man's sport," Forney says, "but its popularity is increasing. A lot

more people are playing."

While the game may no longer be the exclusive preserve of the Vanderbilts and the Rockefellers, it is still not a sport for folks on relief. A good polo pony today costs around \$1000, and the average player has three. Stable fees can amount to \$40 a month for one horse. Then there's the cost of saddles, boots and other gear, helmets and transporting horses. And somebody has to buy a ball.

"It takes about three or four years to make a good polo pony," says Forney. "After they play that long, they get to love the game. Some horses will even follow the ball. You need a good neck rein pony. If you have a good cow pony, you can usually get him to play a good game of polo." Most of Forney's ponies are a mixture of quarterhorse and thoroughbred.

Players, like their horses, have to be a special breed to play the game of polo. Thundering hooves, swinging mallets, flying balls, excited players, all can maim and injure even the most careful participant. Forney is no exception, and counts among his polo momentoes a broken leg, chipped eyebone, chipped elbows, broken ankle and fractured ribs.

Achievement Demands

Your child should understand the demands for achievement and accomplishments before he starts to school. To help him learn these demands, James Van Horn, Extension family life specialist at The Pennsylvania State University, says give him opportunities for reward, success and achievement at home. For example, compliment your child on his skills, such as making his bed, brushing his teeth or keeping his room tidy.

Forney and all his team members are rated players, which means they belong to the U.S. Polo Association. In rating players, the association assigns a number to each player. A player rated "1" would make one goal in an average game. A player rated "2" would make two goals, and so on. Forney is a one goal player. Many, many of the players on the circuit are rated no goals. A very few are rated eight goals.

Polo is strictly an amateur sport, Forney says, although some of the eight-goal super players do have sponsors. No one on the Lancaster Polo Club is in danger of losing his job, though, because none have sponsors. They all play for the fun of it.

Forney's team members are Mike Power, Morgantown, Riggs Jones, Phoenix, Md., and Norman Taylor, Media. In addition to the far-flung regulars, the local team has two alternate players, Ray Longnecker, Lititz RD2, and Larry Royer, Rothsville.



Ben Forney, Rothsville, is the number one player for the Lancaster Polo Club. The hard-riding, 68-years-young semi-retired cattle dealer has been swinging his mallet for the past 35 years.

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