

Polo at A&M is unique, but got new start in '68

By LIZ BAILEY
Battalion Reporter

Western boots and English saddles. That's polo at Texas A&M University.

Since polo was first begun here about 60 years ago, the game and the people who play it have undergone many changes.

O.D. Butler, head of the department of animal science at Texas A&M, says, "We had polo at Texas A&M for many, many years until the military horses were taken away from the campus about 1918."

Polo was originally played at Texas A&M by the Cavalry, says Butler. He coached the team since its start in 1968. The game was used as sort of "fun drill," he said.

After the horses were taken from the campus, interest in polo declined until 1948, Butler said, when there was a polo game between students and former students. This match was the first of several, he said.

John Armstrong, then vice president of the King Ranch in Kingsville, provided the horses for the game, Butler said.

"We had about 3,000 people out there the first time we put it on. We made a big deal out of it."

Since then, polo at Texas A&M has mostly become a game of civilians riding civilian horses.

Polo games between students and former students are still being played, McCleary said. Now, though, each player must furnish his own horse and equipment.

About a month ago, McCleary said, students played some former students. The students won.

In a similar match last spring, the former students won.

In 1968, polo got a new start at Texas A&M when the Texas A&M Polo Club was begun.

Butler said he worked with Earl Butler, then president of Texas A&M, to obtain permission for the club to use the field on the northeast corner of the campus to play on.

In 1968, the area from Bizzell Street behind Zachry Engineering Center, east to Texas Avenue and from University Boulevard south to New Main Drive was dedicated as the Texas A&M Polo Field, McCleary said.

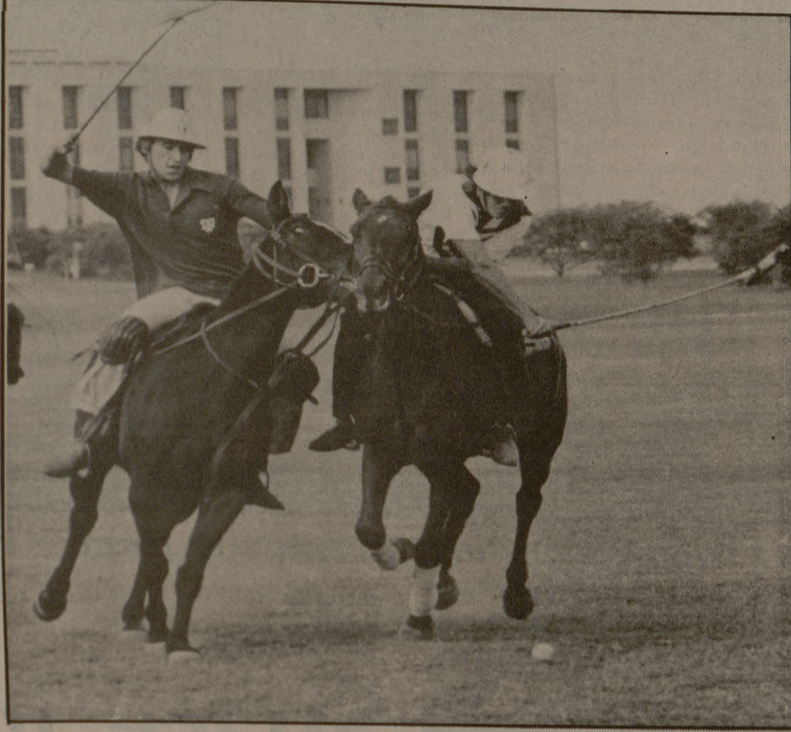
McCleary said the club's goal is to teach people to play polo.

He said membership is open to anyone who desires to play polo, not just Aggies.

Membership is open, he said, because of the lack of people who play polo in this area.

Of the 18 club members, four are not affiliated with Texas A&M, McCleary said.

McCleary said there are only about 20 colleges in the United States which have polo teams. The University of Texas is the college nearest Texas A&M that has a polo team, he added.



Texas A&M polo player Doug Bryan of Jasper, left, tries to "ride off" his teammate Richard Lanfear of San Antonio during an exercise round in College Station. Lanfear is attempting a rather difficult shot in polo, the near side forward.

McCleary said club members usually play teams like the Houston Polo Club, which is made up of businessmen who enjoy the game.

McCleary said there is not one team made up of the best polo players in the Polo Club that plays in all games.

He said he decided who will play in each game and in doing so, tries to make up a team of four with the same level of ability as that of the opposing team.

There are three women in the club, but they are not always allowed to play in games, McCleary said.

"Most of the other clubs won't let a girl play on their field," he added. But he recalled the time that Sally Morris, a member of the club, went with men in the club to play a match against the Willowbend Polo and Hunt Club. He said the men on the opposing team didn't want her to play, but allowed it out of politeness. Immediately after the game began, she took possession of the ball and retained it for the length of the field, just barely missing the goal.

After which, he said, Morris was treated as an equal.

Kay Riney, a club member in her first semester at Texas A&M, said she has found that "the men that do play polo don't care (about women playing)." But some men who don't play are jealous of women polo players, she said.

McCleary said intercollegiate rules specify that women are absolutely not allowed to play in Intecol-

legiate Championships in Summers, Conn. The club hopes to send a team and an alternate to play there this spring.

The Intercollegiate Championships are open to all college and university polo teams composed of students.

Texas A&M teams were sent in 1971, 1972 and 1976.

In 1971, the team was beaten in the first game.

In 1972, they beat Harvard, but were later beaten by the University of Virginia at Arlington.

In 1976, however, they did well enough to become third in the nation.

McCleary said one reason a team is not sent to the Intercollegiate Championships more often is because of a lack of money to fund the trips, since it costs about \$3,000 to go.

Jim Jeter, Associate Director of Intramural Sports, said the Polo Club was given \$1,450 of the \$24,000 taken from the Student Service Fees used to fund competitive clubs at Texas A&M.

Jeter said the club may use the money to pay any fees they must to play polo, to buy expendable equipment and to pay travel expenses. He said the polo club receives about the same amount of money as comparable clubs on campus.

McCleary said the date for the next tournament is not definite. It probably will be played here either next Saturday-Sunday against the Austin Polo Club.

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United Press International

VATICAN CITY — Pope John Paul II will meet the children of Rome next Sunday to bless statues used in Nativity scenes during the Christmas season.

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