



Montreal Team at Toronto Hunt Club

POLO IN CANADA

An Eastern Game in the West

By H. J. P. GOOD

POLO is one of the most ancient of games. According to historians it was played under the name of changau by the Persian kings of the Median period—600 B.C. From Persia the game spread to Tartary and to India. In the British Museum are drawings that identify the modern game of polo with the ancient game of changau. One of these plates shows four richly arrayed ladies riding astride in pursuit of the ball. It is generally believed that the original home of the game in India—whence it travelled to great Britain—was the country of the Munnipoories, in the north-east corner of India, on the border of Burmah. There it is played by boys who call it Kan-jai-bazee. Ponies twelve to thirteen and one-half hands high are used, and the customary number of players is seven as against four here. The Munnipoories ride bare-back and their game is described as fast and furious. Major-General Sherer, a veteran Indian player, took a team into their country in 1865, after a series of victories in Calcutta, and, according to his own account, his men were simply "nowhere," never winning a single game. As stick handlers the Munnipoories are without peers, having a lot of fancy strokes and at times hitting the ball in mid-air. It is their national or tribal game, and, unlike our Indians in the case of lacrosse, they have not allowed the white man to wrest their superiority from them. Polo was first introduced into England in 1870 and into America six years later. It was 1889 before it appeared in Canada. In that year some young Englishmen and local military officers took up the game and established teams at High River and Calgary.

Gradually more teams were organised, among them one each at Sheep Creek, Cochrane and Pincher Creek, the advance guard being usually young Englishmen who had taken up ranching. Before long Canadians took kindly to the game and at the present time Alberta alone can boast fourteen strong teams. Lieutenant-Colonel Williams, commander of the Royal Canadian Dragoons, was one of the earliest to display a penchant for the game and when in 1900 he found himself in Winnipeg he at once proceeded to organise a club there. Unfortunately this club was not of long duration, but a couple of years ago another club was formed in the Prairie City and this year it is proposed to hold a tournament, if not on as ambitious a scale as the bonspiel held at the Manitoba capital annually in the winter, at any rate in a manner more liberal, even generous, than has characterised any tournament in Eastern Canada.

Teams are also to be found at Qu'Appelle, Indian Head, and one or two other places in Manitoba. The western clubs have held a tournament annually since the introduction of the game. New blood is continually coming in and the country being well adapted for the sport, young men of the territory soon acquit themselves well and, as we have seen on several occasions, have rather the best of their friendly rivals in Ontario and Quebec. On several visits to this part of the world, Calgary and High River teams have come out ahead.

In 1901 Colonel Lessard, C. B., then commanding the Royal Canadian Dra-

goons, determined to organise a club, and, having a pronounced disposition to put his ideas into practical and business-like formation, proceeded to the West in search of the requisite ponies. He returned with about thirty, which were speedily taken up by gentlemen who had been attracted by the new game. As in all matters involving equestrianism, the Toronto Hunt Club immediately fell in with the Colonel's views and formed, if not a numerically strong branch, at least an organisation that made up in enthusiasm any deficiency in numbers. Mr. J. Kerr Osborne became the first president of the Toronto Hunt Polo Club and Colonel Lessard the first captain. In the same year Montreal organised a club with Lieutenant-Colonel Meighen as president and Doctors C. Simard and Mignault as strong supporters. Mr. Alfred O. Beardmore was kind enough to present a cup for play between the Montreal and Toronto clubs. This competition has taken place annually since 1902, Montreal having won the trophy twice and Toronto four times. In 1903 the Toronto Club organised an International Tournament and presented a trophy to be known as the International Cup. This cup was played for by United States and Canadian teams annually, but Rochester, N.Y., proved the best by beating Toronto three years running and winning the cup outright. Another gold cup was presented by the late Mr. J. G. Averil, of Rochester, N.Y., to be competed for on the same conditions as the International Cup presented by the Toronto Hunt Club. This trophy has been won two years in succession by the Toronto Hunt Club team and it is now in their possession.

In the 1902 tournament, held in Toronto, High River, Rochester, Montreal and Toronto competed. High River, the members of which team played a spanking resolute game all through, won tolerably easily. In 1905 the second tournament was held in Toronto, with the same teams competing and Buffalo as an addition. The High River quartette again proved themselves expert at the game and again won. During this tournament a match was made between Eastern and Western players and the latter won. In 1906 a tournament was held in Montreal, the competitors being Calgary, Montreal, Toronto and Kingston. The Limestone City team,

it should be mentioned, organised by that ever unwearied enthusiast, Lieutenant-Colonel Williams, made its debut at this tournament, and, although the gentlemen of the team gave a creditable account of themselves, Toronto came out victorious.

I should have mentioned, prior to the foregoing, that in 1905, the year the Kingston Club was formed, a second club, called the Back River, was organised in Montreal, Major George Hooper being the moving spirit. Last year Montreal beat the Toronto Club and won the Beardmore cup, making that city's team a second time winner.

In 1904 the Eastern Canadian Polo Association was organised, with Lieutenant-Colonel Williams as the first president. The Montreal and Toronto Clubs were the sole members at first, but since they have been joined by Back River and Kingston and have some hopes of Hamilton and Ottawa falling into line. All polo tournaments in Eastern Canada are held under the auspices of this Association, of which Lieutenant-Colonel Williams is still president, Lieutenant-Colonel Meighen, of Montreal, vice-president, and Major Elmsley, secretary-treasurer. An executive committee is formed of two members from each team.

Colonel Lessard, whose removal from Toronto to the Military Headquarters at Ottawa everybody in the former city greatly regretted, at latest advices was taking an active part in forming a club at the capital. An organisation is also in progress at Quebec. Up to 1906 Quebec, although a strong military centre, had not seen the game, but in that year two Montreal teams went to the Ancient Capital and played an exhibition match before two thousand people. Toronto's first experience was somewhat after the fashion of Quebec's. In 1892 a couple of teams, under the direction of the late Harry Hamlin, visited the city and played an exhibition game during the holding of the exhibition in the old horse ring. It is rather singular, considering the enthusiasm that was manifested then, that eight years should have been allowed to elapse before anything was done to organise a polo club at the capital of Ontario. However, now that the game has got a firm hold here and is in the hands of men like Colonel Williams, who are indefatigable in anything they undertake, the game is bound to push rapidly ahead.

A polo tournament will be held in Toronto in the latter part of September; in addition two other matches will be arranged for a beautiful cup presented by Lieutenant-Colonel Meighen, of Montreal, to the Toronto Hunt Club for annual competition on their grounds, which by the way experts declare are among the most beautiful and best adapted on this continent. The Toronto Club will present pewters to the winning team. The Ontario Jockey Club has also shown an interest in polo by having a ground laid out in the eastern section of the enclosure formed by its splendid mile track. Undoubtedly during this and coming years this new field will be the scene of many important matches.

Montreal, in 1907, had a most successful season, winning nine matches out of eleven played, including the Canadian championship from Toronto and the "Grand Union" tournament at Saratoga, N. Y. Colonel Meighen's



Montreal Polo Team, Champions of Canada. From left: Captain Pickering, Mr. Robertson, Mr. Freeman, Lieutenant-Colonel Meighen.