

LEARNING THE ROPES

Student Jack McLean, captain of the University of Virginia Men's Varsity Polo Team, on combining his passion for polo with an unrivalled education

As a first generation player from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, a place where little polo is played, I feel very lucky to be a part of the University of Virginia Polo Team. As I have yet to own a polo farm or ponies, our student-run programme gives me a sense of responsibility in caring for our horses. This makes practising and playing them feel all the more rewarding. As captain of the Men's Varsity team, my top priority is ensuring that everyone puts the horses before themselves.

We are incredibly lucky to have an abundance of world-class mounts for all of our players, which includes the Men's Varsity, Women's Varsity and Club teams.

Sadly, our world has currently come to a grinding halt due to the onset of Covid-19. Normally, all teams have at least three weekly practices with two or three stick and ball days in between, but it's not all just fun and games. Every player is responsible for mucking stalls and feeding horses on their designated days. Thankfully, these obligations are manageable and do not detract from our academic pursuits. Our coach, Lou Lopez, gives us the latitude to manage the facility ourselves, inspiring our highly coordinated efforts and proving our unified commitment. By practising regularly, my teammates and I strive to improve our techniques and strategies in the hopes of bringing home

a national title. I assign horses to each player every practice and try to be as fair as possible, so that everyone has a balanced string.

With more than 80 horses, Virginia Polo gives me the joy of riding any time throughout the day, and the thrill of playing the most fun sport of all time. My appreciation remains for all of the helpers at the barn, especially barn manager Jessica Schmitt, and all of the family members who support us at every match. Regardless of the circumstances, this support group keeps us strong and secure.

Having fallen just short of claiming the 2019 intercollegiate title by a slim margin of two points for the all-first year team, we are more determined than ever to bring the glory

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MIKE RYAN: KELLY WELLS



Opposite: Jack McLean and Brennan Wells after winning the Southeastern Intercollegiate championship. This page, from left: (from left) Jack McLean, Brennan Wells, Nachi Viana and Parker Pearce and Lou Lopez; McLean on Valentina after winning the 2019 USPA Congressional Cup



back to Virginia. Our 2019-2020 season has been successful thus far, as we currently hold an undefeated record of 10-0. We anxiously await the re-scheduling of the 2020 National Intercollegiate Championship for which we have already qualified. Unfortunately, the Covid-19 outbreak has put our season on pause, and the horses have all been turned out. As soon as normality returns to the world, the USPA hopes to set a date for the tournament and I remain confident.

During the academic year, when I am not studying, chances are I can be found at the barn singling horses, practising, or just relaxing in the beautiful countryside.

Hanging out with other players at the farm, having asados or even just visiting horses in the paddocks gives me relief from the pressures of school. After two years, this is still an indispensable part of my life as a student at UVA.

I am so grateful for the Raymond Bruce Vere Nicoll Scholarship, which has allowed me to pursue my passion for polo while obtaining an amazing education. Every day, I am reminded how blessed I am to be a part of this wonderful university. I also want to thank the Virginia Polo Board, coaches, and horse donors for making this programme one of the best, if not the best, in the nation.