

# VIRGINIA POLO

2019 - 2020

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# VIRGINIA POLO

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Dimitria Hajimihalis

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Sarah Miller



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## *Articles*

It goes without saying that without the support of our alumni, families, and the numerous sponsors of Virginia Polo, that our club would not stand as tall as it does today. The beautiful facilities, world-class intercollegiate horses, and welcoming environment would not be possible without the support showcased in these pages.

*Demitra Hajimihalis, President, 2020*

# Recent News

## October

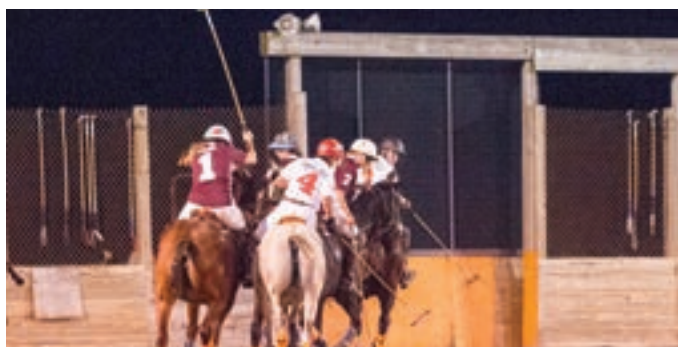
### Women's Arena Handicap

UVA swept the Women's Arena Handicap in October, beating Sullivan Group 16-12 in the final. The team consisted of fourth years Demitra Hajimihalís and Meghan Milligan, and second year Maddie Grant. The women played a hard offense, with Maddie scoring 13 of the team's 16 goals. Best Playing Pony was awarded to Gaucha, a UVA mare played by Maddie in the fourth chukker.



### Fall Invitational

UVA hosted the Virginia Polo Fall Invitational in Charlottesville, October 24-27. The attending Men's teams were UVA, Cornell, University of Kentucky, and Southern Methodist University. The Women's teams were UVA, Cornell, University of Kentucky, and Texas A&M. It was a fun weekend of excellent polo, resulting in both of the UVA Varsity teams winning the tournament.





## *November*

### **Bill Field Invitational**

Cornell hosted the Bill Field Invitational Tournament in Ithaca, NY in late November. Both UVA Varsity teams came out of the weekend undefeated, after playing against Cornell's Men and Women, Skidmore's Men and Women, SMU's Men and Women, UConn's Women, and Kentucky's Women. Dumptruck, a UVA horse, was named Best Playing Pony of the weekend. Fourth year Demitra Hajimihalis and second year Jack McLean received the tournament's Horsemanship Awards.





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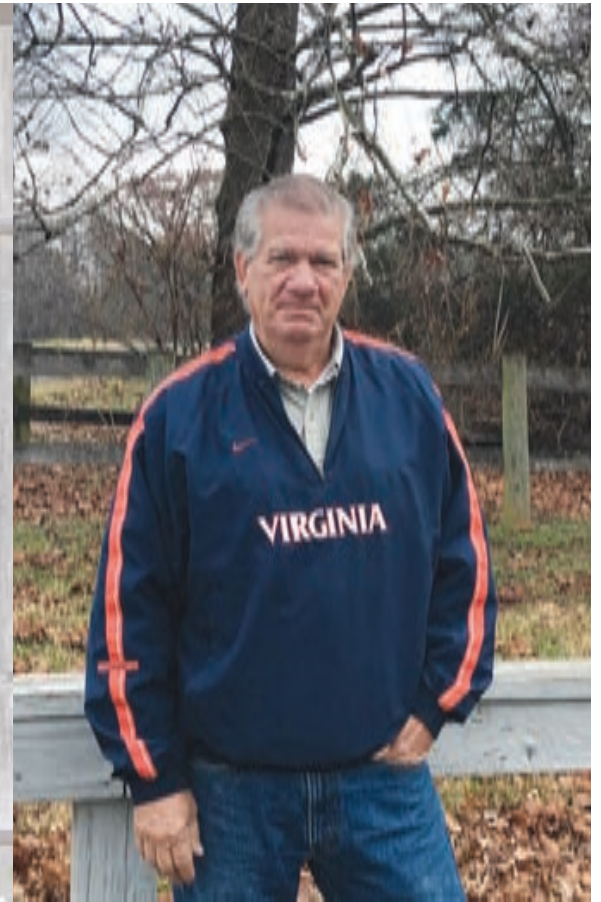
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# COACH'S LETTERS

## **LOUIS LOPEZ JR.**

### Head Coach & General Manager

Lou's first exposure to polo came as a high school sophomore when he attended a clinic sponsored by the Meadowbrook Polo Club at Yale University. To continue learning, he played bicycle polo with Boxwood Bike Polo Club and worked for polo players through the summers. Lou attended Colorado State University, where he started a polo club by recruiting members and registering it as a student organization. After graduation, Lou went on to teach high school in Connecticut. He leased horses from Yale to play polo with Farmington Polo Club. Lou left teaching to become coach and general manager of the Yale Polo and Equestrian Center. After winning a national championship against UVA in 1986, Lou spent the next twenty years earning his living managing clubs, training and selling polo ponies, and competing in the arena as well as outdoors. Lou is in his sixteenth year as head coach. Under his leadership, Virginia has won six Women's and four Men's national titles.



## **JESSICA SCHMITT**

### Barn Manager & Assistant Coach

Jessica graduated from UVA in 2018. This will be her tenth year with the VA Polo program. She started on the High School team and eventually became a part of the Intercollegiate National Team in 2017 and the Runners-up in 2018. She wrapped up her intercollegiate polo career as the 2018 Daniel J. Wallace, Jr. Intercollegiate Female Player of the Year. This is her second year as barn manager and coach of the Virginia Juniors. She hopes to continue giving back to Virginia Polo for everything that it has done for her and is looking forward to a successful year!

# CAPTAIN'S LETTERS

## **Women's Varsity**

The women's team is very excited to return to Grounds and Virginia Polo for another fantastic year. We welcome one new player to our team of four returning players. Since we only five players, this has provided consistent opportunities for club players to jump in our practice and take their polo to the next level. We are also grateful that we have Jessica Schmitt, our barn manager and Virginia polo alum, at the barn every day to practice with us and help us prepare for games.

We are a formidable team that consistently demonstrates great teamwork, communication, and determination to be the best. It is an honor to captain such a great group of women who take pride in representing our university and continuing the legacy of Virginia Polo. After falling short to Texas A & M in the National Finals last year, we are hungry to win a National Championship and are working hard every day to make sure this goal gets accomplished. We make the most of every opportunity to practice at the best collegiate polo facility in the country on extremely talented horses. I would like to thank the Virginia Polo Board, coach Lou Lopez, and Jessica Schmitt for the support they give us and effort they put into Virginia Polo that makes it incomparable to all other collegiate programs.



Maddie Grant



## **Men's Varsity**

This year the Men's Varsity team is loaded with tremendous talent (both players & horses) which we intend to demonstrate in every game this season. Having fallen just short of claiming the 2019 intercollegiate title, we are more determined than ever to bring the glory back to Virginia.

My teammates and I consider ourselves extremely lucky to be practicing and competing at a place as special as Virginia Polo. Given our amazing horses and facility, no other program in the nation is more dedicated to intercollegiate play. For this, we extend our sincere gratitude to the fantastic horse donors, the Virginia Polo Board, and our coaches Lou Lopez & Jessica Schmitt.

Jack McLean '22





## VERE NICOLL SCHOLARSHIP

Raymond Bruce Vere Nicoll was a young man who loved polo and whose life was cut short by a car accident in 1975.

Friends and family of Raymond established a fund in his honor to provide a means for others to enjoy polo while at UVa.

### Recipients of the Vere Nicoll Scholarship

Bradley A. Scherer  
William W. Ylvisaker  
Louis J. Schott  
Donald V. Little, Jr.  
William H. Whitehead, Jr.  
Clarissa C. Echezarreta  
Martha Colhoun Williams  
Derek Sifton  
David Borucke  
Midge Wilson  
Jim Dunlap  
Dana Fortugno  
Jenny Alexy  
Wil Harris  
Robin O'Connell  
Jackson Woodward  
Greg Daniels  
Whitney Chamberlain  
Max Gottschalk

Elizabeth Ann Wildman  
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Mohammed Khakwani  
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Leah Hall  
Mauricio Diaz  
Jay Du-Sauzay  
Lila Warren  
Cecelia Steel  
Felipe Viana  
Meg Greenhalgh  
Alexa Diaz  
Sophie Scheps  
Julia Smith  
Jessica Schmitt  
Ali Mobtaker  
Mia Sweeney\*  
Jack Mclean\*  
Ignacio Viana\*  
Brennan Wells\*

**\*current scholars**

# Facilities & Practice

## Tuesday/ Thursday:

Club, Womens and Mens Practice starting at 4pm

## Wednesday:

High school Practice at 6pm

## Friday:

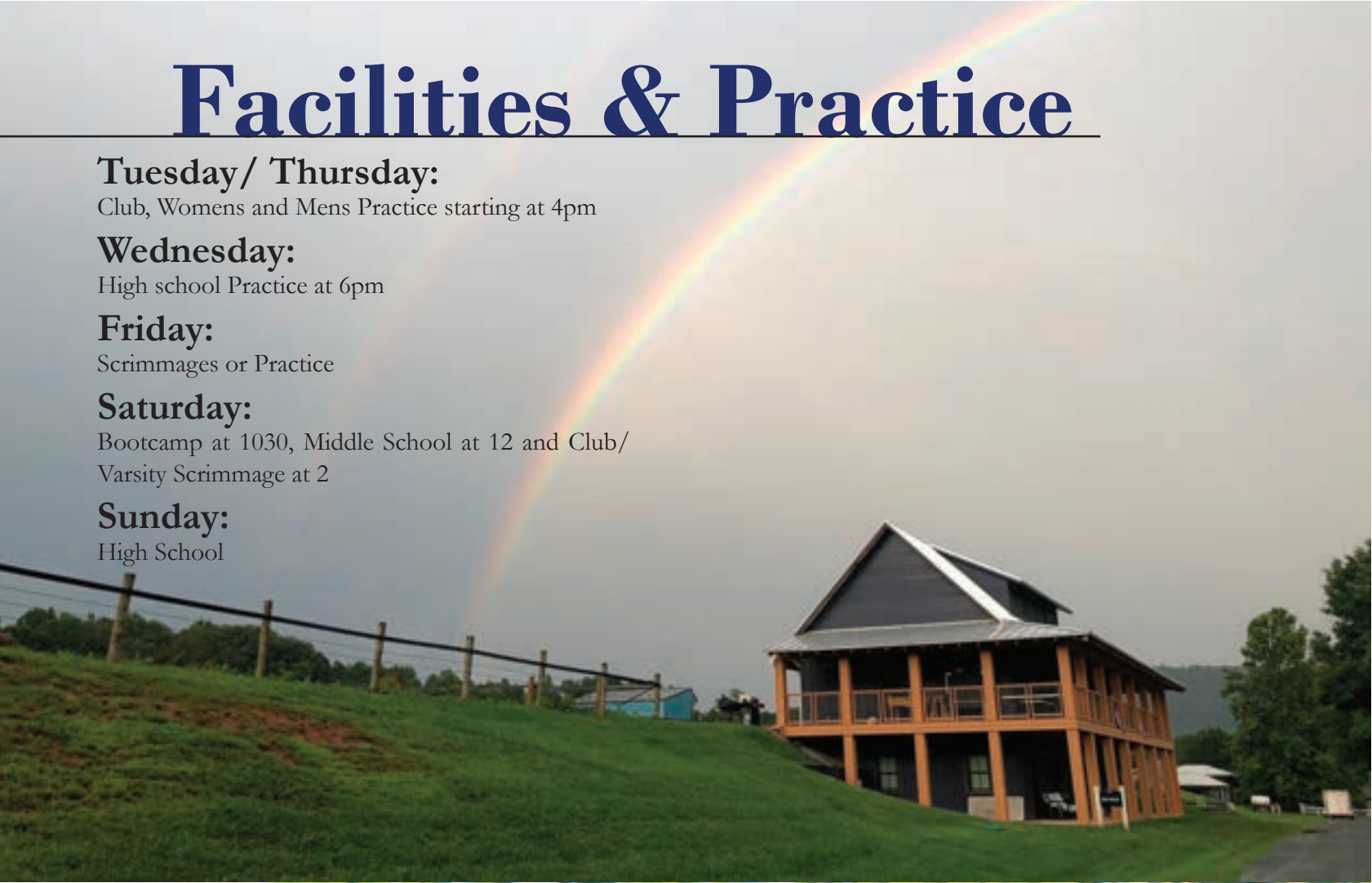
Scrimmages or Practice

## Saturday:

Bootcamp at 1030, Middle School at 12 and Club/  
Varsity Scrimmage at 2

## Sunday:

High School



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[www.myopiapolo.org](http://www.myopiapolo.org)



# CLUB TEAM 2019-2020



**Maria Curtichs Blasco** is a fourth year in the Commerce School with a Psychology minor. She started riding at the age of three and was a show jumper until she got to UVA and discovered polo. She realized polo was much more fun and never show jumped again. She is looking forward to a great final year at Virginia Polo!

**Katie Define** is a first year from Charlottesville, Virginia. Katie has ridden horses since she was three and showed primarily as a hunter-jumper. She decided to try playing polo after working in the polo barn at King Family Vineyards this past summer. Katie is very excited to join the UVA Club Team and have a successful first year in college!



**Cosmo Hunt** is a first year in the College considering majors in Commerce and Environmental Science. Working as a groomer for the Barton Farms polo team this past summer, he received more than enough exposure to decide he loves the sport. Cosmo used to ride often, so he's excited to try his hand at polo with the Club Team this year.



**Griffin Keffer** is a second year Commerce student from Washington, DC. Griffin grew up riding and foxhunting but is starting his polo career this year at UVA. Griffin's sister also played club polo at UVA and got him into it over the summer. He is excited to learn the game!



**Connor Finemore** is second year Mathematics student from New York, NY. He started by riding polo ponies in upstate NY before beginning to play four years ago. He is excited to see what this season holds for UVA polo!





**Ethan Schmidt** is a third year student from Warrenton, VA. He is double majoring in Economics and History. Ethan's favorite pony is Pantera. This year, Ethan is excited to work on his tech startup and hang out with his younger brother Jude, a first year, who rides on the Virginia Equestrian team.

**Jack Dunlap** is a fourth-year majoring in Foreign Affairs. He has been playing polo since his second year and can't get enough. He is currently Co-Captain of the Club Team. His favorite horses are Billy and Teddy, and he looks forward to scheduling more challenging games for the Club Team. Jack hopes to continue playing after he graduates.



**Madeleine Wallach** is a fourth year double majoring in Studio Art and Media Studies and minoring in Global Sustainability. She has been playing polo for four years and is a member of the Club Team. She has worked for a professional polo player in Middleburg, Virginia for the past few years and is very excited for her final year of polo at UVA!



**Madeline Briggs** is a third year studying Media Studies, Architecture and Art History. She has been playing polo for 5 years and is a member of the Club Team. Prior to picking up polo, Madeline competed nationally on the hunter-jumper circuit. Madeline is excited for another year of polo and hopes to have success in the games coming this year.



**Calista Rieken** is a second year Pre-Med student studying Chemistry and Visual Arts, and she is the social chair for Virginia Polo. She started riding hunter-jumper when she was 5 and was hooked on polo from day one of Boot Camp. Her favorite horses at the barn are Rebel and Chunky. On days she's not at the barn (which does happen on occasion), she can be found rock climbing, outside with her friends, or painting. She's really excited for another great year!





**Julia Payne** is a fifth year accelerated masters student in the Batten School studying Public Policy. She began playing polo at UVA her first year and is glad to have an extra year in Charlottesville to continue playing with the Club Team. She plans to spend all her time with her favorite polo pony, Chunky Monkey.



# MEN'S VARSITY



**Antonio Mendes de Almeida** is a Portuguese fourth year majoring in Systems Engineering and Economics. He has been playing polo for ten years and is a member of the Men's Varsity Team. Antonio spent this summer in New York City interning at J.P. Morgan Chase and is pleased to be returning after graduation in May. He is excited to start another year of polo at UVA and hopes to have a successful year.

**Parker Pearce** grew up in Monkton, MD, where he foxhunted with EHC, went eventing, and showed jumpers locally. He played Interscholastic Polo for the Maryland Boys, coached by Kelly Wells. Throughout high school, the Maryland Boys brought home two National Championship titles. However, his polo roots go back to his great grandfather, A. Parker Hall, captain of the Princeton Polo Team in 1922, who led the Tigers to victory in the first Arena Polo Intercollegiate National Men's Championship. Parker is a Cum Laude graduate of the Gilman School and attends the University of Virginia, where he intends to study Business, shoot for the Trap and Skeet Team, and play on the Men's Varsity Polo Team. When not playing polo, he can be found outdoors bird hunting, playing golf, or painting landscapes.



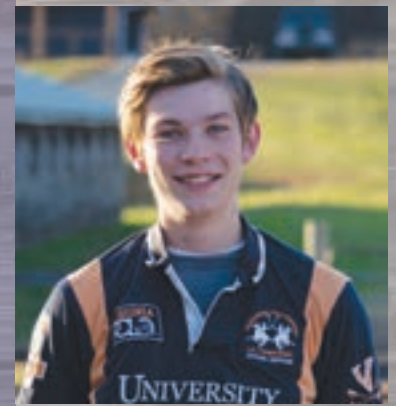
**Brennan Wells** is a second year studying Business. He grew up on Marlan Farm in Freeland, MD, where he learned how to ride and play polo. He's been playing polo for thirteen years and has won two National Interscholastic titles. His 2019 summer highlight was winning the USPA Congressional Cup while representing UVA. Brennan is super excited to start his second year at UVA and is striving to win a collegiate championship.

# VIRGINIA 2019-2020



**Digvijay (Dig) Singh** is a second year student at Piedmont Virginia Community College, with intentions to transfer to UVA as a third year student. Dig has been playing polo for about thirteen years with his family in Litchfield, Connecticut. His favorite horse at the Virginia Polo Center is Lolita. Dig looks forward to learning and practicing with the Men's Varsity Team this coming year, and hopes to officially join the team next fall.

**Jack McLean** is a second year from Pittsburgh, PA pursuing a degree in Commerce. A two-time National Interscholastic champion, Jack has had the honor of playing across the United States as well in New Zealand, Guatemala, Canada, and England. His favorite ponies are Quavo and Mary, two of Virginia Polo's many "machines" which he played throughout Virginia while based in Charlottesville this summer. Jack is looking forward to a fun and successful season.



**Nathan Church** is a first year at Piedmont with the intention of transferring to UVA next year. He has been playing for seven years and is a member of the Men's Varsity team. He played for Virginia Polo his senior year of high school and is looking forward to continuing to play here.

**Ignacio (Nachi) Viana** is a second year in the College of Arts and Sciences. He has been playing polo for fifteen years. He spent the summer playing here in Charlottesville as well as in Boston, MA at Myopia Polo Club. Nachi has delved into a professional polo career, having represented his home country, Uruguay, in the FIP qualifications, as well as playing in California in the Pacific Coast Open for Farmers & Merchants Bank. Nachi is very excited for his second year at UVA and hopes to have a successful year!



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Alicia and Michael Milligan

Jill Owens



*Congrats to VA Polo for sweeping  
the Bill Fields invitational*



**DUMPTRUCK**  
Bill Fields Invitational Best Polo Pony

# WOMEN'S VARSITY



**Elizabeth Owens** is a first year student at PVCC with the intention of transferring to UVA next year. She is a member of the Women's Varsity Team and has played polo on the Boston Polo Interscholastic Team for the past five years. Last year her team competed in the Girl's National Interscholastic Championship in Texas where she won an All Star award. She is looking forward to her first year at Virginia Polo!

**Grace Burgert** is a second year majoring in History and Politics in the College of Arts and Sciences. She has played polo for six years with her family's team, Listo Polo, in Houston, TX. When she's not playing polo, she is vivaciously cheering on the Houston Rockets. Her favorite horses at Virginia Polo are Cloro and Rivera, and she is looking forward to another year of exciting polo!



**Demitra Hajimihalis** is a fourth year and is the President of Virginia Polo Club. She is majoring in Music with a minor in Philosophy. This past summer, she took classes and played here in Charlottesville. She is a member of the Women's Varsity Team. She began polo at Garrison Forest, and prior to playing polo, was in the hunter-jumper world. Her favorite Virginia Polo Ponies are Whiskey, Mosenita, Seven, and Magnolia. She is looking forward to a great final year at Virginia Polo!



**Maddie Grant** is a second year studying Biology from Phoenix, Maryland. She has been playing polo for nine years and is the captain of the Women's Varsity Polo Team. Her favorite horses to play from UVA are Gaucha and Tapa. Maddie was the captain of the Maryland Girls Varsity Team for three years in high school, where she won four National Interscholastic Championships in five consecutive years. Maddie is looking forward to a fun and exciting year of polo at UVA and has her sights set on a National Championship victory!



**Meghan Milligan** is a fourth year on the Women's Varsity Team majoring in Cognitive Science/Neuroscience. She started playing polo six years ago with the University of Virginia high school program, but has been riding since she was six, having competed in three-day eventing prior to making the switch to polo. LJ and Lou Lopez saw her pick up a mallet for the first time six years ago and are the only coaches she has ever had. Meghan is super excited about the team this year and for the upcoming season!



# HIGH SCHOOL 2019-2020



**Coco de Vink** is 15 years old, and a sophomore at Deerfield Academy. She is from Charlottesville, VA, and has been playing polo for three years. She plays field hockey and lacrosse on the side. Her favorite polo pony to play is Teddy.

**Gracie Dunlap** is 17 years old and attends John Champe High School. She has been playing polo for a year and a half. She was introduced to Virginia Polo by her older brother, who is the captain of the club team. Her favorite polo pony is Teddy. She is very excited to keep playing and is looking forward to a great first high school season!



**Natalia (Pelona) Hernandez** is 17 years old. She is a senior at Leesville Road. She lives in Raleigh, NC where she loves to hike with her pup Lilly. She loves polo and is excited for the season with Virginia Juniors!

**Lauren Rapp** is a seventeen-year-old junior at Woodgrove High School. She has been playing polo for six years and has been riding since the age of seven. Her favorite pony at Virginia Polo is Snickers.



**MaryKate Santos** is a sophomore in high school. She has been playing polo for seven years, and this is her third competitive season. She is looking forward to a great season at Virginia Polo!



# Virginia Polo Programs

## Bootcamps

### College Students

Our Bootcamp is an introductory program for those with some experience riding horses, but little to no experience playing polo. It is an opportunity for riders to learn the amazing sport with a series of one lesson a week taught by assistant coach Jessica Schmitt and other students.. This Fall semester, we had eight dedicated bootcampers, who will move up to the Clubteam in the Spring semester!

### Ages 10-15

We also have a Summer Bootcamp for boys and girls ages 10-15. For more information or to sign up for the Summer Bootcamp, contact [info@vapolo.org](mailto:info@vapolo.org). We teach the rules of the game, the language of polo, and have kids hitting a ball while riding a horse by the end of one week!

## Middle School Program

### 5<sup>th</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup> Grade

We also have a week long summer camp for boys and girls. This is the first year that we launched our Middle School polo program. It has been tons of fun for all involved! The kids are dedicated and excited to learn. They will participate in more competitive events in the Spring. Look forward to more updates as the program grows!





*Listo Polo wishes  
UVA a great season!  
Go Hoos!*



# Virginia Polo Dominates First Tournament of the Season with Dual Wins

By Grace Burgert



The men's and women's polo teams are undefeated after a successful weekend of games at the Virginia Fall Invitational

With high expectations after a disappointing end to last season, the Virginia men's and women's polo teams came out swinging over four days of intense competition from Oct. 24 to Oct. 27.

For the past three years, the Virginia Polo Center has hosted the Virginia Fall Invitational to mark the start of the fall intercollegiate polo season. This year was no different as Virginia welcomed Kentucky, Southern Methodist, Texas A&M and Cornell for four days of play.

The Virginia men played their first game Thursday against Kentucky and commanded the arena from the first chukker onward.

The men trailed for approximately one minute by one goal in the first chukker before asserting their dominance. At the end of the sixth chukker, the score was 23-6 in favor of Virginia, and the men's spot in the finals was secured.

The men's final Saturday was a fast-paced game as Virginia took on Southern Methodist. Teammates since middle school, sophomores Jack McLean and Brennan Wells put on a clinic in classic arena play by passing well, using the "boards" of the arena, and anticipating the ball's bounce. Wells led the men with 11 goals as the Cavaliers won with a final score of 21-8.

"Going into Saturday's final, I knew it was going to be a very physical game and that I would need to bring my A-game," Wells said.

“After the game, I was satisfied with how the team played together against a tough SMU team. I was fortunate enough to be involved in many offensive team plays that allowed me to put points up on the board.”

The strong start to the season positions Virginia well to compete for a national title. “I am extremely pleased with our performance in the tournament and think that it sets a fantastic tone for the rest of the season,” McLean said. “We are especially hungry for a national championship this year and have been preparing ourselves for success by pushing each other to the best of our abilities every single practice. I cannot wait to see what the rest of the year holds for us.” Friday night, the women entered the arena fresh off a dominant performance in the National Women’s Arena Handicap, which they won three weeks before. The team was confident in itself and its “A String” of Virginia horses, but Kentucky was not to be underestimated. The first chukker proved to be more difficult than anticipated for the Cavaliers, as the score was 3-2 when the women switched onto Kentucky horses for chukker two.

“I tried to invite the most competitive teams in the country [to the Invitational] in order to determine the strengths and weaknesses of my teams”

“It sets a fantastic tone for the rest of the season”

The unique “split-string” format adds a layer of difficulty to the collegiate polo game as players from both teams play each other’s horses. On the women’s side, players play at least two unfamiliar horses over the course of a four-chukker match, while each member of the men’s team plays three unfamiliar horses over six chukkers.

The Kentucky horses and Virginia horses are quite different, and both teams struggled to adjust to their new ponies at first. The women’s team were playing the “split-string” format for the first time, and that was apparent in the first half. In the second half of play, the women found their rhythm and secured the win 14-6, as well as a spot in the finals. Sophomore Maddie Grant led scorers with nine goals.

The women faced Cornell on Sunday in the final match of the weekend. The Cornell women, led by senior captain Shariah Harris, are a great defensive team and forced the Cavaliers into uncharacteristic fouls. Virginia’s team-play was effective, however, as Grant’s teammates worked throughout the game to block Cornell’s defenders and clear a path to the goal. Grant made the most of every opportunity, converting 15 of the Cavalier’s 19 goals. Ultimately, Virginia prevailed with a final score of 19-9.

“I tried to invite the most competitive teams in the country [to the Invitational] in order to determine the strengths and weaknesses of my teams,” Coach Lou Lopez said. “I am very pleased with the performance of both teams so far.”

*Originally published in the Cavalier Daily 11/1/2019*



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# United States Polo Association

## *Polo Program*

By Demitra Hajimihalis



**The** United States Polo Association Interscholastic/Intercollegiate Polo Program provided me with an incredible opportunity last winter. I was extremely fortunate to have been selected for the 2019 USA/SUPA International Challenge Cup match. Each year, the USPA and SUPA pick a team comprised of one collegiate player per region to make a four-man team. Then, each team executes a three-man rotation format for the arena match. Each year the location is alternated by country to enhance global connectivity and create a fair playing ground for each team as the rules of the game vary between countries.

This year, the match took place on January 25, 2019 at the International Polo Club in Wellington, FL.

It was an exciting time as the new arena at IPC was just completed, and because Wellington is the Winter Equestrian Capital of the World. Team USA was comprised of Fiona McBride-Luman from California Polytechnic State University, Liam Lott from Skidmore College, Christian Aycinena from Texas A&M, and myself from the University of Virginia. Team Britain was comprised of Robyn Evans, James (Sticky) Glew, Jamie Grayson, and Michal Zurawski.

The match was good-natured and extremely competitive. The USPA and Dardo Iglesias provided us with incredible mounts. My favorite horse was Anna, who I rode in the last chukker. Team USA came out of the gates slightly flat-footed, and unfortunately one of our

players had a bad fall and was unable to continue the match. Our mentors, teammates and opponents handled the situation with a caring nature, patience, and support. Having started a little slow, being a man down with the four-man rotation, and playing against top collegiate competitors, we had to adjust. Even though our injured player could not play, she greatly contributed to our game strategy and supported us off of the field. As we all know, it takes a village between players, horse strings, venue, and more to coordinate a polo match, which involves many off-field components.

To me, what happens off the field and in between chukkers can be what makes or breaks an individual or team in the game. I would like to highlight and thank our esteemed coaches and mentors for the game; without the wise words of these individuals we could not have performed as we did. Emily Dewey, Tommy Biddle, Pelon Escapite, Steve Krueger, Carlucho Arellano, and Cristina Fernandez all provided Team USA with strategic, mental, and even life advice which led us to victory. We learned a new trick of the trade as well from Steve Krueger when he gave Liam Lott a rubber dish glove to play with in order to prevent the reins from slipping through his fingers. It was unfortunately pouring down rain for the majority of the match, but the new arena at IPC was well-suited for these conditions and allowed the ball to fly.

The match was fast, furious, wet, and so much fun. It is amazing that the USPA streamed this event as well. Unfortunately, my family was unable to attend, but thanks to the LiveStream, they were all able to watch together in Baltimore, MD. The USPA LiveStream also allowed for our opponents' families to watch from across the pond.

What made it the most fun was that we were playing with and against new friends. We were able to spend a lot of time with our team and opponents, which was my favorite part of

the experience. Establishing connections and sharing such unique experiences with one another creates a newly appreciated level of collaboration beyond the general scope. We all have in common this one positive, adrenaline-filled, amazing weekend and match. I think it is also what made the match so fun; the fact that we were able to get to know our opponents off the field and for us to have such great times together makes playing a lot more fun. There was a level of respect in that arena between all players that I have never experienced before. If we would go hard into a play, we would check on each other teammates and opponents. That level of care and element of safety allowed me to truly give it my all.

Interscholastic/Intercollegiate Polo not only provided me with this incredible opportunity, but has also aided me in pursuing Music, Philosophy, and Business at a premier academic institution: the University of Virginia. I/I Polo administers vital skills off and on the polo field creating well-rounded student-athletes with exemplary mentors. I/I offers a wide range of opportunities, such as this one, for its participants. Without I/I and Virginia Polo, I would not have been prepared for this experience. Without I/I and Virginia Polo, I would not have capitalized on the connections provided during this experience. Thank you so much to Emily Dewey and Amy Fraser for spearheading this event, making it an amazing weekend, and being the ultimate team moms. Furthermore, as the best is always saved for last, I would like to greatly thank my father and my family. Without their support, I would not be where I am today or able to have experiences like these. I encourage everyone to apply for opportunities like this, even if you are not confident you will be selected—you never know what will happen! Put yourself out there and make lemonade.

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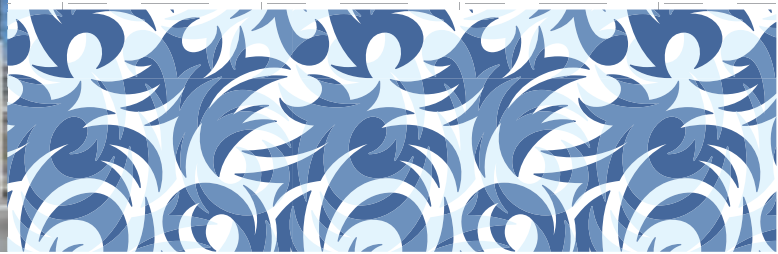
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Good Luck to the  
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# Meet Virginia Polo: One of the most successful teams on Grounds

By Grace Burgert



**There** are few things Virginia fans love more than winning. While two Virginia teams—men’s basketball and men’s lacrosse—won national championship last year, another lesser-known team was also earning win after win—Virginia Polo.

Virginia Polo has won 20 National Championships—11 by the men and 9 by the women—and the teams have reached the finals a total of 46 times. To put this in perspective, other Virginia varsity sports have won 27 NCAA team national championships combined.

There has never been a better time to hop on the Virginia polo bandwagon. Last season, the Cavaliers had two teams make their way to the National Intercollegiate Championships for polo.

The women’s team was full of talent, led by then-senior Sadie Bryant—team captain and a quiet, yet powerful, force to be reckoned with in the arena. Then-juniors Demitra Hajimihalis and Meghan Milligan filled the other two starting positions. Hajimihalis ran the Cavalier’s defense and Milligan played forward, the “number one” position in polo.

The women played aggressively all year and handily clinched the Southeast Region over Kentucky to secure their spot at Nationals. The women began the five-day tournament strong and made their way to the National Championship via an 19-17 semifinal win over Cornell.

The finals were a hard-fought game, as horses and players gave their all, but the women ultimately

fell short in a 9-20 loss to a dominant Texas A&M team. The women ended the season with a winning record, only ever falling short to the champion Aggies.

The men were a young and talented group led by three then-freshmen—two-time National Interscholastic Championship teammates Jack McLean and Brennan Wells, as well as up-and-coming polo professional Ignacio Viana from Uruguay. The men dominated the whole season, which lasts from early October to early April, crushing teams by an average of 16 goals and remaining undefeated leading up to Nationals.

The men commanded their semifinal game, defeating North Texas 23-6. The team was confident going into the finals against a team they had faced and defeated throughout the season—reigning National Intercollegiate Champion Texas A&M. They started incredibly strong—6-1 in the first period—but some untimely mistakes, tricky calls and unlucky bounces led the men to their first defeat of the season season by a score of 19-21.

While the “Aggie Sweep” kept both the men and women from winning a title last season, Virginia Polo is determined to not let the event repeat itself. Heads hung low and accepting second-place trophies, both teams swore they would not accept the same outcome next year.

This year, the women lose Bryant, as well as former Cavaliers Connell Erb and Jessica Riemann. However, one of the most dominant female players in the country will fill that void as sophomore Maddie Grant, four-time Girls National Interscholastic champion, joins the team.

*“the Virginia teams are too good to ignore”*

“Virginia Polo has never been better poised to assert itself as the most dominant program in the country. Stiff competition is expected”

The men bring back their three now-sophomore starters—McLean, Wells and Viana—as well as senior Antonio Mendes de Almeida and and freshman Parker Pearce, who was teammates with McLean and Wells on the high school championship team.

Virginia Polo has never been better poised to assert itself as the most dominant program in the country. Stiff competition is expected on the women’s side from Kentucky and the perennially competitive Cornell women. Likewise, the men’s side will compete with the likes of North Texas and South Carolina Aiken, who will be seeking redemption after crushing losses last year. Competition will be tense and, of course, the Aggies should never be discounted, but Virginia is well-prepared to find success this season.

While polo may not be the most well-known sport, the Virginia teams are too good to ignore. For newcomers to the sport, this is the perfect time to start following Virginia polo.

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