

# VIRGINIA POLO

2022-2023



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**EDITOR'S NOTE**

Virginia Polo is a special place. If you surveyed current club members, many would name the farm as one of their favorite places at UVA and I imagine this sentiment holds true for many alumni as well. While aspects of the program like our incredible horses and the quality of our facilities certainly contribute to this feeling among members, I think perhaps the most special thing about Virginia Polo is that it means so many different things to different people. For many varsity players, their time at Virginia Polo means an opportunity to compete for National Championships with a top collegiate program. For many club players, the bootcamp and club programs mean an opportunity to learn and play the sport of polo for the first time. For high school players, the club provides an opportunity to hone skills at the interscholastic level and an introduction to collegiate polo. In the coming pages, you will learn a little bit more about the variety of impacts Virginia Polo has had and continues to have on its members and get a glimpse of why this program means so much to so many people.

None of these opportunities would be possible without the support of our coaches, the Virginia Polo Board of Directors, and the generous support of our club donors. We hope the stories we share will encourage you to get involved in the program in some way if you are not already, whether it be through attending matches, donating to the club, joining the Virginia Polo Board, or helping us organize the many events we host each year. We hope to see you soon at Forest Lodge Drive!

Katy Owens

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## The COACHES' CORNER



### Lou Lopez

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. 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 eighteenth year as head coach. Under his leadership, Virginia has won seven Women's and five Men's national titles.

### Elka Sterling

Elka grew up moving around the world, living in Kazakhstan, Israel, Azerbaijan and the Netherlands. Having started riding at a young age, she rode whenever and wherever she could, and got to learn from horses and riders of all kinds of backgrounds. After competitively show jumping through high school, she discovered polo her sophomore year at Cornell and never looked back. She graduated with a B.S. in Biology in 2020 and returned to Cornell Polo as Assistant Coach. Elka unexpectedly took over as Interim Head Coach in January 2022, and embraced the responsibilities of solely managing a string of 45 horses and intercollegiate program. She moved down to Charlottesville in August 2022 to take on the role of Barn Manager & Assistant Coach at Virginia Polo. When she's not with the horses in the barn, you can find her in the Beh House, working remotely as a Data Analyst for Atomwise, an AI-based drug discovery company, or reading on the couch with her dog, Blue. She has loved getting to know the ponies and people that make Virginia Polo so special and is looking forward to the years to come!





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# CAPTAIN'S LETTERS



Parker Pearce

Men's Team Captain

The Men's Varsity team entered the season with a great lineup of extremely talented and experienced players who were all eager to get to work. After a great early season of learning our strengths and figuring out how to support and motivate each other, we came into the tournament season committed to winning every play and keeping our horses in prime condition. Upon making it to the National Intercollegiate Final, we unfortunately lost a close match, but could not be more proud of the fight we made and the dedication we put in to reach that moment. Additionally, the men's team left nationals with two of four all-star awards, the horsemanship award, best playing pony, and best playing string. We are extremely grateful to everyone who made this year possible, including our incredible horses, the outstanding board of directors, our amazing barn manager Elka Sterling, and our exceptional coach Lou Lopez.



Katie Define

Women's Team Captain

The Women's Varsity team has been honored to have four dedicated, talented, and competitive players to compete this season. Over the semester, we had the opportunity to practice with various alumni and improve our playing with aggressive, fast-paced chukkers, which has helped us be incredibly successful over the year. We were also grateful to have wonderful ponies to play, even after having to retire some A-string favorites. Our team dynamic and drive to accomplish the same goal motivated us and helped us make it to the finals of the National Championship which was an honor to play in. We would also like to express our appreciation to our coaches, Lou Lopez and Elka Sterling, our horse donors, and the Virginia Polo Board for their invaluable support.



Hannah Thomas & Julia Hersh

Club Team Co-Captains

We are thrilled to have the club team continue to grow with many hard-working, enthusiastic players. Our team members, mostly past bootcampers, have become stronger players and more passionate about the sport by the day. Not only do we have a great group of dedicated members, but we are so happy to play and care for the horses that have come to the club team over the years. With players from various backgrounds, ranging from high schoolers to graduate students, the barn is a place for us to all come together, have successful and fun practices, do work, and bond over the shared love of our ponies. We are so excited to welcome this spring semester's group of bootcampers to join our team next fall and watch them grow as players. In addition, we would like to extend thanks and gratitude to Elka, who has been a huge asset to the club team this year in her role as assistant coach, as well as Lou, for all he does for the Virginia Polo program.

## MEN'S TEAM



### Parker Pearce

Parker is a fourth-year in the McIntire School of Commerce studying Management and Entrepreneurship. He is from Monkton, Maryland where he started riding as a child and competed in show jumping and eventing for many years. After discovering polo, he never looked back. While he is sad to be leaving Virginia Polo, he can't wait to see what's in store for our incredible new team. His favorite horse in the men's string is and will always be Nemo, who took home BPP for Virginia at this past National Tournament. Parker spends his summers playing at the Maryland Polo Club and currently works for Sagamore Spirit. Go Hoos!

### Jim Deal

Jim is a fourth year transfer student from the University of South Carolina, Aiken. He grew up on Grovespring Farm in Culpeper, Virginia, showjumping and foxhunting until the age of twelve when he began polo at Natania Farm in Warrenton, Virginia. He went on to play up and down the east coast. In high school he competed for the UVA junior team. For his first two years of college he competed for the USCA intercollegiate team as well as many local 2-12 goal tournaments. He is currently majoring in English and is thrilled to be a part of the Virginia Polo community. His favorite horses are Sorpresa, Sapa and Nemo.



### Vlad Tarashansky

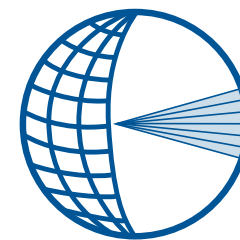
Vlad is a second year in the Engineering School studying computer science. He is from Lloyd Harbor, New York. Vlad started riding and jumping horses, but he switched completely to polo after taking just one polo lesson. He has been involved with numerous I/I polo teams throughout highschool, and over the summers played at Meadowbrook Polo Club. His favorite horse is Dump Truck.

### Makhdum Mourad

Makhdum "Mak" is a first year in the School of Arts and Sciences studying Economics and History. He is an international student from Pakistan. Makhdum grew up riding and learning to play polo at his high school in Lahore. Since having come to UVA, Virginia Polo has become a home away from home for him. His favorite horses are Bonita and Glizzy.



Lou Lopez with 2022-2023 Men's Varsity team members Mak Mourad, Parker Pearce, Jim Deal and Vlad Tarashansky



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2022-2023 Women's Varsity Team members Kellie Booth, Alana Benz, Katie Define and Liz Owens

## WOMEN'S TEAM



### Katie Define

Katie is a fourth-year Computer Science major and Entrepreneurship minor in the College of Arts and Sciences. Originally from Charlottesville, Virginia, she started riding horses with her mom at the age of three, and horse showed competitively as a hunter jumper throughout high school. At UVA she started playing polo on the club team and instantly loved the game. After having the opportunity to move up to varsity her second year she fell in love with both the women's string of ponies, most notably Galleta and Legendaria, and her teammates. After graduation, she is planning on traveling for a year (travel suggestions welcome!) before moving to Boston to work as a technology consultant for Ernst & Young.

### Liz Owens

Liz is from Boston MA. She graduated this spring majoring in Philosophy and minoring in Psychology. She has ridden most of her life and has been playing polo for the past ten years. In high school, she played on the Boston Polo Club Interscholastic Team. Her favorite horses on the women's string are Mosenita and Red.

This summer she will spend some time traveling and working before eventually going to law school. She is very grateful for her time at Virginia Polo and to all the people who have made this amazing experience possible.



### Alana Benz

Alana is a second-year student majoring in International Relations with a minor in Art History. Originally from Oahu, Hawaii, Alana began playing polo in high school after riding for a few years prior. She plays at the Hawaii Polo Club during the summers and played on the Maui Interscholastic team in high school. Her favorite horses at Virginia Polo are Mosenita, Federico and Whiskey. She is very excited for two more years at Virginia Polo!



### Kellie Booth

Kellie graduated this spring with an accelerated master's degree in the McIntire School of Commerce. She grew up in Charlottesville, Virginia and learned how to play polo on the Virginia Juniors team before attending Cornell University. She was very excited to return home and have the opportunity to represent the University of Virginia in her final year of collegiate polo. Although the women's string is filled with incredible horses, she has a soft spot for Baby who was born at her family's farm.



Photo: Dan Addison



Photo: Dan Addison



Photo: Dan Addison

# CLUB TEAM



## Hannah Thomas

Hannah is a fourth-year in the McIntire School of Commerce from Charlottesville, Virginia. She is concentrating in Accounting and Information Technology with a track in Business Analytics. After growing up competing in the A-rated hunters and equitation, she discovered polo in the summer of 2021 and hasn't looked back. The people and horses make this club the best thing she has been lucky enough to be a part of here at UVA; she only wishes she had joined sooner. Her favorite club ponies are Rocket, Betty, and Juan. Following graduation, Hannah will be returning to UVA in the fall to pursue her M.S. in Accounting and, of course, keep playing polo!



## Julia Hersh

Julia is from a small farm in New Jersey and has been on the club team since her first year at UVA after starting with Boot Camp. She competed in eventing and dressage but wanted to be on a team sport when coming to college. She loves the adrenaline rush and being able to learn and love a sport that might not have been possible outside of college. Her ideal string to play is Pantera, Betty, Belle, and Terri. She is so excited to be continuing her third year on the team as co-captain and to further improve her playing and connecting with her teammates.



## Annabelle Bond

Annabelle is a second year biology major from St. Paul, Minnesota. She grew up riding at a hunter-jumper barn and has also returned to her childhood summer camp every year where she is working as the corral director this summer. She discovered polo her first year, completing Boot Camp in the spring, and is so excited to now be on the team. She loves the Virginia Polo community (and of course the ponies). Her favorites are Belle, Pantera, and Mach! Annabelle is so grateful that polo has become part of her college experience.



## Antonia Masias

Antonia is a third-year student from Lima, Peru, majoring in History and minoring in Entrepreneurship and Studio Art. Antonia grew up watching polo matches almost every weekend but didn't hold a mallet until she was 16 years old because there were no female polo players back home. In 2018, she got the chance to watch the Santa Barbara USPA National Intercollegiate Championship, where she realized girls play polo, too. Antonia went back to Lima and became the only female polo player for over 3 years. Last year, she began playing indoor polo at UVA and couldn't be happier.



## Bailey Briggs

Bailey graduated this spring with her Masters in Landscape Architecture. She started riding when she was 5 and continued to ride and groom show jumpers up until she returned to school for her graduate degree in 2020. Following in her little sister's footsteps (Madeline Briggs, Class of 2021), Bailey decided to join the club team during her last year of school. Her favorite ponies to play include Machiata, Betty, Raga, Jaws and Juan. Despite graduating this past spring, she is grateful to have had the opportunity to play at Virginia Polo and hopes to stay involved with the club in the future!



## Katy Owens

Katy is a fourth-year from Harrisonburg, VA studying Civil Engineering with a concentration in Construction Engineering and Management. Prior to coming to UVA, she took lessons at a hunter-jumper barn for 12 years. Katy joined the Club Team in Spring 2022, after learning how to play polo during Boot Camp and has loved the opportunity to improve both her riding and playing while on the team. While she loves all of our wonderful club ponies, some of her favorites include July and Snickers. After graduation, Katy plans on returning to UVA for a year-long masters program and is very excited to spend one more year with Virginia Polo.



## Mackenzie Craig

Mackenzie is a first-year engineering student from Ambler, Pennsylvania. She began riding hunter-jumper at age 7, and tried polo for the first time at an introductory camp in 2018. The moment she hit the ball for the first time, she knew this was going to be her sport! Mackenzie is so grateful for the wonderful facilities, coaches, and ponies that Virginia Polo offers and is looking forward to playing and improving in the years to come. Her favorite ponies (although very hard to choose!) include Fiesta, Terri, and Bella.



## Maryam A. Sarafzadeh

Maryam is a 2nd-year student from Stowe, Vermont intending to major in Financial Economics and Data Science. She competed in USHJA Zone I circuit for most of her middle and high school years, before leaving to work with rehabilitated off-the-track thoroughbreds at a rescue center in her hometown. At UVA, Maryam tried the VA Polo Boot Camp the spring of her 1st year and quickly became addicted to the fast-paced, fierce nature of the sport. She decided to work and practice at VA Polo during the summer and through the fall, becoming close with members of the community. Maryam's favorite ponies are May, Macchiata, and Chunky; a triad of spicy chestnut mares. She is grateful and honored to meet all the amazing members of the VA Polo community and to have the privilege of playing such an amazing sport.



## Megan Maleno

Megan is a third-year Computer Science major from Long Island, NY. She grew up competing in the hunters until she was introduced to polo through Virginia Polo's Boot Camp program in the spring of her first year. She loves being on the club team because of the supportive nature of all the team members, and is grateful for the opportunity to meet such wonderful people. Her favorite ponies are Chunky and Snickers. Megan is happy she has one more year to play with the team before she graduates.



## Morgan Hale

Morgan is a third-year in the McIntire School of Commerce, concentrating in IT and Management, with a second major in Computer Science. She is from Palm Coast, FL. Although she grew up riding hunters, she started exploring other disciplines at UVA and first started helping out at Virginia Polo in the summer after her second year. The people, horses, and excitement of the sport inspired her to complete Boot Camp and finally become a member of the club team. She is so excited and grateful to have found such a wonderful team and community!





**Nora Gaudion**

Nora is a first-year from Camp Hill, Pennsylvania intending to major in Economics. She grew up in the hunter-jumper arena before discovering Virginia Polo her first semester and was hooked from the first day of Boot Camp. She can't wait for what the next couple years hold at the most amazing facility with the best people and ponies. Her favorite pony will always be Snickers.



**Scout Bale**

Scout is a second year civil engineering major and environmental science minor from Redmond, Oregon. She grew up trail riding and showing in 4H shows. More recently, she has been riding for UVA's Dressage team, as well as working on a dude ranch in the Rockies. She is immensely grateful for the opportunity to learn and ride with Virginia Polo since her first semester at UVA. Scout loves her time at the barn and much prefers to be there than on grounds! Her favorite club ponies are July, Juan, and Rocket. She recently studied abroad, but is super excited to get back into polo and continue learning!



**Shang Ruan**

Shang is a first-year student at Darden School of Business. Originally from Shenzhen, China, she grew up in the concrete jungle and did not start learning how to ride until 2020 after COVID's reopening. She watched one polo game at Myopia in South Hamilton, MA the summer before coming to UVA and was immediately fascinated by the nature of the sport. She is very grateful to be here and learn from all the two-legged and four-legged teachers.



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# VIRGINIA JUNIORS



## Hanan Fadil

Hanan is a Junior at Miller School and lives in Charlottesville and has been playing polo for 3 years. Her favorite part of being on the highschool team is getting to play the amazing horses at UVA. Her favorite pony has to be Belle because of her amazing bump and quick turns.

## Hazel Conklin

Hazel is a sophomore at Charlottesville High School. She has been playing polo for three years and loves being a part of the high school team. Her favorite part of riding at UVA is being able to play polo with so many different people and horses. Hazel's favorite horse is Chunky because of her fierce personality and powerful bump. She hopes to go to UVA after high school and keep playing polo!



## Kate Reilly

Kate is a freshman at St. Anne's Belfield from Charlottesville Virginia. Kate has been riding for 9 years and has been playing polo for around 2 years. She enjoys playing on the UVA high school team because it is an amazing community, a great way to practice polo out of the summer season, and has great horses! Kate's favorite horse is either Terri or Chunky, but always enjoys riding new horses.

## Molly Gallagher

Molly is a senior at Charlottesville High School and has been riding for 11 years. She has been playing polo for about a year and a half. She grew up riding bareback and doing endurance rides. She went on a field trip to the UVA Polo Center and fell in love with the sport. Molly's favorite horse is Pantera but she loves all the horses.



## Noah Dabney

Noah is a Richmond Virginia native and a Junior at Glen Allen High School. He has been playing polo for 2 years. Noah grew up riding hunter jumper from the age of 6 and wanted to expand from show competitions to do something more within the equestrian arena. He quickly found his love for polo following his first viewing of a live polo match. He enjoys polo because it is a fast pace and aggressive sport. He also loves the team camaraderie and the uniqueness of the sport.

## Nora Wood

Nora is a senior at Western Albemarle High School and grew up nearby the UVA campus in Charlottesville. She started riding hunter jumper at the age of 11 and had the opportunity of being introduced to polo during the spring 2022 Boot Camp, where she fell in love with the team atmosphere and fast-paced gameplay and joined the high school team in fall of 2022. She will be attending UVA as a first-year for fall 2023 and cannot wait to be a part of the club team and to develop her skills and spend time with such a kind and hardworking group.



## a letter from our juniors...

“ This year we played as an open team. It was our first time playing together but quickly after our first game, we found our chemistry. Although we didn't win every game this season we saw huge improvements and were happy with where we ended and are ready to come back with more wins next season.

We are all so grateful for the opportunity to play at Virginia Polo and have access to such amazing horses and be coached by such amazing people. We want to thank Elka for coaching us and taking us to all of our games, and Lou for running Virginia Polo.

”



# Player of the Year Awards

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# Celebrate!

*Virginia Polo is celebrating 70 years*



We hope you'll join us **October 13th & 14th** at the **Virginia Polo Center** to reconnect, enjoy watching and playing polo, and to celebrate the long life of our club!

For more information on the event, and to RSVP, please visit:  
[www.vapolo.org/70thcelebration](http://www.vapolo.org/70thcelebration)  
or scan the QR code below.



**Grace Burget**  
Women's Varsity Captain  
Class of 2022



**Jack McLane**  
Men's Varsity Captain  
Class of 2022

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PHOTO: DAN ADDISON

# HUMBLE ROOTS

*How a top collegiate polo program grew from nothing*

by Jenny Germroth

*Today, Virginia Polo is known for its beautiful facility and quality ponies, but the program started with humble roots--a group of men playing on a cornfield when the weather allowed.*

## The Early Years

The remarkable story of Virginia Polo began in the early '50s when UVA student Don Hannah gathered a group of student equestrians to form a team, undaunted by the fact only he had polo experience! They had no field, no horses, no equipment and no aid from the university but they were willing to work. One student remembers that at one point the club had only \$13 and the University of Virginia Honor Code as collateral to borrow on. The original team began playing on borrowed ponies and practiced on an airstrip they mowed by hand.

They played only away games where other teams had ponies and arenas and booked their first game at Yale. The team was full of eager anticipation until the Yale athletic department requested a team photo for publicity. This sent the men scrambling to borrow horses to pose for the first Virginia Polo team photo.

In the spring of 1953, things really took off when the student players rented a river bottom cornfield at professor EJ Oglesby's Brook Hill Farm. Everyone worked, and with their own hands, the founding players transformed the cornfield into the club's first polo field. What they built was a 'skin field.' It was 200-yards long and made of a mix of dirt and river bottom sand with no grass. It was festooned with outdoor boards and goal posts. The students took whatever horses were given to them--some were nice and some not so easy. An all-time favorite pony was Dictionary, a large gray so named for being a 'school horse' and valuable for helping the team evaluate new riders' abilities.

The games were played three on three for six five-minute chukkers using an inflated ball. Due to a lack of mounts, each horse played three periods. With any material they

could get a hold of, the players built a rough shed barn with standing stalls for the club's ponies, fenced a pasture and acquired a shack for tack.

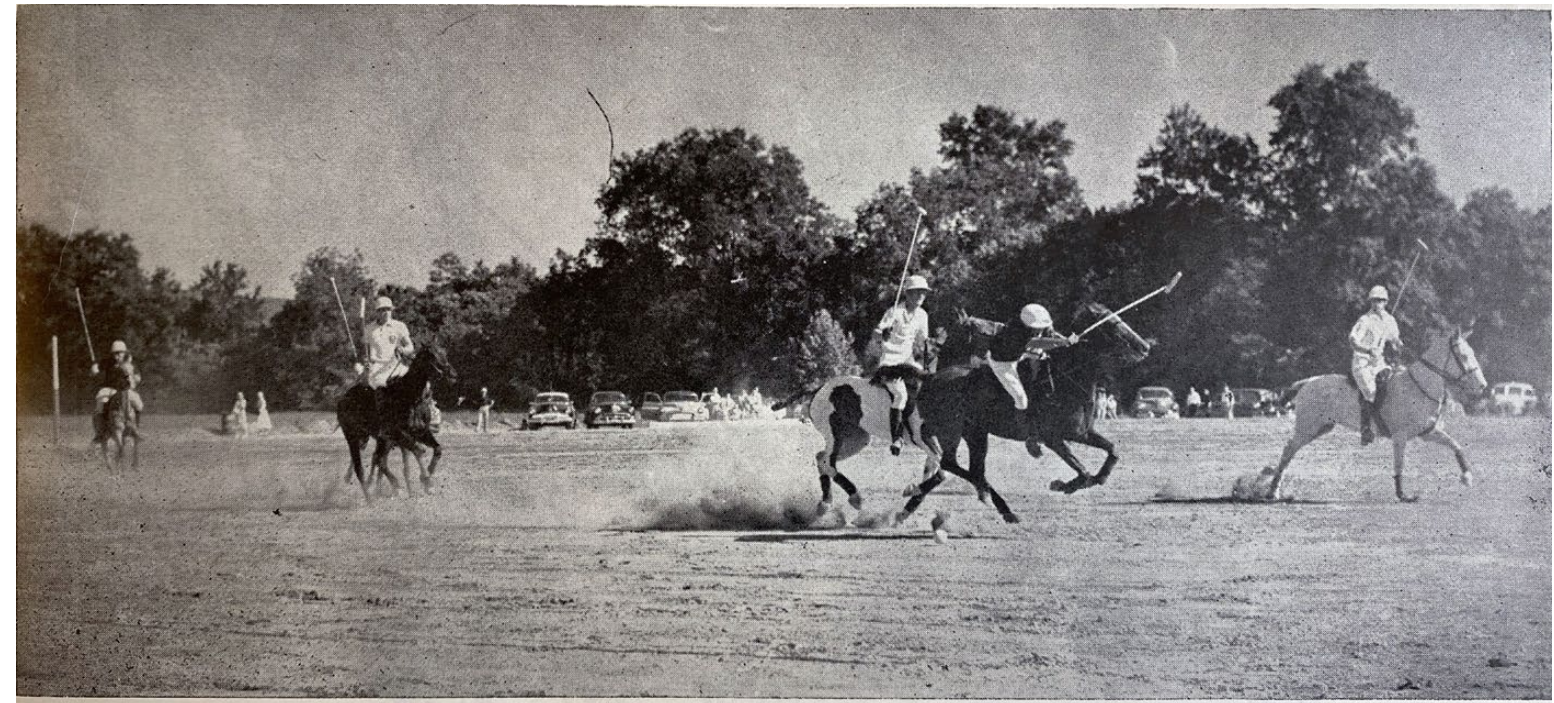
A prized possession of the young club was their old, donated tanker truck--essential for keeping dust down on the skin field. Students filled the truck from the river that ran along the farm to water the polo field, on a good day. Other days, when the old truck conked out, spectators could see a wrecker towing the tanker truck across the polo field as it watered!

With no coach, no employees and no financial support from the university, the students did all the work: fundraising, horse training and planning. To this day, alumni still cherish their time at Virginia Polo, describing the work of building the club as character building, interesting and rewarding.

From the start, the club's goal was to welcome all students and offer polo at an affordable cost to those willing to pitch in. Many of the early teams had only one or two experienced players who shared their knowledge with the rest of the club. They made sure everyone had a chance to play and each year awarded a Most Improved Player trophy to beginners.

The founding student players were industrious. They engaged in many strategies to pay their bills and improve the club, including producing a high-class magazine, selling parking places along the field, holding raffles and hosting unique halftime shows. Among the most memorable shows were a greased pig contest, a near-disastrous donkey polo game between UVA varsity football and lacrosse players and races across the field between a polo pony and a Jaguar driven by player Leo Rocca! Though the pony sometimes won, the car had better brakes!

The tireless efforts of the polo team did not go unnoticed and in 1954 the Daily Progress recognized the students



A scene from Virginia's first season—Spring 1954.

*Insert caption and Photo Credits here*

as the "Most Enterprising" athletes for their stunning conversion of a cornfield into a thriving polo club. Without an indoor arena the UVA men could not practice or play in winter, so they traveled to games at other schools' indoor arenas. Spring and fall intercollegiate games were hosted at the Virginia Polo skin field with Yale and Cornell as the main competition. Through a combination of students and locals coaching, by 1955 they were considered one of the strongest teams in the nation.

## Next Era

With land values rising, Virginia Polo was forced to leave their skin field behind in 1970 and moved to the Farmington Hunt Club with their collection of donated ponies. Once again, the club members and local players worked together to build a place to play polo, this time an arena. During this time, the club gained its first female players. Students continued to manage all aspects of the polo program, from scheduling games to daily care of the ponies and advertising games to draw a paying crowd. Without a proper barn or paddocks, the club knew they needed to find a permanent home. Despite not having its own facility, the club was competitive. The men's team reached the final of the National Intercollegiate Championship for the first time in 1971, while the women's team made the final in 1976. The men won their first of 12 titles in 1987, while the women won their first of 10 titles in 1990.



*Insert caption and Photo Credits here*



Don Hannah

*(continued on page 24)*

### Virginia Polo Center is a Reality

Ever present and supportive throughout the club's history, local player and visionary of the club Rodger Rinehart and alumnus Dick Riemenschneider secured a donation of land to provide a permanent home for Virginia Polo. But the work was not over yet; the land was an uncleared cow pasture, and many improvements were needed to convert it to a polo center.

With local player, field expert and alumnus Dan Colhoun's vision, a site plan was conceived. Again, alumni chipped in with funds, professional building expertise and time to build the facility. Hardworking students became loyal, supportive alumni after graduation, strengthening the club they labored to build.

Once the land was graded and the outdoor arena and four-stall shed barn were built, the club moved their ponies to their new home and played the first match at The Virginia Polo Center in 1980.

In the years since the club was founded, about 1200-plus students have improved or gotten their start at Virginia Polo, just as the founders had envisioned. The facility is home to passionate polo players of all levels, all of whom benefit from the amazing efforts of the founding members. The club could not have grown without their efforts as students and

then loyal supporters as alumni. Though players no longer have to build the arena and barns themselves, they continue to build leadership, responsibility and teamwork through caring for the ponies.

As Virginia Polo nears its 70th anniversary in 2023, the club members are grateful to the founding members, devoted alumni and local supporters that built it. Although much about the program has changed over the years, we maintain the core mission of providing affordable polo for all students and rely on the generous support of alumni and friends to continue this tradition.

We hope it will serve as an example to fledgling clubs starting out, that even with little more than desire, a lot can be accomplished in a student-run program.

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*If you have any old photos, articles, or stories from VA Polo please email:*

[jenny@vapolo.org](mailto:jenny@vapolo.org)

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# VIRGINIA POLO'S BOOT CAMP

## Joining the Club

by Maryam A. Sarafzadeh

Photo: Dan Addison

**B**oot camp is VA Polo's immersive semester-long polo school, an excellent introduction to the "Game of Kings". The program focuses on building the foundational skills one needs to become a great polo player, and expanding on boot campers' existing riding skills.

The boot camp serves to enrich UVA undergraduates, graduate students, and local high schoolers with already proficient riding skills. The program will provide a brief introduction to swing form, riding for polo, unique tack and equipment, and game strategy, all of which are core components of polo. Boot campers begin learning the four basic swings, and move on to harder skills such as 'riding off' by the end of the semester.

After completing boot camp, participants will be invited to join the club team at VA Polo for the next semester. The club team further builds upon participant's skills through weekly practice chukkers. Members of the club team are part of a supportive, tight-knit community of polo players all striving to improve the performance of everyone on the team, all while having fun.

The following page holds interviews with a few Fall 2022 boot camp graduates, who've agreed to speak about their experience in boot camp and their thoughts going into their first semester as members of the club team.



Photo: Dan Addison



Morgan Hale on Pantera



Nora Guidion on July



Shang Ruan on Jaws

### MORGAN HALE

Morgan is a third-year in the McIntire School of Commerce, concentrating in IT and Management, with a second major in Computer Science.

#### Best part of the polo experience so far?

Honestly just doing chores at the barn with friends has been really nice. Also feeling those first few solid shots during boot camp was so satisfying and made me so excited to improve!

#### How has boot camp been enriching to your experience as a UVA student?

Boot camp offered me a very different way to move and think from anything else in my life, even my other riding experiences. I never stuck to ball sports when I was a kid, so it's been a fun learning experience to get to do that again and play a real team sport. It requires me to think in a much different way.

#### What was the most difficult skill to learn? What was your favorite?

Figuring out how to get out of the saddle and really lean for the shot has been hard for me since I've never ridden like this before. Also learning all the horses names lol idk why it's so difficult for me!!! My favorite skill to learn by FAR has been taking sets. It's such an awesome way to ride!

### SHANG RUAN

#### Why were you interested in polo?

Initially, I was looking for the most economical way to ride horses during my MBA, and polo fit the bill.

#### Best part of the polo experience so far?

Everything has been great! Thanks to Virginia Polo's apprenticeship model, I am learning so much just about everything horse-related, from feeding horses on a Gator UTV, tying halter knots, doing sets and practicing swings, everyone is kind and willing to answer questions!

#### What was the most difficult skill to learn? What was your favorite?

Nearside forehand shot. Any shot that went beyond my expectations was my favorite.

#### How do you see the VA Polo community benefitting you as you finish your MBA and enter the workforce?

If we can get more ex-polo players on Wall Street/NYC/New England re-enter the game and play annually, it would be great for networking and expanding VA Polo's brand awareness.

#### Are you planning on continuing to play/ be involved with polo after you enter the workforce?

This is my retirement plan and one of the reasons why I chose investment banking post-MBA - to reach a financially sound place where I can play polo all day!

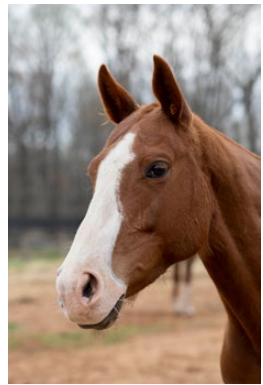
# What's new with the Polo Ponies?

by Megan Maleno

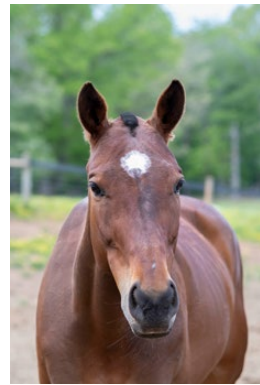
At Virginia Polo we take pride in our ponies, and work hard to give them the best possible care. We extend a special thanks to the donors who trust us with the care of their horses, as we students are so grateful to have the opportunity to ride and work with such amazing animals. We are also appreciative of the people who help us maintain our horses and facilities, as everything that supports our program ultimately helps our horses.



## New ponies on the farm: Indica, Sativa and Tomato



Indica



Sativa



Tomato

Indica, Sativa, and Tomato arrived at Virginia Polo at the end of the fall semester and quickly settled in. Our assistant coach Elka worked with these ponies through the winter to get them ready for the spring season. The Men's team has grown to love Tomato, appreciating how steady she is, while Indica and Sativa are a power duo in the ring, with Indica bringing the chill vibes and Sativa bringing the fire. On the ground, Indica has taken the place as one of the lookers on the property with her beautiful blaze and chestnut coloring. Her sweet personality pairs well with her good looks!

## New to Women's Varsity: Red and Lucia

Pictured to the right we have the new members of the Women's team, Red and Lucia! These best friends moved from the men's string to the women's string this fall semester and have quickly become favorites. Red is named appropriately as this spicy mare is a machine in the arena. She and Lucia have become top horses on the women's A string.



## Familiar Faces come to Club: May, Luna and Lolita

There are some new faces on the club string this year with May, Luna, and Lolita coming from the women's string. The club team is thrilled that we get to have such awesome ponies coming to us from the women's string. May and Luna came to club in the fall, and helped us increase the pace of our chukkers with their abilities to speedily get to the ball. Lolita has been a wonderful addition this Spring, with club members falling in love with her personality and good looks.



May



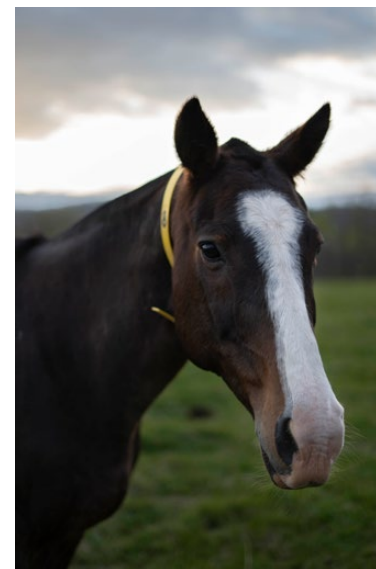
Luna



Lolita

## Happy Retirement to: Galleta, Legendaria, Fiesta and Luc!

We are happy to announce the retirees this year. Galleta and Legendaria (or "Yeti" and "Leg") have held positions as top ponies on the women's string, and we are glad that they get to enjoy an easy retirement after so many years of hard work. Fiesta and Luc have had long careers here at Virginia Polo, with Fiesta being the smallest yet fastest pony on club and Luc being one of our best teaching horses for new polo players, and always the first one picked for Boot Camp.



Yeti



Leg



Fiesta



Luc

# Issy Wolf

## Virginia Polo Alumni at the Women's Argentine Open

by Katy Owens

Issy Wolf is a well-known name in the Virginia Polo community. From her time at Virginia Polo as a high school and college player, to her more recent work as a professional player, her impact on the polo community in Virginia and beyond has been, and continues to be, extensive. Recently, I had the opportunity to call Issy and chat with her about her experience at Virginia Polo, her polo career, and her experience playing in the Women's Argentine Open this past November.

Like many of us at Virginia Polo, Issy got her start in the hunter-jumper world, before finding polo. She had always loved going fast and had dreams of becoming a jockey, but those dreams became unrealistic considering she was 5'10" by the time she was 12 years old. According to Issy however, "Polo is even better... it combines everything I love, horses... team sports, and it's coed, everything I want

in a sport." She began playing polo in the Middleburg area in Virginia during the summers.. Issy got her start at UVA on the Virginia Juniors high school team, after meeting Coach Lou Lopez while playing at King Vineyards over the summer. Joining the high school team was pivotal in Issy's polo career, because it gave her the opportunity to play polo year-round. Ultimately, Issy chose to attend UVA for college as well and played for four years on the women's varsity team, winning two intercollegiate national championships with the program.

Issy got her professional start in the polo industry primarily by making and selling young horses, while also searching for playing opportunities. Many of her first playing opportunities were the result of recommendations from connections she made in the industry. Early in her career, Issy spent a lot of time in California and Texas selling horses and playing in coed 8-goal tournaments. After the COVID-19 pandemic began, Issy moved back to Virginia and began playing in the constantly growing polo circuit in Virginia and got her real-estate license. In her words, she was "going to replace selling horses with selling houses." The flexibility of her career in real estate has allowed her to continue playing professionally, while also maintaining a more consistent and experienced string of horses, and limiting the danger of consistently riding primarily green horses.

This past November, Issy made the trip to Argentina to play in the Women's Argentine Open. Her journey to this tournament was a multiple year endeavor, as she was asked to play in the tournament the year prior, but ultimately was unable due to breaking her wrist in October of that year. While she was hopeful that she would be able to play in the tournament the next year, she broke her ribs in February and suffered a concussion soon after. Despite these setbacks, Issy ultimately decided to play in the tournament and had the opportunity to do so with her friend and former UVA teammate Kylie Sheenan. In Issy's words, "Getting to play with a UVA teammate who I knew had my back no matter what was essential. She's my rock on and off the polo field and I feel like it was a huge part of why I could play well despite injury."

The next step in Issy's journey to the tournament was finding mounts in Argentina. Part of the work she did after she arrived in Argentina was to try as many horses as possible and her final string included horses pulled from three different sources. When I asked Issy about the impact her time at Virginia Polo had on her professional career, she specifically mentioned that, "one of the major benefits of playing I/I Polo was learning to get on any horse and just make the most of it", and that her time at UVA honing this skill and the hundreds of horses she estimated that she rode as a student significantly helped her in the horse selection process.

Unfortunately, while practicing in Argentina prior to the start of the Open and the Pre-Open tournaments, Issy sustained another injury. She played through the pain and had a successful Pre-Open Tournament, but was unsure she would be unable to play in the Open after learning she had broken three of her ribs. Luckily, she was able to receive treatment and ultimately play in the Open, playing multiple successful matches against much higher-rated opponents and concluding the tournament with 11 goals to her name. Issy's success in the Argentine Open also created additional opportunities for her to play in the United States. She credits Virginia Polo with helping develop her drive and determination, both of which helped to carry her through a challenging, but rewarding tournament.

According to Issy, her current goals are "to improve her handicap... especially in women's polo... and keep the same group of horses." She is specifically looking forward to continuing to develop her homebred ponies. She also hopes to return to the Women's Argentine Open this year, this time ideally with a team of sponsors and she would love for those sponsors to be women-owned businesses if possible. I know we at Virginia Polo are excited to see what Issy does next, and will be watching and cheering all along the way.

Thank you to Issy Wolf for her contributions to this article.



Photo: Nacho Corbalan



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# Flying to 5-Goals

*Checking in with past varsity  
player Ignacio Viana*

by Parker Pearce



After two years of attending the University of Virginia and amidst the crisis that was the COVID-19 pandemic, former Virginia player Ignacio “Nachi” Viana was forced to make an extremely difficult decision: to continue with life at UVA or leap forward into his career as a professional player. Nachi dedicated himself to playing professionally long before coming to school, but the real question at the time was, when?

Over spring break, my current teammate, Vlad Tarashansky, and I visited Nachi and his older brother and alumnus, Felipe Viana, at the place they call home in the United States, Zapicán Farm in Wellington, Florida. Not only were we welcomed with open arms, but more importantly, had the opportunity to catch up with old friends and experience the high-goal life from behind the scenes. Aside from working horses and watching games, I took some time to ask Nachi about his decision to leave the University, to look back on his time at Virginia Polo, and give a sneak peak into what the road ahead might look like.

With his future in mind, he lamentably left the program and the University in 2020 to start the first leg of his career.

“When I left UVA, it was COVID time and I came here to Wellington. Classes were stopped and everything so I kinda decided I was not going to go back and the first place I went was to Boston for the summer with my brother Felipe. He helped me with horses and that’s pretty much how I started.”

Nachi went on to explain that in the following season, Adam Snow invited him to stable with him and play in Aiken, South Carolina. No small honor to be invited to the home of the first ever American 10-goaler.

“While there I bought my first two horses and started giving Felipe back the horses he was lending me. We played the 8’s and the 12’s with Adam, we did well. We won an 8, a 6, and a 12-goal and then after that I pretty much already decided I was going to do this. I just kept investing in horses all the

time and improving the string and that was two years ago, maybe two and a half, that I started with zero horses and nowadays I am with twenty, so it has been a good couple of years.”

Although Nachi was able to find success early on, there are of course difficulties that come with the life of a polo player.

“It is hard for sure because you just go around the US and the world and Argentina, and Uruguay, and I might go to other countries and you’re pretty much alone because it’s not like any other job where you already have your friends there or your family. You just leave and you go alone so I would say it’s a tough life, regarding that,” but nonetheless, “I enjoy it all, I feel like what I enjoy the most about the sport is horses. Horses for me are everything. I enjoy buying and selling and improving my string and every year trying to add five or six better horses than what I have and selling the ones that I feel right now are the bottom of the string and that’s what I would say I enjoy the most, as well as traveling and meeting new people. It’s a lifestyle.”

In fact, the horses are clearly the most important part, as Nachi went on to claim, “The string I have nowadays is the most important achievement. In my top string I have 12, I’ve been with 35 horses in the past 2 years and now my string is extremely strong.”

As for the most memorable tournaments, “I remember one tournament that I played two years ago, we won with Felipe and Shane Finemore and Pedro Felabella. It was a 16-goal at the Hamptons. It was a pretty high level and winning a tournament like that with Felipe was everything. I would also say playing the Coronation Cup, which is a 24-goal tournament in England, was also super-super important to me.”

While the polo world has great things to offer, the opportunity we have here at the University is also nothing short of amazing and Nachi could not agree more.

“I feel it was everything, once you leave you realize how much you had and how much it gave you. UVA, it was great, I just have super good memories about it, the friends I made there, the style of life. I just enjoyed my fraternity, my friends, and our parties there. Going to polo, playing games with not the same pressure that you play later on as a professional... It’s just different and I feel like you don’t realize that until you leave.”

“It taught me so much, I don’t know if I can pick one thing. In general, it changed me, it changed my way of living, how to value life, people, family, and friends. It especially opened my mind to the culture and helped me understand how to navigate the United States and this place I didn’t really know at all. And it was tough, the first year at UVA, it was not easy to be open to the lifestyle, but my experience at UVA made that transition possible.”

In regards to the future, if you really want to be the best in such a competitive world you must shoot for the stars and build a string that can take you there.

As Nachi puts it, “I just want to keep going and getting better and better, growing my string, and playing well wherever I go. My aim is to play high-goal in Argentina (30+), that’s for sure my biggest goal. I hope someday to be a part of the Triple Crown.”

It is important to note that making it to the Triple Crown someday and playing at the level he does today would never

have been a reality without an incredible group of friends, family, and help along the way.

“My parents gave me what it is to go to UVA, which made me the person that I am, UVA kind of created me, made me see life differently. For sure my brother, when I wanted to start my career he gave me everything, he gave me a truck and trailer, eight horses, a job, tack. I had nothing. He always says, “Whatever you need, take.” He’s still helping me today, I’m with 16 horses here and out of those 3 are from him, every time I’ve needed a hand, he’s been there. Among many other people, to be here in this sport and to be where I am now, there have been people all along the way that have made it possible.”

From Wellington, Nachi hopes to return home to Uruguay for a couple days, then travel to Aiken, then Maryland, then to Boston, next to New York, later Kentucky and Argentina for a couple months, and once again to Uruguay for a couple weeks. As was discussed earlier, there is polo to be played everywhere and the traveling never stops.

While we missed out on a couple years of having Nachi at Virginia Polo, we wish him the best with his future career. He has most certainly stood out to me as a great example of the dedication, talent, and heart required to make it in the world of polo, and I hope he can continue to be that for many more Hoos and polo players around the world.

Best of luck, from all of Virginia Polo!



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The early members of Virginia Polo envisioned our club and created it with their own work, but they didn't stop there. They knew if their dedication to the club ended with graduation the club would not grow and last. From the beginning the mission of Virginia Polo has been to provide affordable polo to students. As the authors of this mission they believed in it entirely. They didn't aim to only provide polo to students of their age group, but to ensure the program and the opportunities it provides endured and was available to future generations.

Because of the early members' support, we've all benefited. We've had wonderful years in the Virginia Polo Club, ridden talented ponies, and met lifelong friends. So let's all use the early members as our role models and stay connected beyond graduation. Your support will be pivotal to the continued success of Virginia Polo.

There are numerous ways to remain a part of the program and instrumental to its success in your adult life— plus, it is fun to see current students enjoying the club and ponies as thoroughly as we all did. We all got a lot out of the program, so let's put a lot back into it and be the alumni future generations want to emulate.

Because Virginia Polo is not financially supported by the University of Virginia, your donations are essential. We extend a great thank you to ALL of our supporters, your annual support and gifts in honor of important people, built this club and created the experiences and connections featured in the pages of this magazine. Read through with pride, because your support made these memories possible!



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- **Rinehart Polo Pony Endowment**- Gifts to this fund are an investment in the ponies. All dollars in the Pony Fund are used to care for our donated herd of ponies, so think of your favorite pony and give.
- **Virginia Polo Endowment**- When you give to the Endowment, you join a group of alumni and supporters who are ensuring future generations will enjoy the Virginia Polo Club.
- **Horse donations**- The entire Virginia Polo herd is donated. With a thriving club full of all levels of players from the newest beginner to National Championship players, more ponies are needed. Your pony could be the next BPP and will be greatly appreciated by our players and board.
- **Planned Gift**- Was Virginia Polo a cherished part of your life? Consider including the club in your estate plans to become a supporter in perpetuity.

If you are interested in making a transformational gift to the club, or would like to find out more about supporting in general, please contact Jenny Germroth at [jenny@vapolo.org](mailto:jenny@vapolo.org)

“ I have been donating to Virginia Polo since the year I graduated, I try to consistently support a program that I believe is a gift to those who participate. The polo club was an amazing outlet for me and I feel so fortunate to have had the opportunity.

I encourage you to give what you can every year, seeing the new faces enjoying the program that has lasted for 70 years, is a reward in itself.

Christie Barker Reed, Virginia Polo '95

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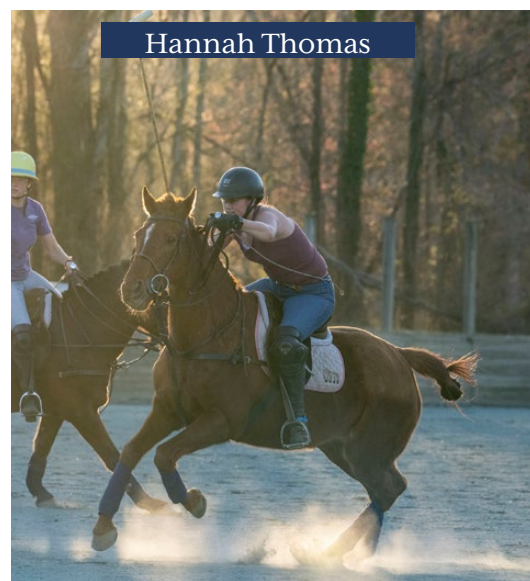
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