

Rodger Rinehart's Legacy at UVA: A Man for All Seasons *by Brad Scherer*

Rodger Rinehart, Jr. died on October 10, 2008; husband of 60 years to Mary Hopper ("Bobo"), father to five children and grandfather to fourteen. Born on February 13, 1927, Rodger was introduced to horses at an early age, learning how to ride and jump, probably before learning to pass a football. His family was instrumental in the original organization of the Farmington Hunt in Charlottesville, and Rodger, who we all knew as "Big" Rodger began hunting and jumping in the early 1930's and developed into an avid foxhunter and eventually master of the hounds of the Farmington Hunt in Charlottesville. Thereafter, the sport of polo "found" Rodger which resulted in a 40 year dedication to the sport. But it was Rodger's early connection to UVA polo that became his legacy with a life long devotion and generosity of time and endless energy to the University's polo program and its students.

After serving in the US Navy, Big Rodger attended UVA from 1946 – 1947, and shortly hereafter, married Bobo, began a business career and started a family. During this period, in 1956, UVA polo was founded by Sandy Bowers, Don Hanna and Malarkey Wall, who rented a field along the Rivanna River out on 29N, on a farm owned by EJ Oglesby; a professor at UVA. Big Rodger's love of equestrian sports attracted him to Oglesby's and gave him his first polo playing experience with the UVA and Charlottesville Polo Club players. It was also during these early years that the UVA Polo club principles of student contribution, work and support were founded, as were some of Big Rodger's closest and lifelong friendships. Notable players such as Carlton Beal, Dick Riemenschneider, Dick Latham, S.K. Johnston, Jr., Georgie Greenhalgh, and John Cousins, all played at Oglesby's. Big Rodger quickly fell in love with the sport and thereafter, became a very capable 2 goal player, competing in numerous indoor and outdoor polo tournaments and in clubs throughout the United States including: Gulfstream Polo Club in Florida, Brandywine Polo Club, Potomac Polo Club, and Middleburg VA. Big Rodger was named Polo News' "Amateur Player of the Year" in 1987.

Rodger's oldest son Rob fondly recalls that "Pop became a better polo player as he aged, and there was never a better sport on or off the field, nor any as encouraging of young players." However, such success was not without its wrecks, and Rodger certainly had his share. And while we think of the dangers of polo, one of Rodger's worst injuries came as result of a fall his horse took going cross country jumping at Clay Hill along Owensville Rd. According to Rob, he busted his shoulder up pretty good that time and was lucky a family living across the road spotted him knocked out on the ground!

In the early 1960's the Farmington Hunt Club show ring needed to be renovated and Big Rodger, Doug Nicoll and Herbie Jones were able to use their collective negotiating skills together with Rodger's legendary charm, to convince the board into building walls around the ring to provide an indoor arena for part time use for polo. It was a tough sell to the otherwise stodgy fox hunters, but once completed, Friday night polo at FHC immediately became the social event of each week. As a result of these efforts, and the availability of an arena, polo participation in the community soon increased exponentially.

These new facilities provided incredible opportunities for young players such as Danny Shifflet, Clarence Mundy, and future high goalers Jimmy Bachman, and Les "Junior" Flerx. However these opportunities were sometimes "behind the scenes". Rodger's second son, Rodger III, recalls that "after games on Friday nights all players and members and guests would retire to the clubhouse for food and drinks. The 9pm game was usually over at 10:30-11:00 and the party at the clubhouse would go on past midnight. The lights to the arena would be turned off to save money and the grooms would tend to the horses and sit around waiting for the last car to leave. As soon as the last car's lights disappeared heading into town down Garth Road, the arena lights would be turned back on and the grooms would re-tack the same horses that had already played and have matches that resembled Shandur Pass chukkas; in that each period would last about 30 minutes! He told me that these "after game matches" had a pretty good run until one night Heath Manning and Juan Rodriguez had to return to Farmington because one of them had forgotten their wallet. Needless to say, the grooms' match the following Friday was played on foot with hand mallets and an old softball.

Soon after, in 1970-1971, development pressure on the Oglesby farm forced UVA Polo to seek a new home, and once again through Big Rodger's lobbying efforts, Farmington Hunt Club agreed to lease its facility to the team, with pasture for the horses. Over the next 10 years, UVA Polo successfully operated at Farmington while Big Rodger used all of his efforts to keep Farmington's fox hunters complacent with polo; a constant and daunting challenge due to some excessively rowdy students/teammates, yours truly included. As the Farmington foxhunters' patience wore thin, and Big Rodger's dreams of an expanded, permanent facility for UVA Polo evolved, in the late 1970's Big Rodger met David Breeden and presented the "case" of UVA Polo. Big Rodger's vision, tenacity and compelling devotion to the UVA Polo program, together with the incredible generosity of the Breeden Family, ultimately facilitated the Breeden's gift of the 25 acre Forest Lodge property that since 1980 has been home to UVA Polo. Several years later, Rodger's continuous efforts with benefactors including Bill Ylvisaker, the Breeden Family and generous support from alumni, facilitated an additional gift of 50 acres, and many of the current improvements UVA Polo now enjoys including the outdoor and indoor arena and outdoor field.

Big Rodger's endless energies did not stop there. His efforts, with the additional generosity of so many other contributors, was also responsible for the creation of the Nicoll Polo Scholarship and the UVA Polo endowment; both of which continue today and provide the on-going financial assistance needed to perpetuate UVA Polo's program. And while all of the UVA Polo's incredible facilities and prosperous program have contributed to the training of some of America's greatest young polo talent in a generation, all remain grounded on Big Rodger's original vision and "club" design of exchanging affordability for the students' dedication and contribution to maintaining the horses, tack and grounds with their own hard work.

Big Rodger was a mentor to countless young polo students over this 40 year span. He and Bobo generously welcomed and hosted so many UVA students into their home for refreshments by the fire, a meal, and council. Their personal farm 'Roundfield' became a home away from home, and Rodger through his gift of endless optimism, unwavering support and sage advice, became a second father and confidant to so many of us.

Big Rodger leaves behind an enduring legacy for UVA Polo of horsemanship, fair play, the best of friendships and most of all his optimism in all endeavors. Truly, a man for all seasons. He will be so greatly missed by so many.

Brad Scherer graduated from UVA in 1980 and Culver Military Academy in 1976. He resides in Wellington, Florida with his family and is the father of C.B. Scherer ('12).