



Horsing Around

Did you know that Hong Kong has its own polo team? We spoke to the team's captain, PATRICK FURLONG, about bringing the sport of kings to the concrete jungle.

BY RACHEL READ



When you think of Hong Kong sports, polo probably isn't the first that comes to mind – but that's something Patrick Furlong, captain of Hong Kong's first ever polo team, is hoping to change.

Though the team was officially created in 2014, Patrick had been holding informal get-togethers with the idea of building a tournament-playing group after moving to Hong Kong in 2009. It just so happened that another polo aficionado, Dan Savage, was also looking at ways to develop the sport here; once the pair met, the rest, as they say, is history. The team has since won five international tournaments, and was recently crowned champion at the Hong Kong Challenge Cup in Korea.

Patrick has been playing polo since he was six, starting on his family's farm in Argentina. "My father played polo and got me into the sport; I was practising as soon as I could lift a mallet!" His South American background also has some more humorous ramifications: "During the heat of the game, I sometimes revert to my mother tongue and shout instructions to the rest of the team in Spanish – which, of course, confuses the hell out of them!"

Nowadays, Patrick plays around two weekends a month; limited by Hong Kong's current lack of grounds, he usually practises in Singapore where he travels for work (he's a Lloyds TSB banker by day), while the other

team members find themselves training in clubs as far-flung as Thailand, Malaysia and even England. "You must be able to ride well and feel comfortable controlling your horse," says Patrick about playing the game, "but it's also very tactical, so you can't be selfish. Polo is a gentleman's sport – since it's a contact game, sportsmanship is very important too."

The horses are absolutely critical, with each player riding at least four per game. "The higher the level of the game, the more important your horse is – at the highest level, players say a horse is 75 percent of the game," Patrick explains. The best horses are "polo ponies", which are bred especially for the sport. "The best ones combine speed and agility with being docile and reliable – they can't be too feisty!"

There's plenty in the pipeline for Hong Kong polo, with more tournaments on the cards. "We'd love as many people as possible to support the team when we travel to play, and we're planning to host polo clinics and beginner's lessons on those trips," says Patrick. "We're also setting up a programme to teach people to ride and play, as we need to develop the next generation of Hong Kong players."

Sounds like the sport of kings is here to stay! *a*

For more information about the Hong Kong Polo Team, visit asiaworldpolo.com.