

BEYOND THE FIELD

Since launching, Hurlingham Polo 1875 has cemented its reputation for authenticity and design. Theresa Harold charts the development of this global lifestyle brand



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For a sport known as the game of kings, polo's uniform is surprisingly democratic. Even those who don't happen to own a pair of jodhpurs are likely to have a polo shirt knocking around the back of their wardrobe. Call it the Ralph Lauren effect, but no matter where you are in the world, a polo shirt represents a level of respectability and style that other forms of sportswear cannot match. Can you imagine going to a smart restaurant wearing a football jersey? Exactly.

And yet, until recently, the majority of polo-inspired fashion brands had no active involvement with the sport. They were fashion brands first and foremost, with an appreciation of the game's aesthetics – and the commercial savvy to capitalise on it. But that all changed last summer. On a gloriously sunny Saturday at Guard's Polo Club, captain Fred Mannix led the Commonwealth Team to victory in the 2016 Royal Salute Coronation

Cup. He and his teammates were wearing royal blue and yellow shirts, with a distinctive 'H' on the chest. It was, of course, the logo of the Hurlingham Polo Association (HPA). Photographs of the triumphant team lifting the enormous gold trophy circulated around the world – this was the beginning of a lifestyle brand that has been evolving ever since: Hurlingham Polo 1875.

At this year's Royal Salute Coronation Cup, the two sides played a tense match in the pouring rain and the English team took home the prestigious trophy. And just like the previous year, Hurlingham Polo 1875 was there providing the teams with their playing shirts, caps and training wear. In fact, the label has been in the spotlight more often than not. Mannix, the brand's first global ambassador, wore the shirt in the 2016 Argentine Triple Crown and his brother Julian wore it when he won the 2016 La Copa Cámara de Diputados.

HURLINGHAM HAS INTEGRITY AND AUTHENTICITY. IT COMBINES HERITAGE, QUALITY AND STYLE



‘I was lucky to be in the right place at the right time for the Hurlingham Polo 1875 project,’ admits Mannix, Canada’s highest-ranked polo player. ‘I was actively involved in my polo products company, Millarville, and had been looking for a partner to branch out of the polo space and into lifestyle clothing.’ Initially, Mannix’s agent reached out to Hurlingham Polo 1875 CEO Simon Hawkins about a sponsorship opportunity. A meeting in Miami followed and soon the talks were about more than just an endorsement deal. ‘We decided that with the combination of my on-field knowledge and Simon’s capabilities in the lifestyle clothing space, that a great partnership was in the making,’ explains Mannix. ‘From that moment, we have been working on all aspects of the project together – it has been great for both of us.’

Although not from a polo background, Hawkins’ CV reads like a who’s who of sporting giants: Reebok, FIFA, Pace Sports Management, and the PGA. As Hurlingham Polo 1875’s guiding partner, he brings formidable expertise in brand building, licensing, and sponsorship.

‘The HPA approached me back in 2013 to ask if I would look into the brand and advise them on how best to bring it to market via a consumer goods strategy, while maintaining the integrity of the association,’ says Hawkins. ‘It was something they had been looking at for a while, but hadn’t progressed. Since that initial work we’ve been on quite a journey, building the brand, its offer, and ensuring a solid foundation for growth.’

When asked whether polo was a bit too niche to support a whole lifestyle brand, Hawkins is quick to respond. ‘You’d think so, wouldn’t you? Although it’s one of the oldest team games, it’s currently growing in a lot of countries – particularly among the young. It seems to capture people’s imagination,’ he adds. ‘Hurlingham has integrity and authenticity. It combines heritage, quality and style with an immense commercial opportunity on a global scale, setting the Hurlingham Polo 1875 brand apart.’

Mannix believes Hurlingham Polo 1875 can speak on the same level as other British heritage brands such

Previous page: Fred Mannix, brand ambassador, at The Royal Salute Coronation Cup. Opposite: Francisco Elizalde during the Camara de Diputados final at Palermo. This page: Mannix leads the pack during the 2016 Coronation Cup

as Barbour, or even Burberry. ‘For 140 years, what is now the HPA has been the spiritual home of polo,’ he says. ‘It’s the sport’s oldest and most international governing body, recognised and respected around the world. Polo is played in 77 countries, 38 of which are affiliated to the HPA. While no one knows who invented polo, it first came to western eyes in the 1850s when tea planters in India started playing the sport. The Calcutta Polo Club was formed in 1862, and then in 1869 the 10th Hussars organised the first ever match in the UK against a team from the 9th Lancers. Six years after this match the Hurlingham Polo Committee drew up the game’s first formal set of rules, designed to protect the interests of the sport, players and horses. These were issued in 1875, hence why we call the brand Hurlingham Polo 1875.’

With several clothing categories under way (Essentials, HP Active, Polo Team Wear and a premium Made in Britain line), the label is already making a name for itself both on and off the field. A fact that did not go unnoticed by luxury fashion retailer Flannels, who has

signed a groundbreaking five-year partnership with HPA in support of British polo, including the shirt sponsorship of all England polo teams and umpires.

‘The Flannels sponsorship is going to enable the HPA to promote polo on a wide spectrum,’ says David Woodd, chief executive at the HPA. ‘Within the HPA itself it will be a huge help for the England team at all levels, the development among the young, and the umpiring. With Flannels getting behind polo, I think we will see it promoted through its stores and online, and this will also be a huge help for the brand.’

So, yes, it’s a big deal for international polo, and one that has captain of the England Polo Team, James Beim, enthused: ‘It’s a massive step forward for our sport and it’s a partnership that ties in very well for both parties,’ he says. ‘It gives us an influx of funds to reinvest in our youth and exhibit our international team on a big stage.’

‘The funds available from the partnership will improve all aspects of English polo,’ agrees Mannix. ‘It could be transformational in the sense that funding will



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be available to the team to play more matches throughout the year. Obviously, more matches require more funding. But with that part of the equation sorted, the question is now how to create the opportunities for English polo going forward.' And with typical good cheer, Mannix adds a friendly challenge: 'I would be happy to have them for a match at our farm, La Alegria in Argentina.'

Ah yes, the jet-setting life of the professional polo player. From Sotogrande to Santa Barbara, the polo season is one of heady glamour and non-stop sunshine. Even for those unfamiliar with the sport, you can see the appeal of a clothing line such as Hurlingham Polo 1875. While Polo Team Wear (and to an extent, HP Active) caters to those actually swinging the mallet, the Essentials range is suitable for everyone, with its preppy collection of T-shirts, polo shirts, hoodies, and caps. HP Active is similarly versatile, with technical fabrics and designs marrying form and function for all sports, or just kicking back. It's the polo world's answer



Opposite from top: England Polo captain James Beim in a Flannels sponsored polo shirt; England player, Jack Richardson. This page, from top: Ultra Light Gilet, £130; T-shirt, £25; Full zip hoodie, £60, and T-shirt, £25, all Hurlingham Polo 1875



HP ACTIVE IS VERSATILE WITH TECHNICAL FABRICS AND DESIGNS MARRYING FORM AND FUNCTION



to the ubiquitous 'athleisure' trend. Made in Britain is a collection of classic British styles, shirts, chinos and jackets, meeting the needs of both the polo player post-match, and the polo enthusiast looking for the very best in tailoring.

'I absolutely love the Active Wear collection,' says Mannix. 'It's such a well thought out and versatile collection for a sportsman with styles that are great for riding, such as the hybrid jacket and performance mid-layers, along with more casual styles to relax in. One of my favourite pieces is the red polo shirt. I use it on the golf course to try and copy the iconic Tiger Red that was used by Tiger Woods – if I can't play like him, at least I can try and copy the way he looks on the course.'

Who would have thought it? One of the greatest polo players North America has ever produced wishes he was better at golf. Well, as Sylvester Stallone once said: 'playing polo is like trying to play golf during an earthquake', so perhaps Canada's number one just isn't used to standing still.



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