



From left: Luca Nobile, Stefano Nobile, Alex Nobile, Alessia Nobile, Nobile and Emma Nobile

FAMILY

VALUES

BY CHARLEY LARCOMBE.
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ZEV STARR-TAMBOR



POLO IS NOT JUST A TEAM SPORT; IT IS A FAMILY ONE. CHARLEY LARCOMBE TALKS TO MEMBERS OF THE HAMPTONS POLO SCENE ON PASSION FOR THE GAME, HARD WORK AND WHY IN THE DYING SECONDS OF THE LAST CHUKKA, YOU WANT FAMILY ON YOUR SIDE.

From left, Jed Coggan and Ali Coggan



Attend any polo match and away from the Champagne and chic fashion, you'll see that the pony lines are a swarm of dogs and children. Moms and dads juggle strapping up their kneepads while keeping the baby from crawling between ponies' legs; parents take pics of the interscholastic team with trophies; kids encourage Mom's backhand or Dad's ride-off. There are winning smiles and defeated tears; delighted praise and the odd clan clash of words. Polo is, if nothing else, one big hub of family life.

It is definitely an ideal perpetuated by the Southampton Hunt & Polo Club (southamptonpolo.com) and its members. Some are new players, some are second generation; some are yet to reach high school. Others are more experienced—but they all share that sense of family, and how the most exciting of games enables mothers and daughters, fathers and sons to play together.

"We live in a fast-changing world where our kids sometimes seem on a completely different plane to us," remarks Alaimn Bailey Natella, an entrepreneurial, polo-playing mother and one of the most integral players at the SHPC. "It's not just about polo; it's about comparing blisters at the beginning of summer, or trail riding together at sundown and feeling utterly relaxed. You look out over the Hamptons and realize how truly privileged you are. It means so much that we can share an experience that is ironically so grounded."

Alaimn's husband and co-head of equities at Cuggenheim Securities, Stefano Natella, echoes her thoughts. "When your daughter or son does a perfectly timed play and takes the ball away from you, it's great to see. Playing together is one of the most special moments of our lives, one thing we can all do together and enjoy immensely."

Two of their children, Alex (16) and Luca (12), are considered real ones to watch on the Southampton pitches, and their love of playing with family is evident.

"Every weekend I look forward to playing with my brother," says Alex. "It's almost like he can read my mind and immediately knows where and what I'm supposed to be doing

"THERE IS NO GREATER THRILL THAN GETTING ON THE POLO FIELD WITH MY CHILDREN."

—ANDREW COGAN

in a game. Although we are competitive, Luca and I always laugh and make the best out of our rivalry."

Luca adds, "Playing with my family is fun because we all love the game. We sometimes play kids versus parents, which is great because we find out who is better. In reality, we all know who is..."

This relationship and dedication to horsemanship from their children is clearly an important factor for Alainn and Stefano, and they believe it teaches their children a great deal. "The kids learn that to control a horse is to bond with the animal. They choose to have a horse by working hard to look after its needs. I think this gives a great opportunity for kids to learn hard work and respect," explains Alainn.

It is these other skills that are more than just a by-product for the parents and their kids playing out of the club.

Andrew Cogan, chairman and CEO of Knoll Inc. and father to Jed, a member of the Cornell polo team, and Ali, readily sees the value of the sport. "Success in polo really rewards those who can demonstrate a commitment to teamwork and the hours of practice and discipline required," says Andrew. "The ups and downs of the game and challenges of working in partnership with both your teammates and an animal builds up resilience and rewards tenacity unlike most sports I've seen."

Both Jed and Ali display a sense of pride in each other: "Ali has been riding since she was 4 years old, so she is a beautiful and technical rider," reflects Jed about his sister. "Polo has really helped her develop her hand-eye coordination and made her a tougher competitor, but her natural riding skills shine when she's out on the polo field."

"Jed is such a fierce competitor," enthuses Ali. "Whenever I watch him play, I admire that he is so fearless, strong and physical. I don't

want to let Jed down when we play together."

Unsurprisingly there is a great deal of support between siblings on the pitch. Hedge fund manager Philip Falcone and his movie producer wife, Lisa Maria, have twin daughters, Lilianna and Carolina, who admit to being competitive but want each other on their side when they're a goal down in the final chukka. As with the Cogans, they're also incredibly proud of one another.

"I think my sister has incomparable determination to anyone who I have played with before," says Lilianna. "I know that my sister will support me no matter what, even if I miss that winning shot, because we are family and family sticks together through thick and thin."

Polo is unique in that a family can play competitively on the same side; it is yet another aspect of the game that makes it so undeniably exhilarating.

"There is no greater thrill than getting out on a polo field with my children," says Andrew Cogan. "Unlike Jed and Ali, I never rode as a child and in fact didn't even get on a horse until I turned 50. But when the three of us are on a field practicing or playing chukkas together, it feels great—even if I'm the one bringing up the rear."

Alainn agrees that family polo is unbelievably special and reflects on the early days when the kids learned to play in Argentina. "When the kids got totally bitten by the bug, they began to practice set moves together on their own. Last year they asked if they could all play together in a kids versus adults match, and boy, did they cream us! It was a proud moment because they not only got the game, they got the game of life—that winning is a long-term strategy that involves humility and compassion."

And that is a valuable lesson for every member of the family. ■

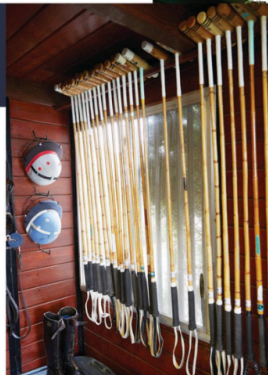


Photo by: Anna Melissa Cogan, Falcone and Lilianna Falcone

HOW TO POLO

Southampton Hunt & Polo Club offers a program that takes the novice player from beginner to an accomplished polo player in three phases: Novice, Intermediate and Advanced. Each phase is carefully structured to advance the player from learning the basics of the game of polo to being able to play competitively in club matches.

For the beginner SHPC recommends a series of 10 private lessons with a professional polo instructor who will teach polo riding, hitting, rules, safety and strategy. The package of 10 lessons costs \$1,200. The instructor will provide horses, tack, mallets and groom.

On completion of the 10 lessons, the student can advance to the Novice program, which consists of twice-weekly games with other similarly leveled players. These games include two professional players on the field to coach and referee for safety. A season Novice membership runs \$8,900 and is prorated. Participation on this level requires a horse rental.

Intermediate and Advanced further polish the skill set of players along with invitation to tournament participation.