**ELEPHANT POLO**

The 2005 World Elephant Polo Championship, hosted by Tiger Tops Jungle Lodge in Nepal, ended with Chivas Regal Scotland winning their second World Championship in a row as they clinched the Tiger Tops Trophy by 7 goals to 6 from their arch rivals the National Parks team of Nepal. Player manager Peter Prentice, who clocked up 25 goals in the tournament, was the star player of the team led by Captain the Duke of Argyll who was quoted as saying, “…This was another humdinger of a final, but to do it for Scotland again is an amazing experience and one I hope will inspire others. It doesn’t get much better, or bigger, than this!”

The victory made it three tournaments in a row for the Scotland team, following the team’s victories in the 2004 World Championship and the King’s Cup in Thailand in September 2005.

The World Elephant Polo Association (WEPA) was formed in 1982 at Tiger Tops Jungle Lodge in the Royal Chitwan National Park in Nepal. The earliest games were played on a grass airfield in Meghauly on the edge of the National Park. The co-founders, James Manclark, a Scottish landowner and former Olympic tobogganer, and Jim Edwards, owner of Tiger Tops Jungle Lodge and Chairman of the Tiger Mountain Group, came up with the idea in a bar in St. Moritz, Switzerland, where they are both members of the Cresta Club.

Elephant polo was first played in India around the turn of the 20th century, by members of the British aristocracy. The first games were played with a soccer ball, but after finding that the elephants like to smash the balls, the soccer ball was replaced with a standard polo ball. The sticks are made of bamboo and have a standard polo mallet on the end. The length of the stick depends on the size of the elephant—anywhere from 5 to 12 feet.

The rules of the game are similar to horse polo, but the pitch is 3/4 length (because of the slower speed of the elephants) and there are some necessary additions—for instance, it is a penalty for an elephant to lie down in front of the goal line. Players are secured in rope harnesses, with a rope across their thighs and rope stirrups. The game will stop if a player’s harness becomes too loose and there is a danger of the player falling off.

The primary difference between horse and elephant polo, besides the substitution of an elephant for a horse, is that the elephants are “driven” by their trainers, called “mahouts.” The mahouts have generally worked with the elephant for many years and the elephants respond quickly to the mahouts’ signals and commands. The mahouts communicate with the elephant with verbal commands and by applying pressure to the back of the elephant’s ears with their feet. The player’s responsibility is to let the mahout know where to go, how fast, when to stop, etc. Most of the mahouts and all of the elephants only understand Nepali, so the communication is difficult at times. The professional players tend to learn some basic Nepali to help with the communication on the pitch.

**AMATEURS OR PROFESSIONALS?**

In addition to the professional game, it may be of interest to readers to know that an all-Ireland team entered and won the Chivas Regal WEPA Olympic Quaich, the amateur world title of the sport in 2005.

Their victory was against the wily and experienced International Tigresses & Dom’s Dragon team, captained by Celia Temple from Scotland. The Irish squad of captain Graham Little (a sports presenter on UTV), brother Warren Little, Justin “The Scoop” Woods, Michael Loughman, Colin Carroll and Graham “Slippy” Smith started the final with a 4-goal advantage due to the handicapping system. The second half saw a come back from the International Tigresses with goals from Lars Lofgren from Sweden and a spectacular volley from Celia Temple as she met a powerful Lofgren cross on the full, leaving Ireland’s defence no chance. However, Ireland’s lead was enough as the final whistle went with the scores 6-2.

Entries for the 25th World Championship are now being invited. More information is available on www.elephantpolo.com or from info@elephantpolo.com.