

## **Report by Arthur Dukes – Playing in the Junior HPA Polo Championship**

In the summer holidays I took part in the Pony Club Polo Championships. It was a trip we had been planning for a long time and one I was really looking forward to. I had been getting my horses fit and preparing since March.

Unfortunately there were not enough players of my age group to make a Scottish team so I put my name into the pool and was asked to play for a team from Vine Pony Club. This meant that the first time I met my team was at our first match against Beaufort Pony Club. We had a brief team chat before the match and decided on our positions but there wasn't much time. At first we found it difficult to play together because we didn't know each other whereas the other team had been playing together for years and were also extremely well mounted. Unfortunately we lost this first match.

The next match I played was I think probably the best I played while with Vine. It was against Cheltenham School who were used to playing with each other all the time. As soon as the ball went in I took it and went on a run up the field, scoring the first goal of the match. At half time the scores were level two all. After half time I was even more determined to win and within the first few minutes of the next chukka I scored one of the best goals of my life taking the ball all the way down the field on the left side then cutting it in and slotting it through the goals! We were then up three two for a while before they came back with another goal and the scores were then tied as we were coming to the final chukka. We started the final chukka and one of my team mates quickly scored to put us in the lead but then Cheltenham came back with another goal and the pressure was really on with only a few minutes to go. We were then awarded a 60 yard penalty after I was fouled by one of their players. I lined up for the penalty and took my shot it was heading straight for goal but was stopped right on the line and Cheltenham came back with a counter attack. With seconds to go they just squeezed in a goal to insure a win.

I was extremely disappointed to have lost that match after putting one hundred percent into it but there was nothing I could do.

In between all of these matches we were staying at a professional polo player's yard and in return we had to work for him and one of his team mates. It was great staying there because we got to practice with them and ride lots of different horse which was fantastic for improving my brother's and my game.

The next match we did considerably better and were now playing well as a team. Unfortunately we still lost against Cowdray Park Cherokees who were the favourites to win the tournament. They were very well mounted and each player had their own groom and several horses. We put up a good fight but lost 3-5, again I scored two of our goals.

My last match with this team was against Hurtwood which was a pretty close game all the way. We put in a lot of effort and ended up winning but unfortunately we didn't qualify because we had only won one match out of three but I enjoyed it anyway!

After a week's break I was asked to play in a different division with a different team. This division played three one chukka matches spread over a day rather than 3 chukka matches that I had been playing in.

I was again playing with people I had never met until the first match but luckily we got on well and we won all of our matches on the first day! This was a great start for me with the new team and we got moved up a league after the first day.

The second day also went very well with another three matches. We won the first, drew the second match 2-2 with both goals scored by me but then drew the last match which meant that we didn't go up a league but we were in second place in the league we were in.

The third day was at Tidworth where there had been a lot of matches played when the weather had been terrible so the pitch was trashed! This made it very difficult to get the ball to go in a straight line and wasn't helped by the weather when it started raining again just before we went on. Luckily we managed to draw the first match and draw the second match. Unfortunately we drew the last match as well which meant we had to have a run-down which means each team starts at the end of the pitch and has a race to the other end of the pitch. We were very unlucky by having to go on the roughest side of the pitch and because it was the end of a long day the pitch was even worse. The run-down went well until just over the half way line when our ball got stuck in a divot which meant we couldn't get a clean hit at it and the other team got ahead and managed to stay that way. I was again very disappointed but had had a great experience and learnt a lot in the time I was there.

