

Agility Drills for Polocrosse

By Tania Churchill

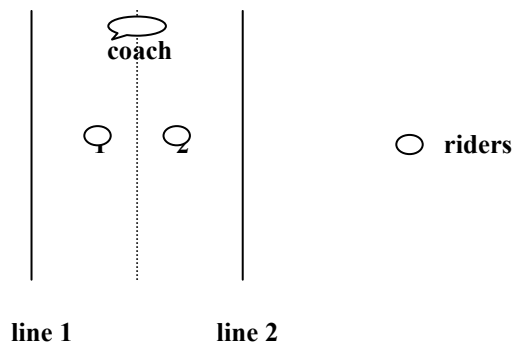
The ability of the horse and rider to change direction quickly, accelerate and decelerate quickly, and the ability to mirror the opponent's movements are all very important aspects in being able to play a good game of polocrosse. This need for agility is very similar to that needed in human team sport games, such as touch football, and soccer.

In this article, I will look at how team sport agility drills can be adapted for use in training for polocrosse. The drills have been adapted from the ACT Academy of Sport Agility Manual. Some of the drills mentioned can be practised alone, while some are ideal for team training.

The drills are designed to develop the physiological components that are important in increasing agility for team sports. These include acceleration, maximal speed, proprioception (the awareness of where one's limbs are in space), reaction time and response time, decision making, agility endurance and aerobic and anaerobic capacity. By developing these elements, you should notice an improvement in the horse's polocrosse performance.

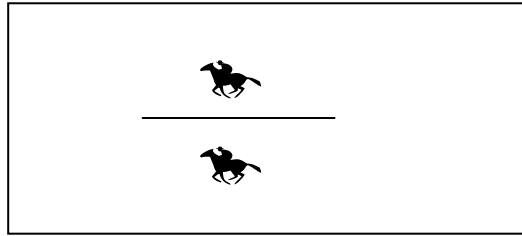
TAG AND CHASE

RESPONSE TIME - visual



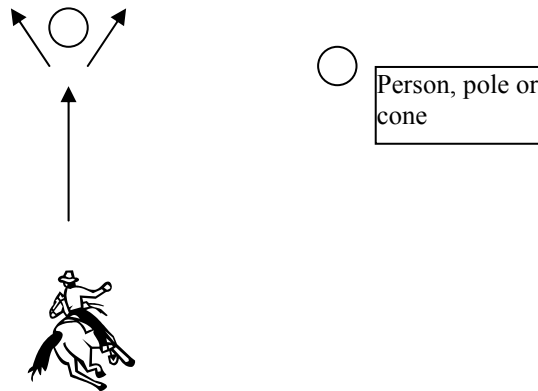
This drill develops the rider's response time, and develops the horse's response time to the aids. The coach/ helper stands 2 - 3 metres in front of the riders with a ball. The coach gives a quick pass to either of the riders and the rider receiving the ball is required to reach the line closest to them before being tagged by the other rider. Tagging occurs if the pursuing horse's head draws level with the other horse's quarters. If the rider with the ball does get tagged then he/she has to turn around and try to tag the other rider, before that rider reaches their own line.

SHADOWING



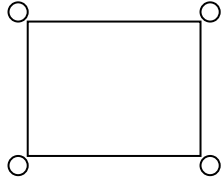
Shadowing involves two riders playing within a square or rectangular area (about half a polocrosse field). The riders face each other on opposite sides of the square. One rider is nominated as the first leader and the other is the shadower. The leader executes varying movement patterns in the confined area, such as quick accelerations and decelerations, changes of direction, turns on the haunches, sidepass etc. The shadower mimics the movement patterns as quickly and accurately as possible, whilst trying to keep up with the leader's movements.

WHICH DIRECTION?



This drill uses both verbal and visual cues to change direction. The horse and rider canter quickly to the coach, pole or cone and then have to quickly make a decision when the coach says or points to the direction in which to turn and canter to.

ROUND THE BEND




The rider completes the drill as quickly as possible. At each cone (corner) the horse and rider turns in either a clockwise or anticlockwise direction to complete a full circle and then continues to the next cone.

PICKING UP THE BALL



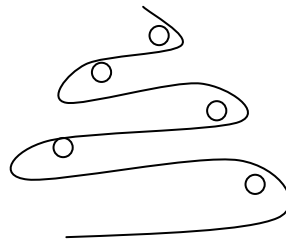
Start line



 **Ball/drop zone**

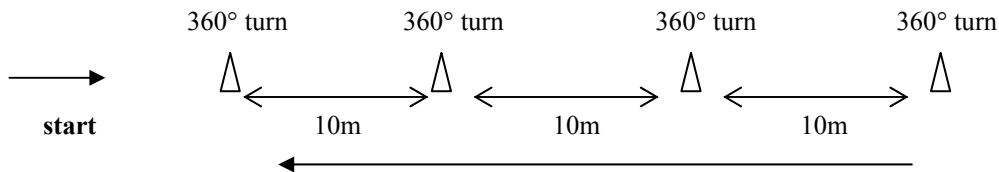
A polocrosse ball is placed at each drop zone. The rider starts by galloping out to pick up the first ball and bringing it back to the start. The rider repeats the process until all the balls have been picked up. When the rider is returning the last ball he/she passes it to the next rider who completes the drill by placing each ball at the designated drop zones.

SLALOM



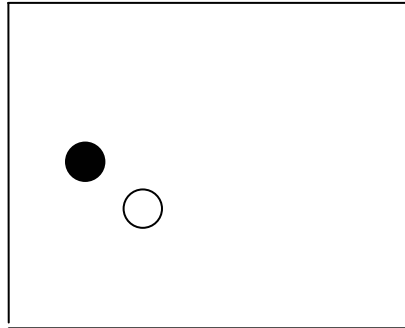
Cones or bending poles are set out in a slalom course pattern. The rider tries to get around the poles as quickly as possible to reach the finish line. The horse and rider then walk back to the start and completes the drill again after ample rest.

360 DEGREE TURNS



This drill develops a horse's proprioceptive (awareness of where limbs are in space) and agility skills. The horse and rider ride at a fast canter towards the first cone (the cones are set 15 metres apart) and completes a full turn and then heads towards the next cone. At the final cone, the rider does a 180° turn, and then gallops at maximal speed back to the start line. The drill is gradually made harder by increasing the horse's speed through the cones.

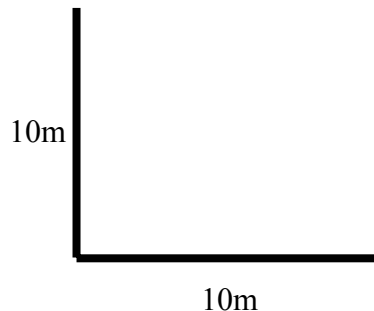
CHASER



● = runner
○ = chaser

One rider is the 'runner' and the other is the 'chaser'. The 'runner' is given a five metre head start and travels around the designated area changing direction and movement patterns so the 'chaser' does not catch him/her. The 'runner' is caught if the chasing horse 'pushes' the running horse. Once the 'runner' is caught the riders change roles and continue the game. The game continues for five minutes.

L DRILL



The horse and rider accelerate to the first corner and before reaching it begin to decelerate so he/she can turn and accelerate towards the next corner. The horse and rider can start from a different starting position such as facing backwards, or sideways, which makes the drill harder and more game specific.

All the drills detailed above are only examples and can be changed in any way to suit a given situation. The majority of the drills are designed to have a high level of coach involvement, however some exercises can also be practised at home in training with a minimum of equipment. The only limit to the exercises is your imagination and the goal/s of the session.

It is important when using these drills to mimic the game situation as accurately as possible. This means having accurate work to rest ratios. Polocrosse games generally have a period of intense action (work) of 30seconds to 2-4mins, then a less intense period (rest) of approximately a minute. A chukka is usually 8 minutes long. The work to rest ratio when completing the drills should reflect these numbers, and the intensity at which they are conducted should also be high.

By regularly incorporating these drills into training sessions, improvements should be seen in the horse's polocrosse ability. They should also be fun for the rider!

Tania Churchill has a degree in equine management, and currently runs a fitness consultancy service called Performance Equine Training Advice. For more informative articles and information on the services PETA offers, go to www.members.eisa/~pequineta/, or call Tania on 0408 11 0607.

Drills adapted from:

Wisbey, B, Templeton, C., 2001. Agility manual, ACT Academy of Sport.