



## **The Poloafrica tour to England in June 2019**

The UK Armed Forces Polo Association (UKAFPA) is responsible for overseeing, encouraging and co-ordinating polo throughout the world for the British Army, the Royal Air Force and the Royal Navy. 2019 is the 150th year anniversary of the game of polo as we know it today and UKAFPA is leading these Polo 150 celebrations.

The game of polo is of ancient origin, a game that over centuries has been played in different ways in different parts of the world, most especially in the Far and Middle East. The first acknowledged game from whence the modern game began was played by the British Army in 1869, hence the celebrations happening this year. “Hockey on horseback”, as it was referred to then, was organised by officers stationed at Aldershot, one of whom had read about a form of the game in India, in The Field magazine. Etiquette, followed by rules, developed quickly afterwards, as did the emergence of polo being played at many clubs.

As part of these celebrations, the UKAFPA has invited the Poloafrica Development Trust to send a team from South Africa on tour to England. It is a tremendous honour for Poloafrica that this small community programme in the rural fastnesses of the Free State in South Africa has been chosen for this historic occasion. The Poloafrica tour will culminate in a game to be played against the UK Armed Forces team in front of the Queen on the finals day of the Royal Windsor Cup at Guards Polo Club in June.

The Poloafrica Development Trust was founded by Catherine Cairns. Catherine began her career at S.G. Warburg & Co. in London. After graduating with an MBA from the Wharton School, where she was a Lauder Fellow, Catherine then joined Booz•Allen & Hamilton and worked in various countries as a management consultant. Eventually in 2002 she fell in love with, and invested in, Uitgedacht Farm in the Free State in South Africa. Catherine’s initial ambition was simply to turn a beautiful location into a polo heaven. Quite early on her priorities changed. She wanted to give her black adult employees an opportunity to operate as equals with their white peers in the equestrian world in South Africa. Rapidly the scope of the effort enlarged to embrace the youngsters of the local community, for whom the farm has become a safe haven. This is how Poloafrica was born.

Poloafrica provides youngsters with a supportive yet disciplined environment, giving them a sense of self worth to help them flourish and grow. Providing they demonstrate discipline and commitment to the animal, the sport, their schoolwork and the life skills lessons provided in the holidays, the children learn to ride and play polo. As they become adults, the programme also gives them the opportunity to participate in equestrian activities professionally. The point of the programme is however not the ponies, although the youngsters love these, it is driving a change in their mindset that leads them to aspire to new horizons.

The choice of who was to go on the trip was difficult, as many on the programme, whether adults or youngsters, are deserving of it. Polo ability was a criterion but



certainly not the key one. Instead effort, kindness to the animal and each other, and a sense of teamwork were factors that drove the choice. All understand that winning or losing simply does not matter. What instead matters is to play your best, with good teamwork, with courtesy to each other and to your opponents and with care for the animal. Good manners on and off the field is what is taught at Poloafrica and this is what the team wish to demonstrate in England.

As Catherine proudly says, this trip will be an extraordinarily special thing for those that go on it and also for those that host it. Whilst it is important that the individuals on the trip gain personal enrichment from the experience, the trip also offers a valuable opportunity to gain support for what Poloafrica is trying to achieve in this rural community in the Free State in South Africa.

#### **THE POLOAFRICA VISITING TEAM:**

##### ***Naledi Nkopane***

*Naledi, 36 years old, began working on the farm when he was only 20. Naledi has learned everything he knows about horses and the management of them at Poloafrica and has taken on more responsibilities over the years such that he is now in overall charge of the ponies (there are over 70 at present), the breeding programme and indeed all equestrian activities at Poloafrica. He plays well off his handicap and is a good umpire and coach. He particularly enjoys teaching the little ones to ride. Horse care is his passion and speciality and he insists on ensuring that the youngsters learn respect and care for the animal.*

##### ***Thabo Johannes Mkhwanazi***

*TJ, 30 years old, has been a member of the team at Poloafrica for over 9 years. Scarcely able to ride when he joined the farm, similar to Naledi he has learned all he knows about ponies and polo at Poloafrica. Gifted with sensitive horses and well trained by Gavin Chaplin (an internationally recognised polo coach who spends some time each year at Poloafrica), he enjoys bringing on young ponies. As is Naledi, TJ is trained in barefoot trimming. TJ is a good coach and captain and will be showing his captaincy skills on this trip.*

##### ***Tinto Mothijoa***

*Tinto and his older brother Thapelo (now employed in the polo world in South Africa) were Poloafrica's two "founder scholars". Tinto, 24 years old, managed to matriculate from high school in 2016 and is now in his third year at college studying public management. He says that a gift Poloafrica has given him is being taught to take care of others than yourself – meaning the ponies and the younger children. Tinto loves gospel singing.*

##### ***Molefi Ralebenya***

*Molefi, now 22 years old, joined Poloafrica 8 years ago. At that time he re-registered at school and successfully matriculated in 2016. Thanks to Poloafrica, Molefi is passionate about beekeeping, one of the programme's key craft skills and one that is important to the world. After matriculating, Molefi set up his own beekeeping*



*business in the local community, which is expanding. He has his own hives and is looking to establish more of these, he does bee removals and gives beekeeping courses. He continues to teach the skill to younger Poloafrica scholars. Molefi enjoys polo and the care of the horse.*

**Johanne Mofokeng**

*Rather behind at school because of drop out years and grade repeats, Johanne, 19 years old, remains determined to get to Grade 12 (the final year of school) and matriculate. He joined Poloafrica 9 years ago and is passionate about horses. Johanne would like to remain playing the game and caring for horses when he finishes school. He enjoys and has a gift for practical craft skills, such as carpentry and beekeeping. He is a rising “boxing star” amongst the teenage Poloafrica boxing group.*

**Ntombe Nkopane**

*A participant in the programme for over 8 years, Ntombe, 15 years old, is the first Poloafrica scholar that the programme has managed to get into Ficksburg High, which is the community’s old Model C school. Ntombe enjoys her polo very much but would like to do it as a hobby rather than a career when she grows up. Now in grade 10, she is enjoying her new Technical Maths class and is considering becoming a teacher when she finishes school. Ntombe says that the emphasis on schoolwork and the help that Poloafrica has given her with it over the years has been invaluable.*

**Tebello Mokoarane**

*Tebello, 15 years old, is the youngest Poloafrica person on the trip. Tebello, who says his favourite subject is English, is determined to reach the final grade of school and matriculate. Tebello is passionate about caring for horses and the game of polo and says that he wants to remain in the polo world when he finishes school. At the same time his ambition is to become a professional beekeeper and own lots of hives. Tebello has been on the programme for 7 years and says that what he most loves about Poloafrica is the sense of belonging that it gives him.*