

THE SOUTH AFRICAN POLO ASSOCIATION'S development PROGRAM

Development polo in South Africa
comes to the fore...

The South African Polo Association (SAPA) sponsors the Poloafrika development program for adults and children, run on Uitgedacht Farm, a polo lodge, in the Free State.

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above
Practice chukkas
at Uitgedacht
Farm.

far left
Home team
pony line.

left
Watching and
learning in the
arena.



The Poloafrika development program, founded by Catherine Cairns, is now in its fourth year and is supported and monitored by SAPA. In 2011 SAPA will provide significant funding for the children's academic costs and contribute towards tournament transport. The program also benefits from the help of Matthew Pohl, internationally recognized polo professional and visiting coach on Uitgedacht Farm.

The program has three objectives. The first is to use polo and ponies as a lever to encourage children from underprivileged backgrounds to work hard at school. Children are given practical and financial support

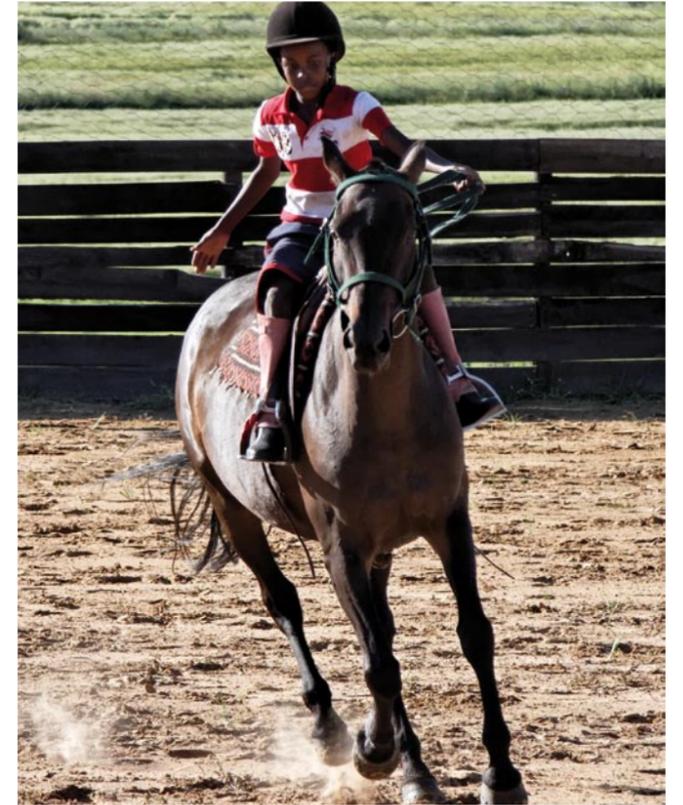
The aim is to foster a sense of self discipline and purpose which will serve these girls and boys well in the years to come.

for school attendance and an opportunity to learn about horsemanship and receive riding and polo coaching. The aim is not particularly to create future professional polo players (although this may happen and indeed is happening) it is instead to foster a sense of self-discipline and purpose which will serve these girls and boys well in the years to come. There are currently thirteen children in the program, seven girls and six boys, of ages

ranging from eight to nineteen. All the children know that, in order to stay in the program, they must try hard at school and demonstrate discipline and enthusiasm for the ponies and the sport. Four Poloafrika scholars were chosen to play in the curtain raiser to the BMW International at Inanda in August last year under the aegis of their coaches. The oldest of these four, Thapelo (aged eighteen and playing well off his -1 handicap), has just passed his Matric, the first Poloafrika scholar to do so.

Poloafrika's second objective is to give an opportunity to adult underprivileged individuals of talent in the sport to achieve more in their lives than they have ever been able to do before. In part this is enabling them

to play the game in a serious manner and giving them the opportunity to flourish as true polo professionals, whether through pony care, farrier work, schooling ponies or coaching other players in the sport. The latter capability requires confidence and authority, which represents a considerable social challenge given the nature of the sport today. Times are, however, changing. Three Poloafrika players were sponsored by SAPA to participate in the



“coach the coaches clinic” run by David Morley, one of the top Hurlingham Polo Association coaches in the UK. This clinic was hosted by Uitgedacht Farm in February 2010. These players’ polo has improved accordingly as has their ability to teach it to others. All three passed the course and achieved a SAPA endorsed coaching qualification, with Tshidiso Meshake achieving the advanced grade.

The third objective is to change both the perception and reality of the sport in this country, in order to allow it to flourish and grow. The sport needs to become more accessible to non-white players. It is therefore important for South Africans to see black players compete and win, in order to challenge the unspoken assumption that the sport is only a sport for white people. The opportunity given by Catherine to the PoloAfrica team is helping to change this mindset. The Africa Cup win for PoloAfrica at Inanda in 2008 was a turning point. This team was captained by Tshidiso and it was the first time a black team has ever reached a final in a tournament in South Africa, much less won. There have been many other successes for PoloAfrica players over the last three years, whether as a team or as individuals. It is something to be proud of, that three of the “PoloAfrica A team” players have moved up in handicap in 2010. Most recently, an accolade has been granted by SAPA, in that Tshidiso has been shortlisted as one of the 2 goal players in the country to represent South Africa at the FIP tournament in June. Furthermore, two PoloAfrica players have been invited to play in the Lagos tournament in Nigeria, at the end of February. ☺

[this page](#)

[top](#)
Last day of the holidays.

[bottom](#)
Tshidiso meshake on Beauty & Zompie Tsoletsi on Foolish Heart.

[opposite page](#)

[top](#)
Mampho trying to canter.

[top right](#)
Tumelo cantering.

[middle](#)
Mampho watching the coach.

[right](#)
Poppetty changing leg for Johanni.

[far right](#)
Johanni copying the coach.

