

Polo's Influence On What We Wear

It is amazing how much athletics has influenced fashion over the century. What became a symbol of the most elegant of apparel - the top hat - originated as protective gear for the fox hunter. In the event of a fall from horseback, the stiff topper would cushion the head against collision with the ground.

Perhaps as much as any sport, polo has contributed to and influenced what we wear today. Jodhpurs, which were brought to the western world with polo, are the eighteenth century invention of the Maharajah of Jodhpur. Roomy and cool, jodhpurs britches or polo trousers are eminently practical for equestrian sports.

In 1900, Brooks Brothers introduced the button-down collar shirt to America from England, where it had been specifically designed to prevent shirt collars from flapping in the faces of the polo players. An indispensable element of business attire, the button-down collar is still called a "roll collar" or "turtleneck". The chukka boot which extends slightly above the ankle and is alternatively called a "desert boot", derives its name from polo's six periods of play, chukkas. The polo belt is a wide, usually coarse-woven inch of wool or leather. The knitted pullover shirt with attached collar and placket front tie is, of course, a polo shirt.

The popular camelhair overcoat is another example of polo's influence of fashion. English polo players devised a casual, robe-like coat to throw over their shoulders between chukkas. This coat, known as a "wait coat", became the polo coat and appropriate for almost any occasion near or distant to the polo field.

A fine point which illustrates the careful thought that goes into the function of each piece of polo attire is the player's boots. A polo player's boots are always brown so as not to get black polish on an opponent's white trousers during a ride-off. Somewhere through the centuries the answer was lost as to why it is preferable to have brown polish rubbed on one's britches rather than black, but the point of etiquette remains. And, of course, white britches are always worn on the polo fields.

