SONS OF THE ROYAL SOIL

An impeccable string of ponies lines up in their compound and there is endless passion for horses all around. For these direct descendants of Jodhpur's founder, Polo has always been more than a sport. It is a royal history of sporting excellence, a part of heritage & culture; it is a way of life.

The home of one of the finest polo teams of the country, polo comes naturally to the sons of this soil. One of the elder members from this royal family of Nathores, Maharaj Dhiraj Sobhag Singh Ji, is a gentleman of great wisdom and few words. Speaking about Polo, he says, "It has come full circle". During his prime, the game of kings suffered a monumental decline and was reduced to a vestige of it's former self.

In the early 90's, when his son Rajkumar Karan Vijay Singh began playing, the scenario was still bleak and there was limited patronage or infrastructure. Veteran Polo player, KV Singh is among those credited with the revival of polo in India. He travelled extensively and was often accompanied by his wife Kunwarani Shweta Rathore and their two sons Bhanwar Janmejai Singh Rathore & Bhanwar Kartikeya Singh Rathore.

Early exposure to world-class sporting events has played a pivotal role in shaping the current generation of the family. **Last year, Kartikeya became the youngest Polo player in India and Janmejai continues to excel and astound at both Polo and shooting.** "Polo is something i have fun at. Both sports distract me from each other but i cannot live without either. If I don't sit on a horse every day, i feel something is wrong with me. If i don't hold the gun for a day I feel I am missing something" says Janmejai.

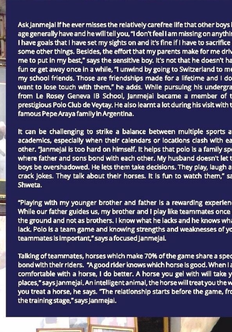
In 2015, Janmejai played his first Polo season in India (Delhi-Jodhpur-Jaipur), with a handicap of -2. He played nine tournaments and won five. These include the Sawai Man Singh Gold Vase & Junior National Championship at Delhi, Sujan Rajmahal Palace HH Maharaja Sawai Bhawani Singh Cup & Royal Gems & Arts SMS Gold Vase at Jaipur and Mount Shivalik Rajputana & Central India Cup at Jodhpur. This year, Janmejai will be playing with a handicap of 0. Next year he also plans to participate in the national shooting calendar.

Ask Janmejai If he ever misses the relatively carefree life that other boys his age generally have and he will tell you, "I don't feel I am missing on anything. I have goals that I have set my sights on and it's fine if I have to sacrifice on some other things. Besides, the effort that my parents make for me drives me to put in my best," says the sensitive boy. It's not that he doesn't have fun or get away once in a while, "I unwind by going to Switzerland to meet my school friends. Those are friendships made for a lifetime and I don't want to lose touch with them," he adds. While pursuing his undergrads from Le Rosey Geneva (8 School, Janmejai became a member of the prestigious Polo Club de Veytay. He also learnt a lot during his visit with the famous Pepe Arrya family in Argentina.

It can be challenging to strike a balance between multiple sports and academics, especially when their calendars or locations clash with each other, "Janmejai is too hard on himself. It helps that polo is a family sport where father and sons bond with each other. My husband doesn't let the boys be overshadowed. He lets them take decisions. They play, laugh and crack jokes. They talk about their horses. It is fun to watch them," says Shweta.

"Playing with my younger brother and father is a rewarding experience. While our father guides us, my brother and I play like teammates once on the ground and not as brothers. I know what he lacks and he knows what I lack. Polo is a team game and knowing strengths and weaknesses of your teammates is important," says a focused Janmejai.

Talking of teammates, horses which make 70% of the game share a special bond with their riders. "A good rider knows which horse is good. When I am comfortable with a horse, I do better. A horse you get with will take you places," says Janmejai. An intelligent animal, the horse will treat you the way you treat a horse, he says. "The relationship starts before the game, from the training stage," says Janmejai.



> LOOK OUT FOR PENALTY SHOTS. THEY CAN MAKE OR BREAK A GAME.
>
> MAHARAJ DHIRAJ SOBHAG SINGH JI

Choosing a good horse to play is also important from a safety and security standpoint. Kartikeya recalls how his father's horses gave him a fantastic season last year, "Sundance and Pappiya are the oldest here. I have played with them and grown up with them. It's a very special bond". This year the family has expanded their string of horses to include a mix of Argentine ponies and thoroughbreds.

Kartikeya has already shown his soft corner for animals. He provides shelter to many abandoned animals on his family farms and is actively involved in the rehabilitation of a large number of rescued Camels in Bisalpur. From Amira, a polo pony that has been bred locally to Chhote Nawab, a mule that must cross the path of the ready team of horses and their horsemen before a tournament, Kartikeya's wild friends have become a part of the family. He ensures that proper nutrition and medical aid is administered to everyone under his care.

Every summer, the family travels to Africa, Europe and Argentina to play tournaments and train for better. The brothers also receive expert guidance in the selection and management of Polo ponies. In fact, a string of horses handpicked by them in Argentina is now stationed at the Vreeland Club, where KV started the jodhpur Cup. Both Janmejai & Kartikeya have been playing as Jodhpur at this prestigious club in the Netherlands.

Speaking about this year's experience, Kartikeya says, "It rained a lot in Argentina as well as Europe and we couldn't play with full intensity but it was a great bonding time". Shweta feels "It's always great to end a holiday with a game. The boys get to play with some of KV's friends and their children." KV agrees, "With teams of father and sons, all playing as friends, it is an experience of its own kind".

Speaking about the upcoming season in Jodhpur, Kartikeya says "I am very excited and look forward to playing with some more senior players. Each match is an exciting opportunity to learn". KV, meanwhile, prefers to look at it from the Polo line or a more strategic perspective. Like an ideal host, he ensures that everyone gets a fair game to play and the tournament goes well.

Now looking forward to the Jodhpur season, all of them say the home ground is always special. We wish all players a very safe and enjoyable tournament.

POLO – Top takeaways

KARAN VIJAY SINGH	JANMEJAI SINGH	KARTIKEYA SINGH RATHORE
• Adventure • Relationships • Travel	• Dedication • Discipline • Teamwork	• Respect for all • Understanding of equine behaviour • Patience & Muscle memory