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York Region family is passionate for polo



TOM OFFEN
Hobnobbed with royalty on British polo tour.

Some fathers teach their children how to pitch a baseball or swing a golf club. Tom Offen put his kids up on polo ponies.

All three Offen offspring, David, Todd and Kelly, became enthusiastic competitors and both sons became professional players.

While David's and Todd's polo careers continue to thrive in the United States, a third generation has taken up the ball and mallet. Mr. Offen's three grandsons (David's son Cody, 12, and Kelly's boys Robert, 12, and Brendon, 11) are keen

players, while David's daughter, Nicole, 17, rides show jumpers.

Family members of all three generations of the Offen clan will be participating, in various formations, at the 23rd annual Polo for Heart, June 14 to 16 at the Gormley Polo Centre in Richmond Hill.

Mr. Offen considers it his Father's Day present to himself, as the annual fundraising event for heart disease and stroke research always falls on Father's Day weekend.

His love for horses developed at the tender age of five when his father took him to a riding stable in Wexford. Later, the family kept a pony at home in Toronto on Earl Grey Road and a horse after moving to Scarborough.

Mr. Offen went on to become a human chiropractor and is one of the pioneers of equine chiropractic in Canada. He continued to show hunters and jumpers and, at age 36, discovered the joys of polo. He's a longtime member of the Toronto Polo Club and gifted polo teacher.

"I knew guys who were playing polo and it was natural sliding into it. Someone said, 'Come out and play' and we did. The next thing you know we were into it," he says.

Mr. Offen was getting tired of the show ring and polo reignited his love for horse sport.

"Every time you hit the ball, you're a winner. It's all fun; you're not competing for ribbons, you're there for your own fun. And there's nothing like team play to bring out the devil in you."

He enjoyed watching his sons play interscholastic polo as they were growing up.

The biggest thrill came nine years ago, when Mr. Offen was along when Todd and David played on a four-member Canadian team in England against a British team that included Prince Charles.

"It was unbelievable. Hobnobbing with royalty every day was a great thrill and an experience that only dealing with polo or horses can get you," says Mr. Offen.

He keeps dozen polo ponies on his Richmond Hill farm adjacent to the Polo for Heart tournament site.

They are Argentinian and North American thoroughbreds, many of which were given to him after he fixed them with chiropractic treatments.

He lends his ponies to Kerri Weir, an excellent player and regular participant at Polo for Heart.

"The resurgence of women in the sport has been great for polo," contends Mr. Offen.

Polo for Heart will also serve as a family reunion of sorts for the Offens. Todd, who is based in Long Island for the summer, will make it north of the border for the tournament.

And Tom is hoping Dave, who manages the Greenwich Polo Club, will play as well.

The grandchildren will be onsite, helping to sell raffle tickets, cooling off polo ponies and generally doing whatever it takes to get the job done.

The elder statesman of the Offen polo clan is not likely to play. But he will be seen modelling equipment and carrying a mallet and ball throughout the crowd to explain the sport, answer questions and share his enthusiasm.

"I thought at one time David was going to follow in my footsteps and become a chiropractor, but polo won out," admits the senior Offen. "He said, 'Dad, you taught me about the good life too well. I'd rather be outdoors with horses.' Both he and Todd have become

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