

# POLO TIMES

**AZERBAIJAN ON FIRE!**

*The Snow Polo World Cup St. Moritz 2023*

**ANOTHER RECORD-BREAKING WEEKEND**

*SUPA University Winter Arena Nationals*

**INDOMITABLE ICONICA SECURE WIN**

*The Ylvisaker Cup Final in Florida*

**PLUS: IFZA Silver Cup & Equine Botanical Choices**



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**Cover photograph:** Team Azerbaijan Land of Fire's Elcin Jamalli & Tarlan Gurbanaliyev celebrate their historic win in St. Moritz. By fotoswiss.com/giancarlo cattaneo

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# NEU

## Our safest polo helmet, by far.

Our helmet passes the European safety standards and is certified to meet the NOCSAE standard.



Helmets that pass safety standards save lives and we are proud to be contributing towards a safer sport.



Understanding what it takes to overcome fear and self-doubt has been at the root of Paul 'Stalkie' Stalker's personal transformation. He has proven experience of working with Polo Teams, Patrons and individual players for the past 2 years achieving outstanding results. With individual clients, Stalkie's aim is to untap, nurture and focus their passion and potential on becoming the best versions of themselves in all aspects of their lives, whatever their starting point



# Power of Mindset Gains

How Mindset Gains Trump Marginal Gains in Polo



Organisational gains can be found and effectively installed into a team's daily routines and rhythms

Like most elite sports, marginal gains can mean the difference between success and failure in polo.

Marginal gains, an approach to performance improvement, first came to prominence during the London 2012 Olympics when Team GB cycling won a record eight gold medals. Here's how Dave Brailsford, British Cycling Performance Director explains marginal gains, "The whole principle came from the idea that if you broke down everything you could think of that goes into riding a bike, and then improved it by 1 percent, you will get a significant increase when you put them all together".

Brailsford introduced small improvements in a number of different team aspects, such as: Bringing Formula 1 motor racing design technology (computational fluid dynamics, carbon fibre) into the design of the bike's frame, wheel and components; breathable, aerodynamic kit for riders to race in; personalised mattresses and pillows to take on tour with them, and tailored diets.

Brailsford also brought the concept to Team Sky Pro Cycling, which resulted in second place in the 2012 Tour de France team competition, and victory for Sir Bradley Wiggins – the first ever Britain to win this iconic race.

F1 is a sport dominated particularly by marginal tech gains. This is because the regulations on the specification of Grand Prix cars allows a team to gain performance advantages for their drivers. This has led

to the use of energy transfer systems, revolutionised down-force and also telemetry (the collection of real-time data from a car as it is driven).

An early adopter of marginal gains (which he termed 'critical non-essentials') was Sir Clive Woodward who introduced them to develop England into the Rugby World Cup winning team of 2003.

Sir Clive's margins included skin-tight kits to make it harder for tacklers to grab a handful of his players' shirts, individual recovery programmes for each squad member and training sessions scheduled to mirror the exact times that the tournament matches would be played.

Sir Clive's "100 things 1 percent better" strategy involved revamping the England dressing rooms to include position-specific booths that featured the names of all the players who had worn the shirt before them, together with messages from loved ones and supporters. This connected each player with their heritage and their fans.

The England training base at Surrey's Pennyhill Park also had a multi-million-pound, purpose-built 3G pitch and high-tech gym installed – things that are now commonplace in most elite sport set-ups but were a rarity in Rugby Union at that time.

When it comes to my polo coaching, I'm a buyer of the marginal gain concept. One of the first things I discover when working with a team or an individual player is where such gains can be made. We start at the

beginning when a player first arrives in the camp and finish with the time the player heads home after each training session and match.

Many organisational gains can be found and effectively installed into the team's daily routines and rhythms, including personalised diet, nutrition and hydration programmes, turning up early for each game and using downtime to create good vibes and team unity, guided PT warm-ups and every player contributing to the logistics of a well-run camp.

We also assess the tools of the trade such as kit and equipment and, of course, any improvements that can be made in schooling the technical and trust connection between player and horse.

However, in my experience, marginal gains will only have a high velocity impact on performance if your players are 'intrinsically' motivated, which means having the mindset and growth mentality to want to be the best player and teammate they can possibly be.

For these players, 'extrinsic' motivation – just playing for financial rewards, bonuses, gifts, ego-massaging, fame or to avoid punishment – is NOT their psychological driver. Intrinsically motivated players play polo because they LOVE it. It gives them value, meaning and purpose. It satisfies their basic human need to realise their potential, to 'self-actualise'.

According to David Brailsford, marginal gains only add up if you "Firstly have a

team with skills and motivation to succeed". Bradley Wiggins sums it up as, "the 5 percent on top isn't going to make you win the bike race if you don't have the other 95 percent underneath".

In F1, McLaren, Ferrari, Williams and Mercedes' success wouldn't have been possible without the mental resilience of Senna, Schumacher, Hamilton and Vettel.

And I doubt whether Sir Clive's T-CUP mantra (Thinking Clearly Under Pressure) would have been realised without a core of players that truly advocated it, such as Captain Martin 'Jonno' Johnson (who endorsed my first You Can RAISE Your Game mindset programme), Jonny Wilkinson, Dallaglio, Robinson and co.

In my current RAISE Your Polo Game programme, I coach over 100 mindset gains across nine key themes: far too many to cover here, but here's a top-line selection that have brought tangible gains to my polo teams in the UK, Europe and US over the last two seasons.

## • Turning Fear into Polo Power

According to US Polo international and 2022 FIP World Cup Championship silver medallist Agustin Arellano, who I have just visited in Florida, "fear is one of the greatest problems in a polo career".

This is where we learn tools to overcome and deal with any fearful moods and behaviours you associate with polo and to motivate yourself to focus on fear as a positive driver to improve your game.

## • An Attitude of Gratitude for Polo

What you focus on you feel. Displace negative thinking with positive thinking and you'll trigger the neurotransmitters and neurochemicals which promote greater health, happiness, empathy, resilience and self-esteem in players.

## • Take Your Polo Power Back

I covered this in some detail in last month's *Polo Times* column. In a nutshell, this is how to remove blame from your game, to choose your response in any on or off-field situation, by reframing your thoughts to conquer all obstacles.

## • Let the Real Polo Player in You Shine Through

How to discover your true purpose and values and behave authentically in line with them, giving you direction and self-accountability in your polo game and career.

## • Ignite Your Polo Self-Belief

How to stack up your polo self-belief using tools such as self-talk, visualisation and living 'in the now'. This is something that Sarina Wiegman, the inspiring manager of England's football Lionesses (brilliant winners of Euro 2021 and currently unbeaten since she took the job in 2021) deliberately embeds into her players, "We're in the now. Everyone's just for the here and the now, focused on the game, and everyone is in great spirits. We just want to keep building our confidence and performing for the fans" – Millie Bright, England's captain.

## • Why Do Polo Players Do That?

How to identify and prioritise your basic polo needs and vehicles, how to meet them positively and achieve balance and peak performance. This is nicely summed up by Lewis Hamilton, "The way I drive, the way I handle a car is an expression of my inner feelings. I believe I have the best job in the world".

## • Be a Polo Influencer

Learn a host of game-changing rapport-building, verbal and body language tips for rich and effective real-life communication and relationships.

## • Praise Your Polo Game Now!

You'll never get your time in polo back. Learn and apply the proven psychological tools of playing polo to your strengths, managing your weaknesses, looking for the good, catching yourself doing things right and celebrating success.

A team full of happy, focused players, loving life and enjoying each other's company, will be a productive team rather than burning up belief, time and energy in things they don't enjoy and are not good at.

## • Raising Your Health and Vitality

Learn how to modify your self-care, diet, hydration and exercise routine to optimise your polo mindset and physical health.

My message here is simple. Pursuing marginal gains should absolutely be on the agenda for any polo patron, coach or player. These may be tech lead or data driven, such as gathering insights into physical performance through GPS tracking, smart saddles and drones. These can be organisational or facilities driven.

But if you want to guarantee soaring margins, put MINDSET gains at the core of your activity.

Join Stalkie's Free Webinar: *Raising Your Polo Game*

Stalkie will be sharing three of the top tips that have supported two of the teams he's worked with this

season, achieve new heights. Register by emailing [polotimes@rygp.co.uk](mailto:polotimes@rygp.co.uk) with your name, contact phone number and team name. Please follow the QR code to see a short introduction video clip



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