

POLO

TIME

ARGENTINE



130TH ARGENTINE OPEN

Second Win for La Natividad

POLO VALLEY SOTOGRANDE

The Perfect Spot to Hone Your Skills

VII WOMEN'S ARGENTINE OPEN

El Overo Z7 UAE Strike Again

PLUS: Rugby Polo Club Spotlight, SUPA Special & Hugo Taylor's Passions



Contents

**Publisher**

Nick Hine
publisher@polotimes.co.uk

**Editor in Chief**

Rosabella Hine
rosabella@polotimes.co.uk

**Principal Design**

James Morgan

**Design**

Alice Ruddy

**Financial Controller**

Angie Clark
accounts@polotimes.co.uk

**Accounts & Administration Assistant**

Rosalind Cutter
ads@hinemarketing.co.uk

**Administration Assistant**

Lynne Berry

Contributors:

Donna Barker, Mark Beaumont, Gill Glimmerveen, Sophie Hare, Charlotte Inness, Fiona Kalies, Dr.med. Andreas Krüger, Simon Ledger, Rege Ludwig, Tony Ramirez/©www.imagesofpolo.com, Jack Richardson, Emma Sheridan & Paul Stalker

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Adolfo Cambiaso secured his 15th Hurlingham Open title. By Matias Callejo / Prensa AAP

Contact details

Hill Farm Studios, Wainlodes Lane,
Bishops Norton, Glos, GL2 9LN
Tel: 01452 730770
email: admin@polotimes.co.uk
www.polotimes.co.uk

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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 3 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



Paul 'Stalkie' Stalker



Nina Clarkin

The Nina Mindset

How Adopting It Can Make You A Winner Too

Since she started playing polo in the Pony Club in England at the age of six and becoming the first professional female player in England over 20 years ago, Nina Clarkin has achieved numerous accolades and accomplishments throughout her illustrious polo career.

This inspiring human dynamo has achieved the rank of the world's number one female polo and a 10 goal handicap in women's polo. Nina has won The British Open, French Open, British Women's Open, Women's Argentine Open (a record four times). England Captain, she represented Great Britain in the 2008 Olympics.

Nina plays all year round, spending her time equally between England and New Zealand which is her breeding and training ground for her horses, taking two or three horses back to the UK each year to play or sell.

Off the field, Nina is a strong advocate for women and young players in polo, working to increase the visibility of women in the sport and has mentored

and coached young players, both male and female, to inspire the next generation of polo players and develop their skills in a supportive, inclusive environment.

All this and a proud, hands-on mother to three gorgeous children too! How does she do it?

Having heard so much about Nina from all corners of the polo community, I was bowled over when meeting her for the first time and consider it one of my most flattering joys to now be working alongside her as her personal mindset coach and collaborator in developing my RAISE Polo 'Winning Polo Mindset' coaching programme. We have exciting times ahead in 2024 to share.

With her permission, I'm delighted

to share with *Polo Times* readers how Nina maintains her passion and thirst for polo success – which shows absolutely no signs of diminishing – even amongst the pressures and demands placed upon arguably the most successful female polo player in history.

Stalkie Q: Nina, what would you say is the biggest challenge polo players face to their mental health?

Nina: "It's probably the pressure to perform at a high level consistently. Polo can feel like a very fickle friend because you can have days where you play amazingly and everything goes your way and then suddenly apropos to nothing, things don't go well and

"Working with Stalkie has really helped me develop a stronger mindset and become more resilient. His approach has taught me how to manage my thoughts and emotions better, helping me to stay focused and motivated in high-pressure situations"

you can think yourself into a vicious circle where you get more and more frustrated, more and more stressed and you seem further away from turning it round.

My sort of go to was to always just work harder, try harder, do more things and hopefully that'll fix it. But actually, it's normally not a physical thing. You know, you're not playing badly because you suddenly stopped training because everything is normally the same."

Stalkie Q: What does pressure look and feel like?

Nina: "In the past when I was on a bad run of form, I felt real frustration and almost helpless – as in "oh what can I do, how am I going to turn this slump round?". You'd think of all the ways that you might do it. You'd spend longer stick and balling, you'd practice more penalties you know, you'd make sure you're training that bit harder in the gym."

But when your training is already geared to the amount of polo you're playing and concentrates on strength, conditioning and cardiovascular work, additional training could do more damage than good. That's how I've come to learn that slumps in form are far more easily healed through mindset."

To maintain her positive mental attitude, Nina takes regular breaks to rest and recharge, practices mindfulness and meditation, prioritises self-care and mental and emotional support.

"The right mindset allows you permission to know that you can't play a perfect game every time you play. You're always going to make mistakes. That's the nature of the game. Be kind to yourself when that happens, forget the bad plays the moment when you do them and focus on the next play. You have plenty of time to reflect after the game and re-set. But during the game, focusing on the now gives you control over yourself and lets go of the uncontrollables."

Stalkie Q: 'Being in the now' is a fundamental element of our Winning Polo Mindset coaching programme. Can you describe how you have incorporated this into your daily routine?

Nina: "One thing for sure I'll take away, and always keep, is that my enjoyment of the game, win or lose, in the moment has changed significantly. To live in the present, to not stir up negative emotions, feels like a gift in everything that I do! I can deal with what happens afterwards, but that feeling of control in the game is something that I'm so happy that I know is now a part of me."

"Stalkie's coaching has helped me to become more self-aware, both on and off the field. By understanding my own thought patterns and reactions, I've been able to improve the way I communicate and lead my team"

It's very, very positive when you can get a team playing with this mindset, because when all of you think you can, you can! It's so powerful when everyone just moves on and encourages each other to move on from a mistake or bad decision – particularly when you see the other team not move on."

Stalkie Q: I know that you are a great advocate of gratitude and the power that gratitude brings you both on and off the polo field...

Nina: "Absolutely. I guess gratitude comes easily to me because I enjoy almost everything about the sport. I also love the ponies, I love working closely with them and making sure I am as well mounted as possible. Hence my interest in breeding."

I love playing a team sport and working with my teammates to play the best collective polo we can. I also love the personal challenge of constantly trying to improve and play better in such a challenging sport."

I am aware that my timespan to keep doing what I'm doing is finite and I'm forever grateful for the opportunity and health to keep doing it for as long as possible. Like you say Stalkie, if we want to be the best version of ourselves, small changes can actually make a big difference."

Yes – and this is all proven in bioscience! Having a gratitude or 'abundance' mentality, displacing negative thinking with positive thinking, has the capacity to trigger neurotransmitters and neurochemicals – the 'feel good' molecules such as dopamine, oxytocin, serotonin and endorphins – that are proven to improve health and wellbeing, increase resilience, strengthen the immune system, promote self-esteem, empathy and reduce stress. All of which resonated deeply with you when we first started talking about it together Nina."

Stalkie Q: Finally Nina, from the time that we've spent together, what do you think the defining characteristics of a winning polo mindset are?

Nina: "I can think of five big things! These are not the *only* things, but they do provide a great foundation to rest all the other tools upon:

- Firstly, strong focus and concentration. Polo is a fast-paced, physically demanding sport that requires us to be mentally sharp and focused at all times. A great polo player must have the ability to concentrate on the game and not be distracted by external factors, no matter how much time and emotionally invested you are in them.

- Then there's quick thinking and decision-making. We make split-second decisions on the field, so your mindset must be 'in the now', in the present moment, to naturally make the right ones.

- Next, is the 'R' word – resilience. In every elite sport and human undertaking, such as being a parent and bringing up a family, there are physical and emotional challenges, from which you need to bounce back and keep yourself pushing forward.

- Teamwork and communication are definitely key. Polo is a team sport, and a great player must be able to communicate effectively with their teammates, get to know what makes them tick and work together towards a common purpose.

- Finally, you are not going to get anywhere without a genuine passion and love for polo. And, even in the hardest spells, to always be grateful for it! See pressure as a privilege, enjoying the moment changes everything."

A positive mindset, not only changes you as a player, it changes you as a person. It kind of shines everything around it. It's just a much easier place to be. It's almost like cleaning your glasses – the view just becomes clearer! ✖

Can you relate to how Nina felt in a high-performance game?

Here is your opportunity to discuss your fears with two professionals who can help you.

If you would like to find out more about what events we have in store, please get in contact by emailing stalkie@raisepolo.com or calling +447440320238, whether you're a patron, player or enthusiast, there's a place for you to get coached by both Nina Clarkin and Stalkie in 2024.