

POLO



BiBIE



Intro

This is the Polo Bible. It's meant to help a newbie go from 'totally clueless' to 'semi-respectable Polo player.' The Bike Polo community is insanely fun, inspiring, and supportive. Playing pickup, you could find yourself passing the ball to anyone from a particle physicist to the friendly neighborhood hipster. Everybody comes together to have fun and challenge themselves. From the filthy casuals all the way to the highest levels of Bike Polo, men, women, gay, straight, trans... everybody competes and collaborates with a strong sense of community. It's fucking beautiful, so we're on a mission to bring Polo to the people.

We'd like to thank you, the reader, for picking up this Bible. If you're already a player, hopefully this has something to offer you. If not... good thing it's free! All we ask is that you contribute by spreading the love, the good word, and above all get out there and play!



If you're brand new to the sport, you're going to need a basic understanding.

First of all, the game is played 3 on 3, on a paved surface--hence the proper name of 'Hardcourt Bike Polo.' Players must stay on their bikes throughout the game, putting your foot down removes you from the play until you tap back in. Your aim is to score in the opponent's goal, and doing so requires three basic skills: Mallet/ball handling, bike handling, and teamwork.

This guide will break down the absurd and wonderful sport of bike polo into the following:

| | |
|-------------------------------|-----------|
| Da Rules | 4 |
| Court | 8 |
| Goals | 10 |
| Learning to Play | 12 |
| Gameplay | 17 |
| Equipment | 18 |
| Bike | 22 |
| Sundries | 32 |



Da Rules

Before you go off to compete, you've got to review the official rules. Best bet is to ask someone from your club to give you a thorough rundown. But for now, let's just get you familiar enough to get on the court for pickup. Keep in mind that each club tends to have their own little differences, so remember to be flexible, and always follow Rule Number 1... Don't be a dick!

Mallet Rules



Moving down the court in Bike Polo, your bread and butter will be to shuffle the ball. This is done with the broad side of the mallet head, in a pushing motion. You can use the open end of your mallet to ball-joint and make quick turns, scoop the ball into the air, or make a pass, but remember, this is only allowed for a maximum of two seconds. Your movement down the court should be based on shuffling the ball in front of the bike, not dragging it behind you.

Shuffling down the court is going to be the first thing you work on, but remember, you cannot score with a shuffle! Your goals must be shot with one of the circular ends of the mallet. Additionally, a scoop is not a shot, another good reason not to make a habit of ball-jointing.

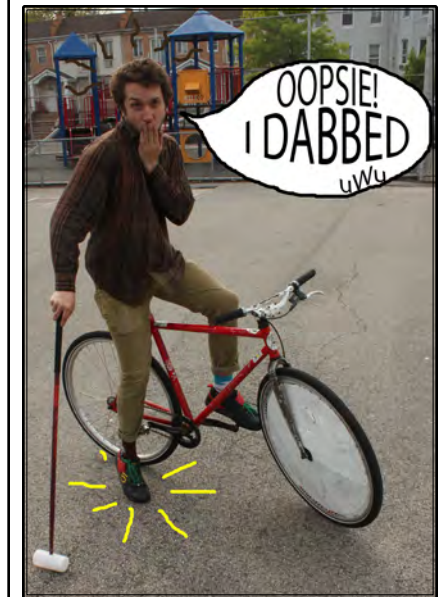
Contact



Bike polo is a contact sport, but it isn't chaos out there. Body on body, bike on bike, mallet on mallet, these are the only types of contact allowed. Even then, the only time you can make contact with another player is if they're in contention for the ball. It bears repeating that in addition to these ones, always follow Rule Number 1... don't be a dick.

Dab

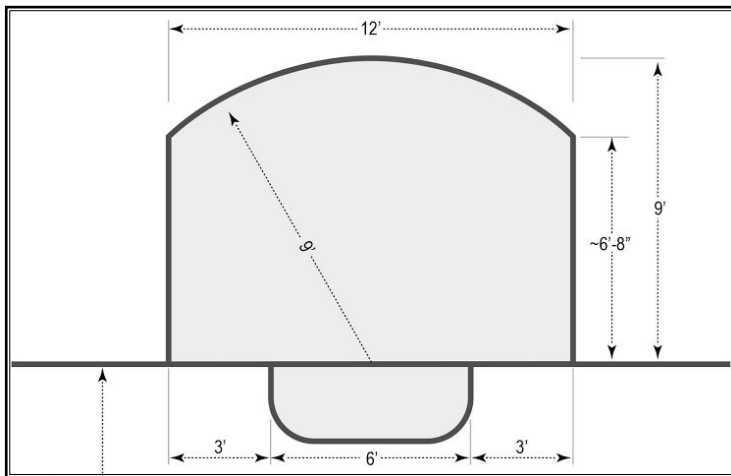
Whenever a player's foot touches the ground, they've dabbled. A player who has dabbled is considered out of play until they go 'tap out' at a location on either end of the half-court line. Once a player taps one of the designated objects or spots on the wall, they are back in action.



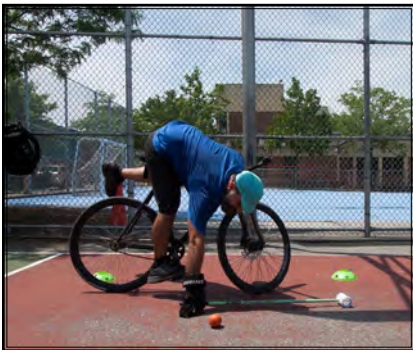
Goalie Rules

First off, there are no dedicated positions in Bike Polo. There is no ‘goalie’, technically speaking. It can be very effective—if done properly—for a team to play ‘three up’, leaving the goal wide open.

So, you can have a player acting as goalie, you can have no goalie, but what about a double goalie? No way Jose. The crease is the area right in front of the goal. A team can only have two players in the crease for up to two seconds. You can pass through it as needed, but parking the bus is not allowed.



NAH Regulation Specs for the crease w/r/t the goal.



Freedom Block



Pickup Rules

If you're attending an existing club's pickup, skip this section and ask questions as you go. If you're taking the initiative to start your own club, this section is for you! Pickup teams are traditionally decided by a mallet toss. There are two types, a lineup and a big-toss.



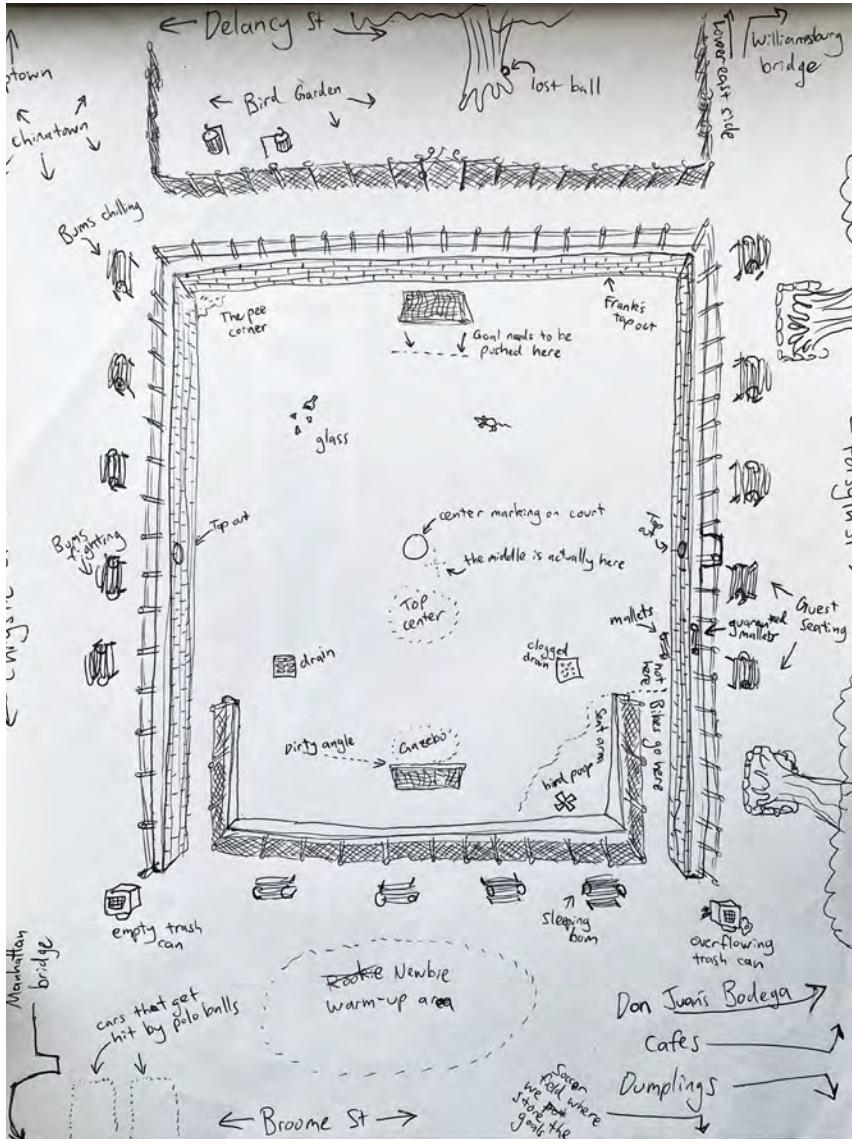
Lineup

Players put their mallets into the pile/fence for the next game six mallets at a time. These mallets are tossed into two teams of three on each side of the court at random. Custom states that the last player to put their mallet into the pile shall toss teams.

Big-Toss

A big toss is done either for the first game, or whenever players want to mix up games/teams. All players put a mallet in, two teams are tossed, and the rest are put into the next game pile(s). These players have to sit out and wait their turn. It's the price you pay for fresh teams.

Court



Official rules state that a court is somewhere between the sizes of 155' x 80' and 120' x 60'.



Players search their cities for a court with the best fences or walls that can be found. Plywood or other lumber can block off any inadequate or missing sections of fence. Even if you've found a court with a nice fence all around, it's often worth blocking off the corners somehow, to avoid the ball getting stuck.

Unfortunately, bike polo doesn't get as much appreciation as it should, so regulation courts are few and far between. Poloists have been known to play on a basketball court, in roller-hockey courts, across two tennis court halves, or anywhere else they can find.



You want to look for a nice playing surface with minimal blemishes on it. There's really nothing more annoying than working hard to get a shot only for the ball to bounce off a crack and ruin everything. And remember, 15 minutes sweeping off the court is always worth the effort.



Goals



Goals are 6 feet wide and 3 feet tall, measured to the inside of all goalposts. Goals are netted and have a solid crossbar on top. Unofficially, players might have traffic cones, beer cans, or homemade goals. Folding soccer goals of the right size can be bought, but their net is made for a soccer ball, so a second layer of finer netting is necessary.



If you're going to use cones or beer cans, simply put a bike where you want your goal and place your items at either end of the bike. It might not be six feet exactly, but it's close enough and wHo fUcKInG cAReS.



Learning to Play

We're going to go through each of the basics. These are things you should practice on your own outside of the game. If you can do these, you can play in an actual game.

Shuffling

Shuffling is your bread and butter. Place your mallet head flat on the ground and give the ball a push. Boom! You did it.

Learning to shuffle the ball with more control, the first drill is to simply ride in circles. Start off turning toward your mallet arm, and do a variety of wide and tight circles.



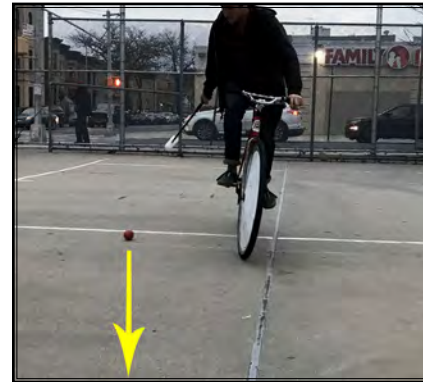
Then, move your mallet across the front of your bike, so the mallet is on your offhand side, and make circles in that direction.

It will be frustrating at first, but you'll surprise yourself with how quickly it can feel fluid. Of course, it is going to be more difficult in the game, but you're well on your way.

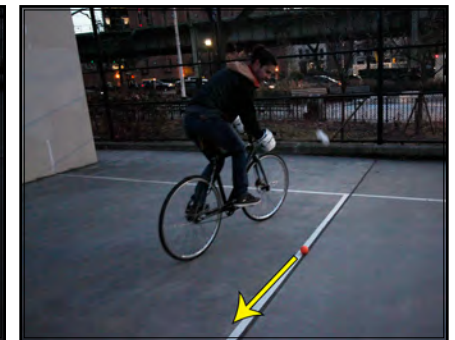
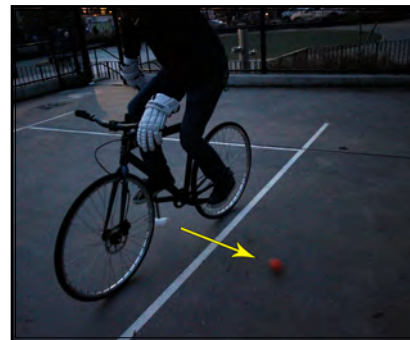
Shooting

The first four shots you should learn are great for passing, too. All the crazy trick shots in the world are going to be useless if you don't have a solid base in the fundamentals, which is why you see veterans practicing these shots consistently.

There are two forehand shots to start with. The first is your most basic, with you riding toward the goal, shooting straight ahead. The second is only a little modified, with the ball further out in front of you, shooting across toward your offhand side (great for passing).



The next shot is through your bottom bracket (ie. between your wheels), it can be a pass, shot, or a juke. Lastly, work on a backhand shot. These are fun to hit hard, but a real soft one can be the perfect drop pass.



Passing

Passes are the litmus test of a 'good' player. It's hard enough to shoot at the goal, now you're hitting a moving target. The shots above can all be used to pass the ball. The shuffle pass is also important, because sometimes the angle just isn't there to shoot the ball at your teammate, but they don't have the same oomph. Above all, passing depends on communication. Make sure you're letting your teammates know where you are or where you need them to be.



Goalie

This one is a whole lot different from the other skills we've discussed so far. As a newbie, you're probably going to spend a lot of time in goal. First off, practice the tripod.



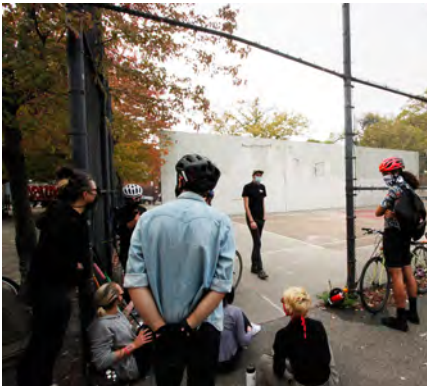
This is the mallet-lean that allows you to stop moving without dabbing. Playing goalie, you've got three big holes to worry about. The front door is the space between your front wheel and the goalpost. The backdoor is between your rear wheel and the corresponding goalpost. Finally, your bottom bracket. The front



and back doors are mainly blocked by your wheels, so practice getting them into a good position when you roll into goal.

There is a good amount of rolling forwards and backwards necessary. Rolling backward is hard at first, but it becomes natural in time, so don't worry too much. When you first get into goal (if you have the time) try circling around the back of the goal to get your rear wheel tight against the goalpost.

You will have to swat shots away from your front and back doors with your mallet, but your wheels are doing most of the work. Shots on your bottom bracket are all you. Most goalies use a shuffle motion to block shots, some use the 'freedom block' but that's an advanced technique you'll learn later on.



Gameplay

Since the game is three on three, most teams gravitate toward a three position system: striker, flex, goalie. It bears mentioning that even on teams that adhere tightly to this structure, you'll see players swap positions as the game dictates. The striker and flex player pass often, trying to open up shooting lanes. The flex plays less deep, ready to turn around and get back into a defensive position quickly.

When the team is playing defense, typically, one defender gets on the ball and the other covers the pass.

There is no need to adhere strictly to this or any set-up. You often see two strikers and a flex/goalie. Some of the most fun teams are three flex players, switching in and out of goal often, playing three up whenever the opportunity arises, just having a fun ass time!

In the end it all comes down to gamesense. A combination of intuition, communication, and overall team chemistry. Gamesense can't really be taught--but there is a surefire way to learn it... Play more Polo!



Equipment

As in any sport, the list of gear ‘n swag could run longer than a CVS receipt. Some players wear a full getup while others just have a bike and a mallet (No Pads. No Helmets. Just Balls). We’ll do our best to get you started without being overwhelmed.



Mallet

You’ll find that the mallet is indispensable if you want to get the ball in the goal. It’s made of four components: Head, Shaft, Hardware, Grip.



Mallet Head

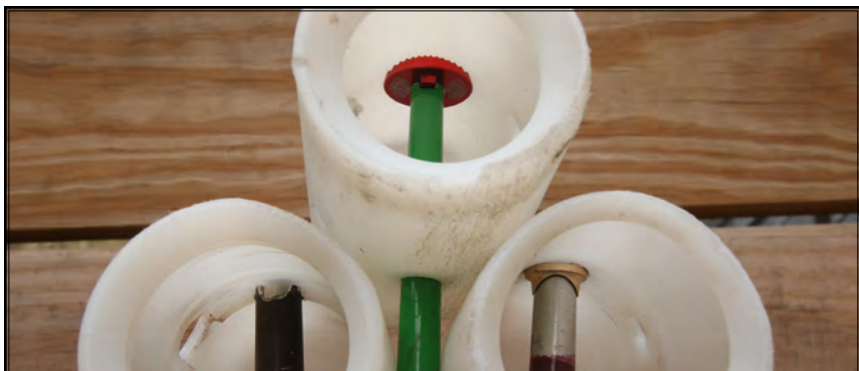


A mallet head is a plastic cylinder, capped on one end and an open ‘scoop’ on the other. A mallet that is open or capped on both ends can be perfectly playable, but the vast majority of modern mallet heads use one open and one capped end.

The open end is used for passing, juking, or even scooping the ball into the air while the capped end can offer a crisp shot. Experienced players can quickly rotate the mallet in their hand to hit either forehand or backhand shots with the capped end, but shots off the open end work just fine, so don’t worry about that while you’re learning. As long as your goals go off one of the two circular ends (ie. it isn’t a shuffle), you’re good.

Sometimes you’ll see a mallet with several holes drilled into it—a classic look. These holes shed weight, and since the mallet head is on the end of a long shaft, even small weight reduction can make a big difference.

Hardware



These are the bolts & fasteners that secure the mallet head to the shaft. If you're buying a certain company's shaft, you may need to purchase their hardware. Be sure you read your product descriptions to double check compatibility before spending your money.

Shaft



The currently available shafts from Heckler's Alley are great. You can choose among several options for lightness or durability. Most have accompanying hardware that will work with them. You can also make your own out of a ski pole, but we'll make a video describing this process for any of you cheap bastards out there.

Grip

There are a variety of options available to Bike Polo players. You can buy one online, use a golf grip, or wrap your own. Whatever you do, make sure you've put a solid endcap on the mallet shaft, even a penny can work in a pinch. Without one, the shaft will cut through the grip.



Bike

One's first Polo bike should be nothing more than whatever's on hand and a bit of love (elbow grease). All players agree, the best bike is whichever gets you on the court. That being said, we'll lay out the current standard of what goes into a 'good' Polo bike so you have something to shoot for.



Frame

A Bike Polo frame is a single-speed whose main feature is a small space between the front and rear wheels. This is known as the bottom bracket, and if you're playing goalie, it is 'the goal hole' that players are often shooting for. Those sexy curved seat tubes you'll see bring the rear wheel forward, shrinking that gap while improving maneuverability. You'll want horizontal drop-outs, and the appropriate brake-mounts for whatever you choose to put on there.



Brakes

Bike Polo has gone through many phases, but the sport seems to have settled on a preference (for now). Front disc brakes are preferred because they allow for endo-pivots and are very efficient overall. Though front brakes may be scary to a new player, the benefits become clear as you learn to stop mashing your brake. If you're new to front brakes, just keep



your butt down on the saddle and you'll be alright. Still, some players prefer a rear brake, so ultimately you have to go with your gut.

If you're throwing together a bike and don't want to buy a new wheel and fork to put a disc brake on your bike, that's fine too. The best option for rim brakes are V brakes because they are mechanically simple, and provide good stopping power. Rim brakes will require more attention, since keeping your wheels true (nice and round) affects your braking. It's a safe bet that a player at your local club will be happy to walk you through the process of truing as long as you're enthusiastic about polo and willing to learn.



Drivetrain

A tournament-legal Polo bike is going to be super simple. A single speed drivetrain with no exposed teeth anywhere, this includes flip-flop hubs. For a starter bike, the drivetrain or some other aspect may not be tournament legal, but it is far more important you get out and play pickup.

Bike Polo involves a lot of stop and go, plus fast breakaways, so a small gear ratio is appropriate. Some claim that the 'ideal' ratio is around 1.66. But what does that even mean? Your gear ratio is the number of teeth on your chainring (the front gear where you are pedaling) divided by the number of teeth on the cog (on your rear wheel). So if your bike has a 40 tooth chainring, you could use a 24 tooth cog to get a gear ratio of 1.67 ($40/24 = 1.67$). That being said, don't worry. You aren't going to get the gear ratio right on your first bike. Once you play and learn your own playstyle, you'll know whether you want a bigger or smaller gear ratio.



Wheels

Size

Polo players use both 26" and 700c wheels. Both are good options, and mostly it will come down to what you're familiar with. Not partial to either one? Just pick, there's no right answer.

Spokes and Wheel Covers

The spoke count is your next choice. For the most part, players opt for a heavier, more durable 48 spoke wheel. Others prefer fewer spokes for lightness over durability. Since we're operating under the assumption that you're a new player, we're going to skip wheel covers. You don't need them to get started and they have their own pros and cons that we just don't want to get into with newbies.



Handlebars



Most common are straight or raised bars. The grips you choose need to be comfortable first and foremost. Rubber grips are a perfectly fine option, but more popular are ergo grips. With only one hand on the bike, the added contact area provides greater control and comfort. If you choose to go with ergo grips, just make sure that they tighten down onto the handlebars so they don't rotate under pressure.



Helmet & Accessories

What shoes do I wear? How about gloves? Do I need a helmet? Here are answers to some of these oddball questions.

First off, get a helmet. You'll be required to wear one in a tournament, and it never hurt anybody to wear a darn helmet. Plenty of players don't wear one during pickup. Quite a few do! No polo player is going to judge you for wearing one, even in a casual game.



Some players add a facemask, more for high-sticking than a ball hitting you in the face. Players who use one say that it 'doesn't affect their

vision', but that seems hard to believe, right?



Gloves aren't necessary, but as soon as you get your hand whacked you're going to want a pair. Loads of folks go for lacrosse gloves with a thick padded outside and a thin palm-side, so you can still feel your mallet.



Shoes... What a big question. Take a look around. Many, if not most, high level players are clipped in, yet there are some very talented players going back to platform pedals.

The fact of the matter is you need to start with platforms. Once you're comfortable out there, don't be afraid to ask someone if you can play a game or two on their bike with clips to try it out.



Again for emphasis. If you're brand new to the sport, don't clip in.

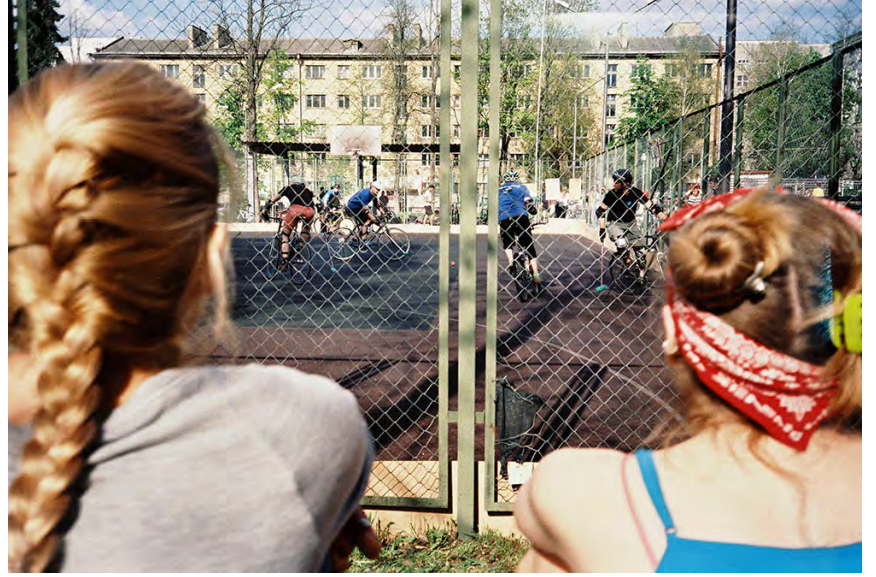
Even if you're coming from another cyclesport and think you're comfortable clipped in, you need to get accustomed to the game on platforms first, and before you ask... Are toe cages a good transition? No.

SPD (Cheapest/ Classic)



Time ATAC (Best)





Sundries

Gatekeeping

You'll see it in every sport, hobby, whatever. Looking down on newbies or people who don't take Bike Polo seriously is uncool. Bike Polo isn't a mainstream sport, so we should take every opportunity to grow the community. There's nothing wrong with being a normie; we all started out that way. Luckily, it's pretty uncommon in our sport, but any amount is too damn much. If someone at your club is gatekeeping, remind them about Rule Number 1.

Repairs

We thought about giving you a rundown on quick fixes you should know how to do. After flip-flopping on the idea, we've decided to leave it out, since it's better for you to learn hands on or with Youtube University. Nobody will be judgy if you don't know how to fix a flat or anything simple as long as you're willing to learn.



Loaners



As we've discussed, your first polo bike is going to be temporary. You can make adjustments and incremental improvements as much as you want, but nothing is going to compare to a bike built specifically for the sport. Eventually, you're going to invest in one, but that's no reason to neglect your old bike! Having a loaner bike can open the door for someone to get acquainted with Polo.

The same thing goes for mallets. Newcomers may or may not have a bike they can use, but you can bet your ass that they won't have a mallet laying around the garage. Having a few extra mallets around for newbies is always a good idea. Hey, maybe you can even gift it to a budding new player as their very first mallet. This is the stuff we live for as Polo players, we can all recall being given an old mallet or wheel cover, symbolically initiating us as part of the club.

The Bike Polo community is something we are tremendously proud of. Without the benefit of loaner bikes and mallets from veterans, plenty of us would never have started in the first place.

Tournaments



Let's start by saying how sincerely proud we are of anybody gearing up for their first tournament. Trust your comrades, they'll help you find a good tournament, get signed up, make travel arrangements etc. If you're especially ambitious and don't have any veterans to show you the way, here's what you need: [BikePoloCalendar.com](#). If it isn't on the calendar, ask around on facebook. Before you leave, make sure your bike is ready for play. The big boxes to check are: no exposed teeth (flip-flop hubs, etc.), a rotor guard (if you use a disc brake), and bar-ends.

Tournaments are what we get most excited about. Your game improves just by breathing the air at a tourney, and many are annual events so you'll see the same friends year after year. More than anything, tournaments are where you'll see that Bike Polo—as a *real* sport—is here to stay.



Contributions

Through the ups and downs in life, the Bike Polo family has always been there for us, so the opportunity to help bring Polo to more people is its own reward. We hope you can help us share the love... Love for the sport, love for the community we share it with, and love for the future players who have yet to pick up a mallet for the first time!

Making this guide has been a group effort and there are so many people we'd like to thank; friends that helped us create content, strangers who said 'sure, you can use my photos,' and everyone who didn't know how to help but offered a few words of encouragement. If you are any one of these people, or if you spread the good word of Bike Polo in your own way... THANK YOU!

Contributors

Daniel Riley
Eric Simpson
Mike Maverick
Josh Green
Alen Kalta
Shelley Smith
Kaleb Christian
Sean Bendon
Maddie Baugh
Diego Alexander Ayala
Wheelie Will
Brian Riley

Kyle Fakhoury
San Diego Bike Polo
NYC Bike Polo
Montreal Bike Polo
Boston Bike Polo
@tytenko
@bikepolokharkiv
@aucklandbikepolo
@glasgow_bike_polo
Cordoba Bici Polo
PedalJunkies
And so many more.

Now that you're ready to get on the court...

**Looking for gear?
Hecklersalley.com**



**Looking for more legit info?
Nahardcourt.com**



**Want to see what we've got going on?
RileyPolo.com**



