

John Gobin – A Real Team Player

By Lauren R. Giannini

John Gobin was 14 when polo inspired him with impassioned focus to excel, setting the tone for the rest of his life. He became a professional polo player, contributing to historical USA and international victories. He achieved the distinction of a 7-goal rating (10 is the highest). In 2007 he became general manager of Great Meadow Polo in The Plains, Virginia. His assets include diehard work ethics, enthusiasm, professionalism, sportsmanship and a lifelong love for horses and the game.

“John has taken the best of Twilight Polo and made it better,” said Rob Banner, president of the Great Meadow Foundation. “He brought solid family values and sporting values to the job and has made the game far more professional and far safer. Great Meadow Twilight Polo [Saturday evenings, May through September] is a star event on the US Polo Association calendar.”

If you ask John, polo isn't just a job: it's a way of life. Yet, it wasn't the easiest transition when he went from being a full-time professional player to promoting and growing the game at Great Meadow. He just did what he has always done: he gives polo everything he has, and then some. He plays as often as possible, but his rating slipped to four, not bad when you consider how busy he stays during the Great Meadow Polo season.

“As a player you're trying to win tournaments, get your handicap as high as it can go, trying to get the best horses possible,” he explained. “As a manager, you're selling polo, attracting people to get involved as spectators and as student players. When you're a pro, it's all about you. As manager, you're responsible for seeing that the sport grows, that people enjoy polo and want to learn the sport so that Great Meadow Polo becomes part of the community.”

John's passion for polo dates back to when he was a working class kid wanting pocket money. He had never ridden, but he went to a barn near where his family lived and was hired to muck stalls. “A couple weeks after I started, they needed a player for the kids' team and invited me to start playing with the local kids



Somebunny is funny! John scored the winning goal during an Easter Sunday tournament in Palm Beach.

Photo by Nate Dailey



John, the manager of Great Meadow Polo, with Whitney Ross, the Great Meadow Polo School manager.

Photo by Lauren R. Giannini

who stabled their horses there. That's when I started riding,” he recalled. “I caught on pretty quick. Within six months to a year, I was in the arena. I'd be in deep trouble if I didn't find polo and the horses.”

At 17 John went to Argentina for two years to work on a polo farm where he trained green horses, worked cows, whatever they needed doing. That's where he started playing grass polo. After his return he played as much as possible and was a member of the Budweiser team that won the World Cup, which launched his professional playing career. In 1992, at only 23, John not only played on the U.S. team that defeated England for the prestigious Westchester Cup, he scored the winning goal in double-overtime.

“That was a serious high point in my career – I think I was rated four goals,” he said. “I won Most Valuable Young Player. A lot of the kids who were getting to play and winning were all wealthy kids so I was quite honored to go in there and do what I did.”

Mentors included Jimmy Bachman, Ricky Bostwick, Adam Lindeman, Bill Ylvisaker and Chris Knowles. “Chris from Massachusetts was a huge influence. He was my first coach and got me started,” John said. “Chris taught me everything: how to ride, how to play, how to care for the horses. He emphasized that the horses always come first, that without good horses, you'll never be a good player. He was an amazing horseman.”