



Eduardo in action during the Argentine Open in December

While polo remains a long-established family tradition in Argentina, the Heguys continue to dominate the national polo landscape.

Two days after winning his third Argentine Open, Eduardo Heguy – better known as Ruso – was busy at his family's Los Indios club, on the outskirts of Buenos Aires. In his second year as the club's president, Ruso was supervising the annual Potrillo tournament, which was

established in 1972.

Potrillo means 'foal' in Spanish, and is the leading junior tournament for youngsters aged between nine to eleven and twelve to fourteen. All matches are played on the same day, and this year thirty-two teams from around the world participated. This made Los Indios the scene of youngsters having fun and their proud parents looking on, with juniors from the leading polo families.

The Chapaleufú junior team had a

young Llorente as number two, while Back featured a Ruso Jr, wearing a blue beard drawn by a marker pen. Ruso, himself umpired the final.

PQ It looks like the Argentine family tradition in polo has come to stay.

EH Yes, it's an established tradition which will continue to go on in the future. Yet, polo has changed a lot in Argentina. It's more popular than ever,

A FAMILY AFFAIR

Eduardo Heguy talks to PQinternational about his love of the game – and a longstanding family connection



with TV, radio and newspapers covering the matches.

PQ Following the tradition, you had an early start – earlier than most children, I am told.

EH I was on a horse before I could walk, with my father, and then when I was older, I would practise with the mallet on foot. I grew up at the farm and, being around the horses, polo was always a nat-

At the Abierto prizegiving, with a young admirer



PQ ARCHIVES

A young Eduardo (second from left) with his parents and brothers

ural thing to do. Part of it is talent, but you also have to work really hard, in order to improve and to get the best of it. You have to learn all the time.

PQ To what extent did your father influence you and your brothers?

EH He influenced us a lot. He taught us how to ride and how to handle the horses. He has been an inspiration and a good example. He was not a professional, but he always behaved like one – he would go to bed early, not drink and lead a healthy lifestyle.

PQ How important was the Potrillo to you?

EH As a child I dreamed of this tournament all year long. It was my first official tournament when I was nine, and then I won when I was twelve and thirteen. The year after I played in college and could not attend.

It is the most important junior tournament in the world, and the first tournament that everyone wants to win. Today, there are kids from Uruguay,

Malaysia, Brazil – from all around the world. The level and the skill of the children are impressive. They will show up in many other opens. They are the future of Argentine polo and many will play professionally.

PQ Such as you and your two brothers, who have just won your third Abierto, even if the start was a bit shaky.

EH We had a slow start, and we were one goal down in the first chukka. But we never lost control. We knew that the key of the game was to stop Cambiaso. He was feeling the pressure of Nachi and myself – we were always behind him, and that pressure probably made him miss the penalties.

Also, we played very well as a team. We were really focused and sure about the way that we always play.

PQ So a slow start does not make you lose faith?

EH No, because we've been playing together for three years, and we had a great season, where we'd won everything.

So we knew in the beginning that we would catch them later.

PQ You are not just the captain of the team, but also your brothers' leader.

EH Well, I'm the eldest and the most experienced one, because I've played longer, so I'm like the chief to them. But we also have our coach, Daniel Gonzalez. I'm the coach inside.

PQ And happy with the results for this year?

EH Yes, I'm really happy with the whole season. The Abierto was the end of a great season, where we never lost a single match. We haven't finished celebrating yet. First we'll celebrate here and then we are having another party at La Pampa, with all the grooms and the *gauchos*.

PQ What about rivalry, does it exist between the families?

EH Only on the field, not really outside. Everybody wants to win. We are professionals and a tournament like the

Abierto is the dream of all players in the world. A lot of sacrifices are involved, and you have to work really hard to get to this level. That's why I understand why everyone is like this. And I enjoy it, because you have more pressure and it is more fun. The two weeks of the Abierto were the weeks that I enjoyed the most of the year.

PQ So pressure rather motivates you?

EH Yes, I enjoy it. It's also nice to see how people are getting more involved, as in football. Polo is more fun like this. I prefer it when the crowds shout, scream and whistle than to play in front of a quiet crowd. It makes us play better, too.

PQ The audience were shouting 'Ruso, Ruso' – does it in fact mean Russian?

EH Yes, when I was a kid, I had blond hair and I looked like a Russian, so all the grooms started calling me Ruso. It used to bother me then, but it remained my nickname.

PQ You also had a busy season abroad.

EH Yes, we played six months abroad and the rest here, from September to December. Now the horses are tired and in need of a vacation, just like us.

We put all our energies into the Abierto, and focused on it all year long. Soon I am going to Intendente Alvear in the La Pampa region, which is where I always try to go when I don't play. Our whole family lives around that area, where we have farms and breed horses. This is also where we have the Chapaleufú clubhouse, and from where we took our team name, representing Los Indios here and Chapaleufú in La Pampa.



MIKE ROBERTS

The 2000 Abierto final – 'we won against the best team right now'

Chapaleufú is an Indian name and means something like 'wild lagoon'.

PQ How many horses do you have in La Pampa?

EH I have around three hundred horses, some young, some for breeding, and others that are just here. Some people collect cars or stamps, and I collect horses. Horses are a family passion.

We play polo because we love horses, we love breeding, and spending time with the animals. We try to keep them, but we also have to sell some to finance the whole organisation. Also, we cannot end up with a thousand horses each.

PQ The 1996 final is widely considered a polo landmark, with two Heguy teams involved. What are your memories from

this match?

EH It was a very special match, since it was the first time that we won the Open. We had been playing for eleven years and made it to the final several times, the first time in 1985. The 1996 final was our sixth final, so it was very special.

PQ Was it your best match ever?

EH We have played many great matches and it was definitely one of them. This year's Abierto was a great one too, because we won against the best team right now – La Dolfina.

PQ And your best goal?

EH Probably a penalty shot with a wide angle.



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No chance of confusion – names and Roman numerals for Eduardo and his Abierto team mates

PQ It must be difficult to keep a good balance between breeding, training and playing abroad. You lost the 1997 Abierto because you had not trained enough.

EH Exactly. At this level it is like a Formula One team or a football team. It's tough and competitive. It is nice to win the tournaments, because they mean a lot, but in 1997 we lost because we were not focused.

We had won it the year before, and we were a little bit relaxed, and also we had had a difficult semi-final against my cousins. Their father was very ill and it was very hard to have to play against them.

PQ So do you basically enjoy playing abroad, or does it interfere with your routine?

EH I love playing outside Argentina, because it gives me new ideas. All around the world it is competitive and the good thing about this is that you never finish learning about polo and about horses, from the many players and the many grooms that you meet.

The moment that you think that

you know everything, it is time to stop. When you stop watching people and learning from others, it's over.

PQ What are your plans for this year?

EH In February I was due to play in Palm Beach, and after that I will probably go to England – I'm very fond of playing there.

PQ What do you think of Kenney Jones's Hurtwood Park club – and what effect do you think it will have on the sport?

EH It is very nice and good for polo in England. It will probably make the game more popular. It's what we need in polo – that people won't think that it's just for an elite – that they get more involved, by knowing the players, and trying to play themselves. When the media supports it, the sport will become more popular.

PQ Do you have any special advice for young players?

EH The most important thing is not to copy. Don't try to play like someone such as Adolfo Cambiasso or Bautista Heguy. They play as they do, because they are

unique. It's like Maradona or Pele – they do things easier because they are at that particular level.

So don't try to copy them, because they are the only ones who can do it. Also, try to enjoy playing – polo is just a game and the most important thing is not winning but enjoying it.

PQ Your equestrian advice?

EH Treat your horses well. Get to know them well, and know when the horse is tired and how to get the best from each horse. They are beautiful animals, and to me they are really special.

I love to be around my horses and being outside in these green surroundings and in the open air. I have a great job, and I thank God, because I know how lucky I am to be able to do something that I love.

I also love spending time with the kids or teaching the players. I'll be playing professionally for about ten years more, I hope, and after that I'll be watching the game, and probably go on breeding horses at the farm.

I'll play as long as people invite me, and as long as I enjoy the game. CA