

Written by Written by Melissa Larsen Photographed by: Ellen Barnes

Thursday, 04 October 2012 11:10 - Last Updated Thursday, 04 October 2012 11:46

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At the age of 14, polo player **Nic Roldan** enjoyed top honors at the 1998 U.S. Open Polo Championship, the first of many hard-earned wins. Now, nearly 15 years later, the Buenos Aires-born athlete and model has become one of the sport's most decorated stars, having taken the polo field in five continents. During a visit to Scottsdale in September, *AFM* chatted with Roldan about the emerging popularity of polo and what we can expect next from this handsome horseman. (This month, fans can catch him at the Scottsdale Polo Championships: Horses+Horsepower Oct. 20 at WestWorld.)



**AFM:** *Your father was also a player. Is this how your interest in polo came about?*

**NR:** I am the third-generation polo player. My father used to be a professional polo player; he is retired now. And his father was a polo player—not professional—but played. I grew up on a huge polo farm, and I've been riding before I could probably walk. Polo and horses and the whole lifestyle have been with the family for a really long time.

**AFM:** *Was it expected of you to be a polo player?*

**NR:** Yes and no. My parents never put pressure on me to play polo. I sort of fell into it. I loved sports; sports have always been my passion. I probably could have gone professional in one or two other sports. But I fell in love with polo.

**AFM:** *What other sports did you play?*

**NR:** I played a lot of ice hockey. Honestly, sports are all I ever did when I was a kid. Soccer, football, baseball, golf, tennis. I do a lot of cycling and running. Ice hockey—I would have loved to have taken it [to a professional level] or maybe had the potential to do that. Or golf or tennis.

**AFM:** *What is training like for a polo athlete?*

**NR:** I am a very active person. I love sports. Depending on the game schedules—in polo, you usually have one or two games per week, give or take—we usually practice with the team one to two times per week. That is polo-wise. We have a personal trainer. I try to train every day, depending on the polo schedule, at least three or four times a week. It is pretty intense training. To play polo at that level, you have to be very fit. There is a lot of core training, a lot of stretching. Our training is similar to that of a tennis player. We are very lean and fit. Not too bulky like a lot of other American sports.

**AFM:** *You achieved your first major win at 14. What was it like getting a taste of success so young?*

**NR:** I had to grow up pretty quick. Everything happened really fast. It was an amazing experience. I was still too young to realize what I had going on. Having won at the U.S. Open, which is the most prestigious tournament in the United States, it was an amazing accomplishment. That kick-started my career and made me realize that maybe polo is what I should be doing.

**AFM:** *What advice would you give your teenage self?*

**NR:** I think the most important thing is that you stay focused, stay driven and follow your dreams. If there is something you really love, work for it. Nothing comes easy and nothing happens overnight. It is all about putting in work and dedication. Stay true to yourself, and stay true to your family. Be humble.

**AFM:** *What has been the highlight of your career?*

**NR:** Winning the U.S. Open was one of my biggest accolades. I have won mostly every tournament in the United States, which has been pretty amazing. Being an ambassador to the sport has been a huge honor and a lot of work, but it has been nice to see all the success. Also, seeing polo reach out to the masses and getting the exposure that we need to get.

**AFM:** *What do you love most about what you do?*

**NR:** My first and foremost passion is horses. I love the horses and any polo player will tell you the same thing. They do it because they love horses. We are around them 24 hours a day and seven days a week. They are like our kids. I am an adrenaline junkie; I love speed and intensity and aggression. Being able to travel around the world, seeing the most beautiful places and meeting the most amazing people. I have been doing it since I was 14. I have seen and experienced everything. I think of polo as a passport to the world. It is truly an amazing sport.

**AFM:** *You are also a model. In what ways does that job fulfill you?*

**NR:** Polo is growing, and it is attracting television, it is attracting corporate sponsorship, it is getting a lot of attention. As a part of being a top athlete in any sport, it comes with the job. The modeling, the TV commercials, the endorsement deals. I wouldn't consider myself a model; it is part of my job as an athlete. And I enjoy doing it.

**AFM:** *What do you think the future of the sport holds?*

**NR:** My goal is to hopefully [turn] polo into a more mainstream sport. I'd love to see it on ESPN and other big sports channels. I think it is an amazing sport and want to educate the people about it. A lot of people don't know about it. People think of it more as a lifestyle instead of a sport; I think they are misinterpreting it. Polo has to be one of the most intense sports there is and definitely one of the most dangerous. It is in the top two with Formula One racing. We literally put ourselves on the line every second of the game. It is definitely a barbaric sport. Any new spectator that I have spoken with who has seen it for the first time firsthand has fallen in love with it. I think the sport has a lot of potential to grow to the masses.

**AFM:** *Personally, what are your future goals?*

**NR:** I have always dreamed of beating 10 goals, which is like the ultimate handicap in polo. I am getting there, I am close. That is one of my dreams. Probably winning the U.S. Open [again], winning the Argentine Open and educating the people about the sport. The sport has always been my passion, and I want to see people enjoy it as well on television. I am going to do my best and work my butt off to get it there.

### QUICK FIRE

**Favorite Book:** The Richard Branson biography.

**Favorite Movie:** "Blood Diamond."

**Favorite Way to Relax:** Hang out on the beach or play golf.

**Favorite Food:** I am a huge foodie, but I love pizza.

## Horsing Around: Scottsdale Polo Championships Horses+Horsepower

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### Save the Date

**Nic Roldan and Tommy Biddle Jr. are just two of the world-famous athletes who are set to take the field at the second-annual Scottsdale Polo Championships: Horses+Horsepower. Fans are invited to WestWorld of Scottsdale Oct. 20 to witness three heart-racing polo matches, a sneak preview of Barrett-Jackson, VIP experiences, fun for the entire family and much more. A portion of proceeds go to Work to Ride and Scottsdale Healthcare's Neighborhood Outreach Access to Health program. Tickets are available for purchase at [www.thepoloparty.com](http://www.thepoloparty.com).**