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## HOCKEY ON HORSEBACK

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BY BECKY ANTIOCO / PHOTOS BY CLAUDIA JOHNSTONE

# HOCKEY ON HORSEBACK

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**When the players** and mounts (ponies) hit the field for The Bentley Scottsdale Polo Championships: Presented by Talking Stick Resort, attendees may recognize one of the riders from a different Valley sporting event. Former Arizona Coyotes captain Shane Doan, the franchise's all-time leading scorer, will turn in his hockey stick for a mallet and try his hand at polo.

Doan was introduced to the Scottsdale Polo Party last year when he was honored with the first drop – similar to baseball's first pitch – to start the match. But while he may be new to the game of polo, Doan is no stranger to horses. He grew up in Halkirk, Alberta, at Circle Square Ranch, a Christian youth camp that his father opened when Doan was 6 months old. His dad, Bernie, played hockey professionally for a brief time for the 1971-72 season, but cowboying was the real





family sport. Additionally, Doan's grandfather and uncles are in the Canadian Pro Rodeo Hall of Fame.

Polo is often called "hockey on horseback," and Doan recalls playing a version of the game with broom sticks and a ball in the back pasture of the ranch back at home. Then, through the Polo Club, Doan had the opportunity to get involved with the Bentley Scottsdale Polo Championships.

"I went to drop the ball last year; I was just hanging out with the group, and they were just incredible. They said, 'Hey you should try this and maybe you would enjoy it,'" Doan says. "I have about 100 horses back in Canada that we'd ride and herd, and I'd always try to find fun things to do with that, so I look forward to giving this a try."

Although he's a longtime equestrian, Doan has spent the past few months training with Andres Camacho, Diego Florez and Natalie Camacho of the Arizona Polo Club, learning how to bring his hockey and horsemanship skills together for the upcoming polo match.

"I've been riding horses my entire life. I have always been fascinated by the fast paced, action packed game of polo," he says. "Now that I'm retired I feel like it's a good time in my life to try the sport and see if I can put some of my hockey skills to good use. I don't know how good I'm going to be but I'm excited to give it try and make my polo playing debut here at the Scottsdale Polo Party."

## FROM SNOW TO THE SONORAN DESERT

Doan started playing organized hockey at the age of 7, and joined the Winnipeg Jets in 1995. The following year, the franchise relocated to Arizona and became the Arizona Coyotes. Doan moved to the desert, bringing some of his horses with him. He went on to spend 21 seasons with the Coyotes, becoming the franchise's all-time leading scorer.

Arizona had some history with ice hockey – the Phoenix Roadrunners minor league IHL team played at Veterans Memorial Coliseum throughout the 1990s – but the Winnipeg Jets franchise's move to Arizona made Phoenix one of a handful of cities to have sports teams competing in all four major leagues. Doan recalls what it felt like to be part of the team that brought NHL hockey to the desert.

"The Roadrunners were here, so it was

nice having them start that tradition, but to be the first NHL team here was really special. It's been really fun to watch the sport grow here and take root. Now we have someone like Auston Matthews [of the Toronto Maple Leafs] – who was raised here – as the league MVP."

Doan retired from the Coyotes in 2017, as the longest-serving captain in the NHL. He rejoined the team in 2021 as the chief hockey development officer. Recently, the city of Tempe voted to move forward on an arena development project, which would keep the Coyotes in the desert for the foreseeable future, and potentially bring an NHL All-Star Game and an NHL draft to the

Valley. In addition to the arena, the proposed entertainment district would house hotels, apartments, retail stores and a sportsbook.

"I've thought all along that we can be one of the staple franchises in the league. Obviously, the location is important. I think it would be a huge asset to be central in the Valley," he says.

## HOME OUT WEST

Doan's longevity with the Coyotes was somewhat of a rarity in today's sports world. But he and his wife, Andrea, have embraced the Valley as their home, raising four children in Scottsdale. When he reached free agency in 2012, several teams were interested in





signing the Coyotes captain. Ultimately, his decision to stay in Arizona came down to family: Doan didn't want to uproot his children to move to a new city.

"When I first got here, I had no idea it was this Western of a town," he says. "As I got to know the city more, to see the outdoors and the way that so much happens here, taking advantage of the amazing weather, going riding or doing different things outside, I thought it was pretty special. The Valley, and Phoenix, and the whole of Arizona for the most part is kind of the Wild West. And I love that."

And though he still has a home in Canada – with horses, of course – a decade later, the Doans still call Arizona home. They have a son and a daughter at Arizona State University; his son, Josh, a sophomore, was drafted by the Coyotes in the second round of the 2022 NHL draft. As the 37th pick, he became ASU's highest-ever draft pick.

But after a long hockey career full of successes – Doan has represented Team Canada numerous times in international

play, has won five medals (two gold, three silver) at the World Championships, helped Canada win the World Cup championship in 2004 and was a member of Canada's 2006 Winter Olympic team – the father of four is looking forward to slowing down a bit in the next chapter of his life.

"I get to watch hockey now. That's probably the best part. Following my kids wherever they go is what I'm looking forward to the most," he says. "This is home for me, my kids and my wife."

### THE POLO PARTY

Doan will be one of several new players and elements at this year's Scottsdale Polo Championships. Among the polo teams confirmed to play in 2022 are the United Kingdoms' Royal County of Berkshire Polo Club and Wales Polo Team, Aspen Valley Polo Club, USA Women's Team, Switzerland, The El Paso-Naranja Polo Club and Arizona Polo Club. Top U.S. polo star Nic Roldan will return to play alongside the first family of American polo Marc and Melissa Ganzi, who are the event's

defending champions and own the prestigious Aspen Valley Polo Club.

The event will consist of four action-packed polo matches, a full day of signature events, and new VIP experiences. Fieldside lounges and party tents, pet fashion shows, a preview of the 2023 Barrett-Jackson Scottsdale Auction, and a halftime performance by the Scottsdale Arabian Horse Show make this a polo event unlike any other – after all, it's called "The Polo Party" for a reason.

"I don't know if people really understand how special and how incredible [the event] is," Doan says. "The environment is amazing, the people-watching is phenomenal, and the whole event is an experience. I'm not a real cultural kind of guy, but it feels like you're part of a culture that's really unique and special."

The event will take place Nov. 5, at 10 a.m. at WestWorld of Scottsdale. Tickets start at \$45 for general admission, which also includes access to lounges and DJ-infused party tents. Learn more information at [www.thepoloparty.com](http://www.thepoloparty.com).