

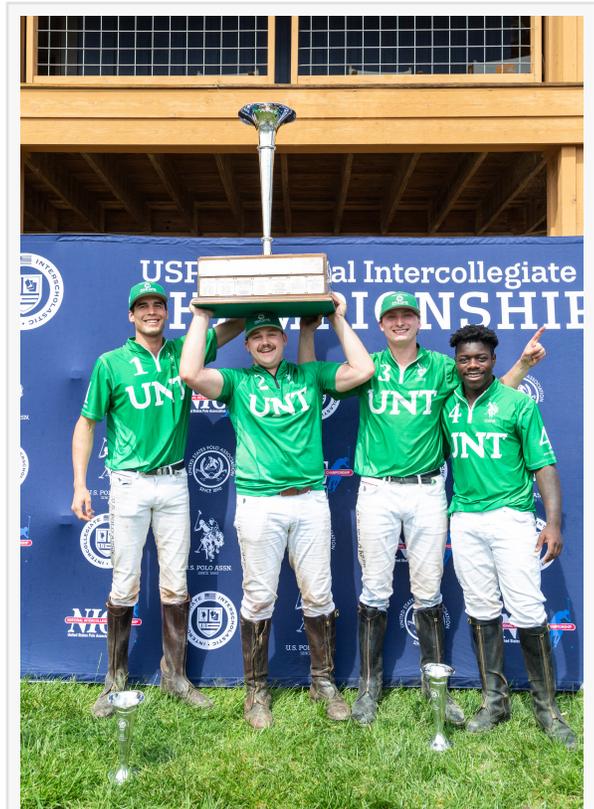
“Mean Green” UNT Men’s Arena Polo Team Wins National Intercollegiate Championship Two Years Running

University of North Texas Men’s Arena Polo Team wins National Intercollegiate Championship over Southern Methodist University.

CHARLOTTESVILLE, VIRGINIA, UNITED STATES, May 22, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- From Tuesday, April 9 to Sunday, April 14, six intercollegiate teams representing top varsity talent across the country assembled at Virginia Polo Inc. in Charlottesville, Virginia, to battle for the Division I Men’s [National Intercollegiate Championship](#). In the final match of the 2023-2024 Intercollegiate/Interscholastic (I/I) season, a Texas showdown pitted defending champions University of North Texas (Niklaus Felhaber, John Dencker, Vance Miller III, Mosiah Gravesande) against Southern Methodist University (Landen Eckbo Daniels, Clark Mayer, Shane Metternick, August Schneekloth). Taking charge early on, [UNT](#) clinched a solid 17-8 win to secure the John R. Townsend Trophy for a second consecutive year.

[Arena polo](#) is a ball and mallet sport played via horseback. Arena polo is played in an enclosed arena with two goal mouths set into either end of the 300 by 150-foot dirt arena. The game is played with teams of three players each mounted on horseback. All players are equipped with bamboo cane mallets and attempt to move the ball into their respective goals to rack up points.

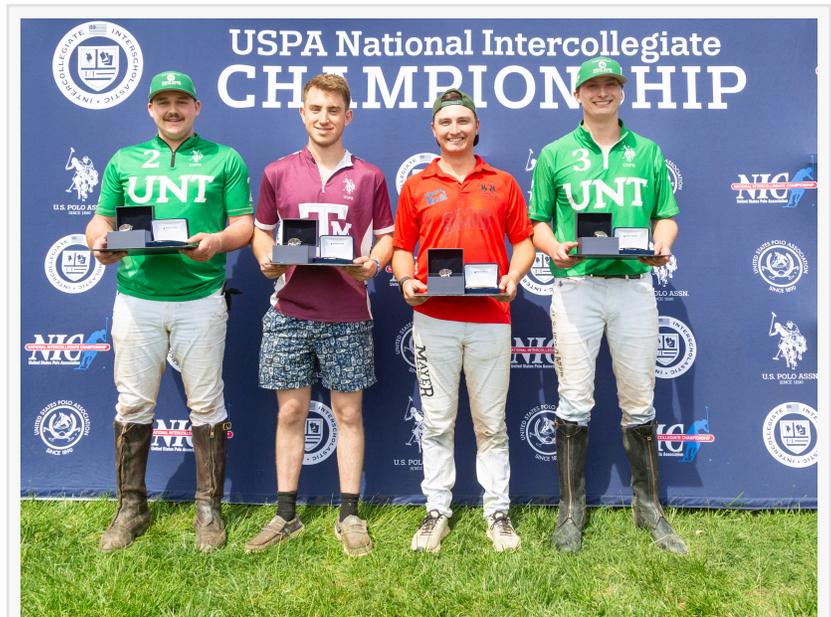
Periods of play last for 7.5 minutes and are known as “chukkers” or “chukkas”. At the end of a game, the team that has the highest number of goals wins. Teams must abide by all rules to ensure the safety of players and horses. Many players start off in arena polo during college and compete for a shot at the national title throughout their years of study. Over 30 colleges and



2024 Division I Men's National Intercollegiate Championship winner_ University of North Texas - Niklaus Felhaber, John Dencker, Vance Miller III, Mosiah Gravesande. ©Oana Moore

universities coast-to-coast host arena polo clubs for students of all experience levels. Though many clubs are co-ed, varsity men's and women's teams compete annually for a shot at their own national titles.

Receiving a bye into the semifinals as the competition's number one seed, UNT met rivals Texas A&M University (Zak Coleman, Will Mudra, Aiden Meeker, Hudson Hurtig, Jose Solis Andres). Down by two at the start of the fifth chukker, TAMU's Mudra and Coleman sunk back-to-back two pointers to secure the lead. Finishing strong, all three UNT starters found the goal outscoring their opponents 4-1 for a final 17-15 score.



2024 Division I Men's National Intercollegiate Championship All-Stars Award Winners: John Dencker (UNT), Zak Coleman (TAMU), Clark Mayer (SMU), Vance Miller III (UNT). ©Oana Moore

Cruising through the quarterfinals against Grossmont College (Christian Munteanu, Ethan Bankhead, Garrett Bankhead), SMU forged ahead versus the University of Kentucky (Rehan Kumble, Joseph Schwartz, Alejandro Puyan Boggio) in the semifinals. A back-and-forth affair, SMU was able to edge a one goal lead headed into the break. Widening the gap and outscoring Kentucky by one in the fourth, SMU held onto a two-goal lead for the remainder of the contest to earn a spot in the final 14-12.

“

I got a burst of happiness. I don't know, it's just surreal. Obviously, the game wasn't over, but we had a big lead, momentum and we were playing lights out—we weren't going to be stopped.”

Vance Miller III, UNT Polo Team

When asked about meeting SMU in the final, Miller responded, “Well we played SMU a lot and they're much different team than A&M, similar, but different. We just had to keep the same mentality, bring high energy but stay calm and relaxed, and just use the wall.” Dencker strategized for the final, “They are very good at what they do, they're more of a finesse team and we know that we are definitely more physical, so we kind of use that to our

advantage to wear them down over time.”

Aside from an opening Penalty 1 automatic goal awarded to SMU, the teams matched goals in the first. UNT's offense surged in the second, all three players contributing to the scoreboard, outscoring their opponents 5-1 to take the lead. Entering the third with a 7-4 advantage, UNT continued to keep SMU's efforts at bay, each team adding a solitary goal to maintain the gap 8-5

at halftime.

Speaking to UNT's adjustments and mentality though out the game Felhaber remarked, "They are a very talented group of young men and very familiar with each other. If you give them an inch they'll take a mile. We never underestimate them because like we always say, 'the best polo comes from Texas.'"

After the break, UNT continued their forward momentum outpacing their rivals each chukker, allowing only three SMU goals in the second half. Ahead by six moving into the final period, UNT players cemented their win with a hat trick. In the final moments, Gravesande substituted for Felhaber to cement the victory 17-8. "I was tapping coach on the back of the shoulder," Gravesande said. "I'm like 30 seconds is not worth it, but I went in, still got to show them what I'm about." Miller congratulated his teammate, "Thankfully, coach called a timeout and put Mo in. He won one throw in, got an assist and saved a goal. I mean, I don't know how you can get that many stats in 40 seconds!"

Thrilled with the win Miller beamed, "There was a moment in the fifth chukker, I think Niklaus scored and when I looked at the scoreboard, I got a burst of happiness. I don't know, it's just surreal. Obviously, the game wasn't over, but we had a big lead, momentum and we were playing lights out—we weren't going to be stopped."

As seniors, the victory held special significance for Miller and Dencker, who are set to graduate this year. "This back-to-back win means a lot. A lot of people counted us out and it feels good to prove them all wrong," said Dencker. "We had two seniors leave last year and everyone was like 'oh it's gonna be a new team' and everyone thought, even until this point, when we were undefeated the entire year, people were still counting us out—but I thrive on that!" he continued.



SMU's Shane Metternick works the ball with UNT's John Dencker at his hip. ©Oana Moore



Semifinal action between UNT's Niklaus Felhaber and TAMU's Aiden Meeker at Goal Mouth

Dencker also touched on his I/I experience, "It's pretty bittersweet because we won the championship but now, I'm done. I've been playing I/I since I was 11 years old—long time." When asked about the best part of I/I Dencker said, "The people, I mean, obviously winning is fun and playing is fun, but everyone here we've known each other for years from high school to college."



SMU Clark Mayer and UNT Niklaus Felhaber. ©Oana Moore

All-Stars were awarded to John Dencker (UNT), Vance Miller III (UNT), Clark Mayer (SMU) and Zak Coleman (TAMU). The Upchurch Memorial

Sportsmanship Award was presented to John Dencker for his continued positive attitude, fairness and support for his peers on and off the field. Demonstrating consistent riding ability and equine care throughout the tournament, Clark Mayer received the David Wenning Memorial Horsemanship Award.

Best Playing Pony was presented to Payasa, owned by Prestonwood Polo Club, with Prestonwood Polo Club also earning Best Playing String honors. "I've played Payasa my whole life," said Miller III, "She's so special to me. She isn't the fastest she's not gonna go catch somebody on a run, but that doesn't matter she will wipe everyone off the field. No one can touch you when you have the ball and honestly there's just something about her, you just feel like a superhero when you're on her, you feel unstoppable. I'm glad I got to start on her this game and in the semifinals, that gave me a big boost of confidence to start on her."

Only a freshman, Gravesande already has his sights set on upholding the legacy, "To be honest I'm ready for next year and I'm coming 10 times harder because I really have something to prove!"

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