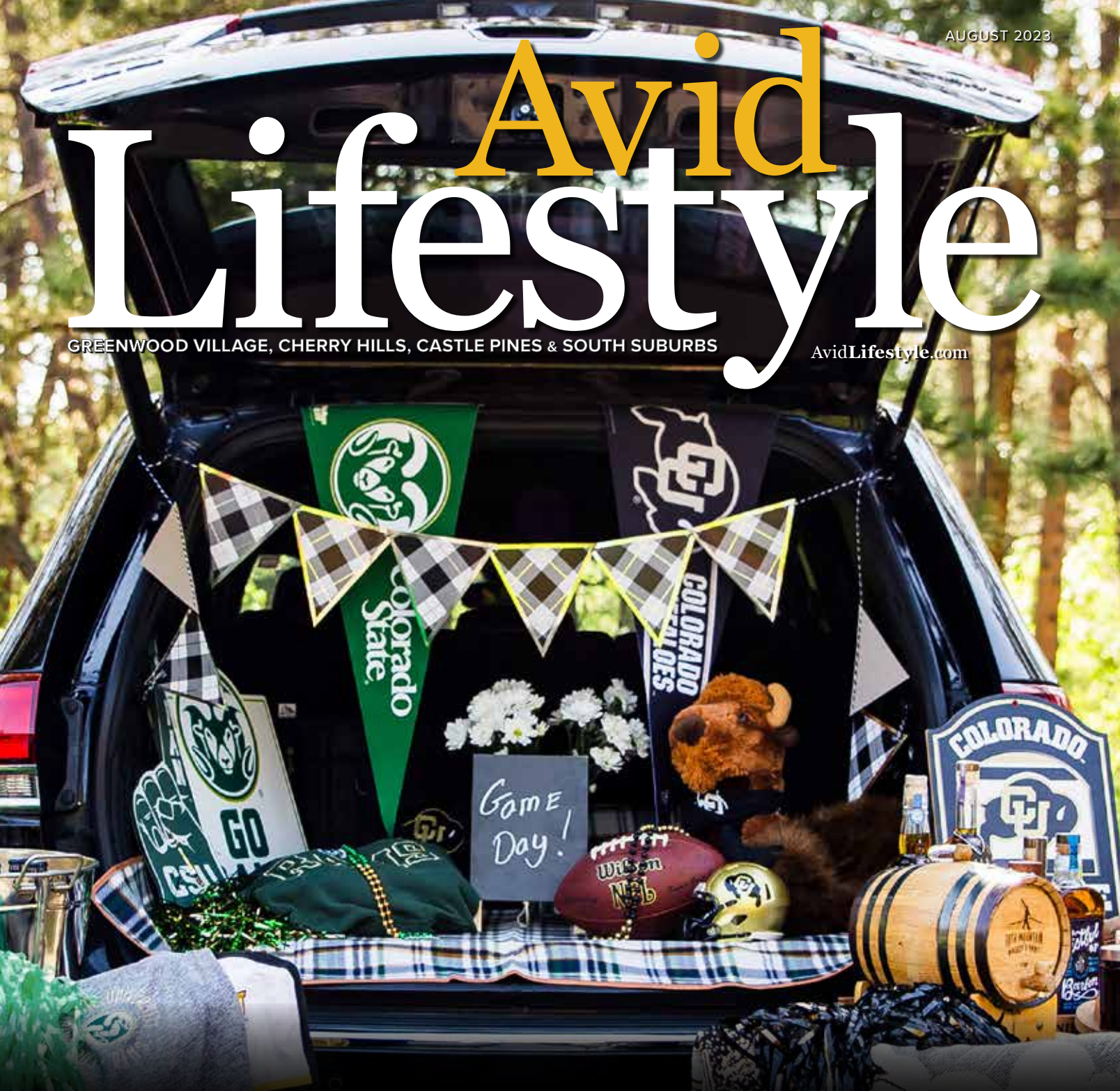


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Tailgating Time

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Enjoy Kentucky Derby-style tailgating at the **DENVER POLO CLUB**

Learn how Denver's top **PRIVATE SCHOOLS** stack up

Former Denver Bronco **RICH KARLIS** on being a woodworker



In the Saddle

Denver Polo Club makes it easy to participate in one of the world's oldest sports

By Lexi Reich

Photography by Ron Morin



“It’s like football tailgating meets Kentucky Derby.”

—ERICA GRANDOMCAR-SACHS

IMAGINE: You and your friends are gathered around the back of your vehicle, everyone in a comfortable camping chair, cocktails and snacks abound. Suddenly, you feel the earth shaking beneath your feet as the thunderous roar of hoofs pounding the ground draws near. A *thwack*, then a *crack* as long-handled mallets swing ‘round, threatening anyone in their wake. The freight train of ponies wallops past with shouts from the players and crowd alike. One final crack and the crowd goes wild. This is polo at the Denver Polo Club.





With the vast traditions and beacons of opportunity surrounding polo, most enjoy watching a classic match, and Sunday Fundays is the name of the game in Denver. “It’s like football tailgating meets Kentucky Derby,” says Erica Gandomcar-Sachs, co-owner of Cottonwood Riding Club and Denver Polo Club.

On select Sundays throughout the summer, Coloradans can enjoy a field-side drink while witnessing the brilliance of polo in the comfort of their lawn chairs. Spectators often like to dress to impress, but tailgate parties are also a casual affair. At half-time, the divot stomp is a beloved tradition that invites people onto the field to help the players by stomping upturned grass back into place.

The game of polo is experienced all over the globe. Most historians believe it started around 2,000 years ago for military training. It wasn’t long before its thrilling and addictive nature spread to the United States, and Denver Polo Club, founded by Gandomcar-Sachs’ parents John and Chris Gandomcar, was a pioneer in bringing it to the Centennial State in 1986.

Gandomcar-Sachs started riding horses when she was just 2 years old and felt an immediate connection to the equine creatures. By age 10, she was riding at thundering speeds on grassy fields across the country as a competitive polo player. Today, Gandomcar-Sachs is widely known as a leading female polo player of her generation, holding multiple top titles, and she has devoted her life to the sport. >>>

As one of almost 300 existing clubs in the country, Denver Polo Club prides itself on being the ultimate polo destination but with a Colorado twist. Long known as a prestigious sport, Gandomcar-Sachs and her sister, Tara, are changing the narrative. Together, the duo embraces innovation and inclusivity at Denver Polo Club while remaining deeply rooted in its storied past. Located south of Littleton, the 100-acre club is surrounded by century-old cottonwood trees and boasts world-class professional players, leagues and events. All skill levels and backgrounds are not only welcomed but celebrated.

“If people want to get started, they just come to the club, we put them on a pony and away we go,” Gandomcar-Sachs says. While there are undoubtedly financial barriers to polo—primarily due to the expensive upkeep of the ponies—Denver Polo Club offers weekly polo lessons and leagues with custom membership options to make the game accessible to more people, according to Gandomcar-Sachs. Several hundred polo players maintain membership at the club, with more joining each year. In either group or private settings, the club’s pros teach everything from horseback riding and polo basics to refining the mechanics of an experienced player’s seat, swing or game strategy.

Resident summer pro Mark Wates has played worldwide and believes Denver Polo Club is unique in its approach. Wates first met Gandomcar-Sachs at Kingston Polo Club in Jamaica 15 years ago. After crossing paths again at a tournament in the distinguished polo hub of Aiken, South Carolina, Wates agreed to come to the Mile High City to help grow Denver Polo Club.

“While I came here for a job, it’s become a family,” Wates says. “Erica and I also share the same values on how to grow polo, with a strong belief in making it accessible for beginners to watch and try the sport.”

Every day, twice a day, Denver Polo Club’s professional players are on the field. The object of the game is to move the polo ball down the field using a long-handled wooden mallet, hitting the ball through the goalposts to score. But most importantly, polo players say it’s about the human-horse connection, believing few sports can rival the nobility and thrilling intensity of riding horseback. Polo ponies are specially bred for agility, speed and responsiveness, and the polo player must exhibit exemplary horsemanship with their equine companions. >>>





“You can always grow and improve in polo, so we teach players of all levels, from never-ever beginners just trying the sport to advanced players who have their own string [of polo ponies] and have been playing for years,” Wates explains. “Private lessons are tailored to each student, and we also have a coaching league for beginning and intermediate players to practice and learn while playing in the arena.”

Wates has worked with numerous teenagers who are now professionals and travel with him around the world to play polo. By spending the summers helping at the club and tending to the horses, aspiring players can train alongside the top-notch professionals at Denver Polo Club.

Gandomcar-Sachs loves the beautiful playground Colorado offers for the sport and encourages community members from all backgrounds to join in on the fun. Due to its promising growth, expansion efforts across multiple facilities, including a storefront with a museum, a clubhouse and an amphitheater, are already in place and set to be completed within the next five years, so even more people can experience the thrilling legacy of polo. 🐎

DENVER POLO CLUB
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The next Sunday Funday dates are Aug. 13 and Sept. 17.
 Purchase tickets online.