

Bicycle Polo in Dublin

00.03

Polo – the sport where players riding horses have to hit a ball with a long wooden mallet into the opponents' goal. But hang on a minute! There are no horses here. The Irish have developed their own version of this game.

00.15

Titel:

Bicycle Polo in Dublin

00.26

It's the last day of school for James Harding and his friends. Today's the beginning of the two-month-long summer holidays. The boys have lots of plans about what they want to do. When the weather's good, as it is this year, the Irish are very inventive.

00.51

James has just turned 18, an age at which he will have to make lots of decisions regarding his future. First he discards his school uniform. There is also a great deal to sort out in his private life. The 4th year or Transition Year in Ireland is intended for self-orientation and broadening ones knowledge base, Pupils in this year are encouraged to discover and recognise their leanings, talents and abilities and try new things out.

01.17

O-Ton James:

Ah, we learn all about different things, such as politics in Europe, and, er, the recent history, and how to cook, how to sew and practical skills that would help us for our life, that may not necessary be in a book or be on the exam and, um, we learn all about the world and how it works. So, that's what we do in 4th year. So, it's a good break from other subjects in the school and all this.

01.45

But that's not all. James has a whole load of other hobbies, like, for example, performing cards tricks, which he can practice during the long school holidays.

01.55

James is very inventive. He can make animals out of balloons for young children.

02.09

But his favourite hobby is music.

02.39

But Music is not the only thing that's fun. This is James' latest discovery this summer: Polo, Irish Style.

03.01

This holiday, James has decided to learn how to play bicycle polo professionally. Trainer Evan Connon explains the basics to him.

03.11

O-Ton Evan:

Ok, James. This is basically a polo bike as I said earlier. And what this is, is that this bike – it's a fixed wheel sport – there is no brake levers. The reason that we don't have brake levers is that if you have a break lever and someone ran into you and done that, he will crab your hands. So the idea is – the hands are free, at any stage you can step off an...

How do you brake? How do you brake? - Here's basically what you do – you get on the bike and you literally push the bike forward with your one pedal - like forward - push back and push back like that. You put pressure on the back leg to pull the bike backwards.

It's not really difficult?

It's not that difficult, once you actually get the hold of this bike. The gearing here is a low based. It's a not high gearing like a big mountain bike or a cycling bike. So the idea, is fix wheels, small gearing, small wheel frame base and the bike'll just go, whumm!

04.00

Compared to horse polo, bicycle polo is easier to learn. Almost everyone can ride a bike. You don't have to learn how to ride a horse first. It's always important to be able to cycle backwards and forwards using only one hand. And how to keep possession of the ball with the polo mallet and move speedily in the direction of the goal. You have to be able to cycle as if its second nature. The cycles are not allowed to have brakes, because, well, horses don't have any either. This trick is very important. If there's nothing else to do, hit the ball through, under the pedals.

04.44

James' mother knows about horse polo but not the cycle version, for not everyone in Ireland has heard of it. She already knows about James' decision and she doesn't miss a chance to find out more about his new passion.

05.08

O-Ton James and Mother:

– you can't control a horse.

– Yeah

– You know, a bicycle has no brain – a horse has a brain. So I would be much more afraid of playing horse polo. I mean. Bicycle Polo – there is tactics and there is no tactics in horse polo. You just – they all run towards the ball, they all run this way, they all run this way... I told you, I've been on about it before.

05.27

O-Ton James' Mother:

So on Sunday then we'll watch you playing polo and then we'll wait and watch the horse polo. And then we'll actually learn a bit about it, eh?

05.33

O-Ton: Musik:

Don't make a sound. I know you're watching. Waiting. Come take me over.
Pillars and posts. I know you watching. You are waiting. And you, your sex is on fire
And you...

06.20

James and his recently-formed band often rehearse the latest rock hits. But they want more, maybe a career in music.

06.25

O-Ton James:

Once a month, maybe we do a gig and play for people at a venue and we are hoping to get our songs recorded professionally, soon enough. Sport and music are both huge parts of my life and lots of people of my age. So I'd like keep doing both as long as I can and when the times comes I'll have to make an decision to pick one and whichever one I'm better or whichever on I'm enjoying more, I'll probably pick that one. But at the moment I can't tell.

06.53

Evan has developed a strict training programme for his boys. Training even takes place on Sunday. Dublin is quiet then and there's not much traffic. James' friend, Finten, comes along too. If James wants to play in an adults match, then normally he'll have to train very hard.

07.15

O-Ton Evan:

So, I'll tell you, what, we'll head down the road here and get of bit training in and we will head down to Sandymount, and down by the beach. And...er...we'll go down there. Ok?

07.26

There are not many cycle lanes in Dublin. It's only possible to cycle through the city unhindered on Sundays and public holidays. James loves to explore his city by bike.

07.42

Dublin, U2's hometown, the city where they grew up, and, in spite of their huge success, they have never really turned their backs on the place. This is James' favourite street. Musicians are to be seen everywhere in Dublin.

08.21

One of the oldest railways in the world crosses the River Liffey. And right up there the famous Daniel O'Connell, "The Liberator" stands watch.

08.30

The heart of Dublin, where the young people congregate. Ireland has one of the youngest populations of Europe.

08.51

The ancient, celtic city of Dublin has developed into a modern, busy city. With more than one million inhabitants, Dublin is the hub of both Irish business and transport.

09.06

When James eats out, you'll always find him in The Chipper, Dublin's oldest fast-food restaurant.

09.15

"Fish and Chips" is the young people's favourite food, although only cooked in the Irish way. That is fried, but using very little fat.

09.31

The Chipper is also where people go to meet each other, because you have to be 18 before you can go into a real, Irish pub.

09.42

James needs the food, especially today. He's about to prepare for the big match against the adult team. It takes place in Dublin's Phoenix Park, where the small, but growing bicycle polo community meets regularly.

09.59

O-Ton James:

There's two teams that are emerging in the group. There is the junior team and the senior team really. But we are one club together. We are joint. We are a joint unit when we go abroad and we're representing Ireland. Ähmm. We are all very nice to each other, you know there is a bit of argy-bargy, a bit of craic, (NOTE: this is a common Gaelic word meaning "for the fun of it") there is some rivalries sparking up between, but they all healthy rivalries and it just makes the games more intense and better. We pretty much friends. There is no real issue with age really. It's just – we all come for the same reason. It's the love of the sport.

10.55

The whistle is electronic. And then, they're off. Each team tries to keep possession of the ball and ensure that it is kept in play around the outside line of the goal or at least in the middle of the pitch. Fouls are not permitted.

11.08

James is totally involved. Riding with the stick has become second nature to him. A game or match is made up of four, ten-minute "chukkers" – the same as a "quarter" with short breaks in between.

11.20

The younger team has enough stamina but not many tricks. The older, more experienced team has already scored three goals.

11.43

James already has his first accident. His wheel is buckled.

11.49

No problem! Each player can repair his own bike. Why else do you wear a helmet? James got that from the older guys.

11.57

So, the wheel is quickly straightened out. Well, sort of. And it's back in the game.

12.06

Just like football, bicycle polo is about scoring goals. For James it is the perfect addition to normal bicycle riding.

12.15

O-Ton James:

At a polo game you've got freedom, you can go wherever you want and as many times as you want. You cover about ten or eight kilometres in a game, depending on your position. Um, on a normal bike – you know – it just depends where you're going and how far you go and you don't have a lot of freedom on the road. So, there's a lot of differences. But – they are both good things to be able to do and I am happy I can do both of them.

12.49

It's James' last attempt to score a goal and...

12.54

...he misses! He is still finding it quite difficult to ride and shoot at the same time. Meanwhile it started to rain again, but then, we are quite used to that in Ireland.

13.14

Head trainer Evan scores the last goal. James' team may have lost but they accounted well for themselves. And for James in his first outing against the adult team, that's almost as good as winning.

13.34

Whether this first game will be the beginning of a new sport's career for James is still open.

13.36

O-Ton James:

I don't really know yet, haven't decided what I want to be yet, because there is such a broad range of choices to be made and we will do that next year really – you have to, you have to pick next year. So, I'll think about it more when it comes to the time. Right now, I'm just, I'm just, you know, I'm enjoying myself and taking it easy and having a good time.

14.00

James is not too worried over the future. If you are someone like James who does so much both in school and out, you can be relaxed about what the future holds.

End