

# Colorado State Women win DII National Collegiate Arena Polo Championship

*Five teams converge at Central Coast Polo Club in California for the arena polo title*

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EINPresswire.com/ -- Crowning a new champion in 2024, Central Regional winners [Colorado State University](#) (Sara Eggenberger, Elyse Warren, Lily Nelson, Willow Longerbeam) met Western Regional victors Grossmont College (Abigail Purdy, Kylie Kufahl, Zoey Newton) in the final held at [Central Coast Polo Club](#) in Los Osos, California. In an intense match, two standout chukkers for Colorado State University (CSU) in the second and fourth made the difference to clench the team's first Women's National Intercollegiate Championship title.



2024 Division II Women's National Intercollegiate Championship winner Colorado State University - Elyse Warren, Sara Eggenberger, Willow Longerbeam, Lily Nelson, pictured with Coaches Stephen Coleman and Andrew Wildermuth photo credit-Kaile Roos

Many players start off in [arena polo](#) during college and university, known as intercollegiate polo, and compete for a shot at the national title throughout their years of study. Over 30 colleges and 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. In the United States, teams competing in four different regionals for a chance at the national title.

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I don't think words can explain what this win means to me and my team. None of us ever expected to be here winning the national championship.”

*Lily Nelson, CSU Women's Polo Team*

Arena polo, sometimes referred to as hockey on horseback, is a ball and mallet sport played on horseback. Arena polo is played in an enclosed arena with two goal mouths set into either end of the 300 by 150-foot dirt or

sand arena. The game is played with teams of three players all 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, consisting of four chukkers, the team that has the highest number of goals wins. Teams must abide by all rules to ensure the safety of players and horses. With highly trained, athletic horses as the most important teammates, the action is fast and reaction times are quick. The arena aspect brings the action up close to spectators who can feel the thunder of hooves and hear the players communicate with their teammates.

Battling over three days of competition, action began with the quarterfinal between Southeastern Regional champions University of Wisconsin-Madison (Elizabeth Lalor, Lindsey Samuelson, Emma Vigy, Heidi Zahnleuter, Jessica Chudy) and wildcard selection Texas Tech University (Tatijana Mirsky, Rachel Mittman, Holland Tapper). Texas Tech dominated the game capturing a resounding win and a chance for redemption facing off against Colorado State in the semifinals, a rematch of the Central Regional final played only a few weeks earlier.

After a few rain delays, competition was moved into the covered arena. Entering the second half with a slim two goal advantage for CSU, three goals from Nelson increased Colorado’s lead combined with a collective defensive effort to earn the 8-3 victory. “I think we have all begun to



CSU's Elyse Warren and Grossmont's Abigail Purdy in action during the Division II Women's National Intercollegiate Championship final at Central Coast Polo Club photo credit-Kaile Roos



Lindsey Samuelson from University of Wisconsin Madison and Tatijana Mirsky of Texas Tech go head-to-head in the quarter finals-photo by Kaile Roos

play smarter and together, and we have worked a ton on set plays, which really helped us in the first game against [Texas] Tech," Nelson noted.

Cornell University (Ava Ramachandran, Charlotte Book, Samantha Symons, Lara Chong, Isabelle Braden) entered the semifinals fresh off a win in the Northeastern Regional and were matched up against Western Regional champions Grossmont College, making their national debut. Trailing throughout the game, Cornell slowly mounted a comeback equalizing the score 5-all with a minute remaining. However, Grossmont bounced back, regaining the lead with seconds left to edge past their competition and advance to the final versus Colorado State.

Prior to Saturday's game, Colorado State's strategy emphasized Warren's directive: "Enjoy the game, execute our set plays and consistently support each other." It held particular significance as it marked the final collegiate match for all four players to compete together.

A national title on the line, Colorado State came out strong with a quick two-pointer off the mallet of Longerbeam. "Willow's two-pointer to open the game was the highlight for me. It just put the whole chukker in our hands," said Eggenberger. Grossmont College responded with three consecutive goals, a penalty conversion from Purdy and a goal each from Kufahl and Newton to end the opening chukker 3-2, in favor of Grossmont. Maintaining the pressure CSU came out strong in the second chukker with a hat trick from Eggenberger and a goal from Longerbeam to outscore their opponents and take the lead 6-4.

After the break, Grossmont returned with renewed and determined energy jumpstarting a three-goal streak, however CSU followed suit adding three of their own to maintain the gap. "The most



CSU's Willow Longerbeam and Grossmont's Kylie Kufahl during D2 Women's Intercollegiate Polo Championship photo credit - Kaile Roos



2024 Division II Women's National Intercollegiate Championship Best Playing Pony Snowflake, owned by George Dill, pictured with Zoey Newton, Abigail Purdy, Cinderella von Falkenhausen and Kylie Kufahl. Photo credit-Kaile Roos

impactful moment of the game for me was when we finally got our momentum together as a team during the middle of the third chukker," said Warren. "Not a single one of us played as an individual out there, and that proved that we were always stronger working together."

In the last chukker, Longerbeam led an unstoppable offensive campaign posting three more goals. Despite Grossmont's Purdy landing a final penalty conversion, Colorado State's strong second half sealed the 12-8 championship win.

"Not a single one of us played as an individual out there, and that proved that we were always stronger working together." – Colorado State University's Elyse Warren

"We progressed a lot throughout the season, looking back on how we started I can see significant changes in our playing style and how we work together as a team." – Colorado State University's Willow Longerbeam.

All-Stars were awarded to Kylie Kufahl (Grossmont), Willow Longerbeam (Colorado State), Tatijana Mirsky (Texas Tech) and Lara Chong (Cornell). The Clyde C. Waddell Jr. Sportsmanship Award was presented to CSU's Elyse Warren for her continued positive attitude, fairness and support for her peers on and off the field. Demonstrating consistent riding ability and equine care throughout the tournament, Grossmont's Kylie Kufahl received the Horsemanship Award. Best Playing Pony was presented to Snowflake, owned by George Dill, with Best Playing String awarded to Central Coast Polo Club.

Detailing what she felt the key to CSU's success was, Warren remarked, "The team has worked extremely hard these past few years, and especially these last two semesters. We really figured out how to play as a team and trust one another on and off the field. I think this national win just proves that having a super strong team bond can really help one accomplish anything."

Looking back on her Intercollegiate career Lily Nelson noted, "I don't think words can explain what this win means to me and my team. None of us ever expected to be here winning the national championship. We are the first women's polo national champions at CSU. Our men have won in the past, but never a women's team. [...] Knowing everyone was there cheering us on meant so much, they wanted the win as much as we did."

All photos courtesy of ©Kaile Roos

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