

International teams to compete in bicycle polo tourney

By Nathan Isaacs

Harold staff writer

New Delhi, Paris, London and the Tri-Cities?

The eighth International Bicycle Polo Tournament rolls through the Tri-Cities today through Saturday.

About 50 players on teams from Ireland, Canada, France, the Tri-Cities and Unionville, Pa., are expected to compete. The 16-member Malaysian bicycle polo team was unable to make it following a snag in its visa application, according to the New Straits Times of Malaysia.

This is the 10th anniversary of the first tournament—a couple of years were missed—which also was held in the Tri-Cities.

Past tournaments have been in New Delhi, Paris, London, and Vancouver, British Columbia.

The games will be held at the Eastside Equestrian Center in Kennewick, 2600 S. Washington St.

So what is bike polo?

"That's an excellent question since a lot of people don't know what horse polo is," said Carl Baker of West Richland and president of the American Bicycle Polo Association and the International Bicycle Polo Federation.

He said four players from each team are on the field at a time. Each player rides a bike and uses a mallet to hit an inflated ball (sort of a small soccer ball) to get it through the opposing team's goal.

Baker said it's a lot like soccer or hockey—or polo. Each game typically comprises four 7½-minute periods. Each goal counts for one point.

It can be fast-paced as the

bikes travel across the field. And it takes skill to maneuver the bikes. "I think it's pretty exciting," Baker said. The referees also ride bikes and competition can get intense with players occasionally getting ejected for hitting each other with mallets.

The public is invited to watch the games, which will be from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. today and Friday with the championship at 1 p.m. Saturday.

The U.S. is the current world champion.

The tournament benefits the Surgical Implant Generation Network, or SIGN, a Richland-based nonprofit organization dedicated to bone repair in developing countries. Dr. Lewis Zirkle, who founded SIGN, promised to fix any bones broken during the tournament.



Harold/Rajesh Bose

Geoffrey Nielsen, left, and Jerry Tagstead go after a loose ball on the polo field at the Eastside Equestrian Center in Kennewick while warming up for today's eighth International Bicycle Polo Tournament. Teams from France, Ireland, Canada and the U.S. will be competing, starting at 10 a.m. today.