

## Buzkashi

*Buzkashi*, which literally translated means “goat grabbing” is the national sport of Tajikistan. Many historians believe that Buzkashi began with the Turkic-Mongol people, and it is indigenously shared by the people of Central Asian region, including Northern Afghanistan.

In *Buzkashi*, a headless carcass is placed in the center of a circle and surrounded by the players of two opposing teams. The object of the game is to get control of the carcass and bring it to the scoring area.

Although it seems like a simple task, it is not. Only the most masterful players, (called *chapandoz*) ever even get close to the carcass. The competition is fierce, and the winner of a match receives prizes that have been donated by a sponsor. These prizes range from money, to finer and more expensive prizes. In order for someone to become a *chapandoz*, one must undergo a tremendous amount of difficult training.

The players are not the only ones who undergo arduous training; the horses that participate in *buz-*



*kashi* must train for five years before ever making it to the playing field. *Buzkashi*, is indeed a dangerous sport, but intensive training and excellent communication between the horse and rider can help minimize the risk of injury.

In *buzkashi* games up to 300 horse riders – or *chapandoz* will gather to play to make it most competitive game.

In Tajikistan, *buzkashi* is played in a variety of ways. The most common iteration is a free-form game, often played in a mountain valley or other

natural arena, in which each player competes individually to seize the *buz* that is the goat and carry it to a goal. Forming unofficial teams or alliances does occur, but is discouraged in favor of individual play. Often, dozens of riders will compete against one another simultaneously, making the scrum to retrieve a fallen *buz* a chaotic affair. Tajik *buzkashi* games typically consist of many short matches, with a prize being awarded to each player who successfully scores a point.

