

BRITISH ARMY OFFICERS CELEBRATE EFG INTERNATIONAL VICTORY

Tournament report by Barbara Zingg, Polo Manager at Royal Military Academy Sandhurst.
Photos by Tony Ramirez.

THE MAGNIFICENT BACKDROP OF THE Royal Military Academy Sandhurst provided the showcase of one of the most prestigious events in the UK Polo calendar, imaginative, international and most enjoyably British.

The HBL Heritage Polo Cup, proudly sponsored by Habib Bank UK was played on the Round Ground over the 7th/8th August weekend and celebrated 125 years since 1885, when young Officers Cadets first played at the Academy and 5 years since the beginning of Heritage Polo in 2006. The Heritage Polo Cup 2010 came to a dream conclusion when the British Army Officers Polo Team, sponsored by EFG International won the final.

It was a photograph discovered in the archives that inspired RMAS Polo & Event Manager Barbara Zingg to rediscover polo history, fashion & art. This year, the Black Tie Gala Dinner welcomed 100 guests with a

Pol Roger Champagne Reception at the Grand Entrance of Old College in the presence of the Commandant, Major General Patrick Marriott CBE. In the heart of Old College is the Indian Army Memorial Room, where guests were served a 3 course meal by a light sound of a Jazz Quartet. "Liberty Freedom United Kingdom" showed their new collection of tweed vests and coats in a beautiful Fashion Show accompanied by 8 Officer Cadets, active members of the RMAS Polo Club, who marched on stage to stand on guard, while the models were on the catwalk. Dressed in T.M Lewin Luxury Twill shirt and 'Help for Heroes' charity ties, they were each holding up their own short polo mallet. A photographic booklet designed by Images of Polo was handed out to each of the Team Captains to thank them for their support and to commemorate the Cup of past and present by its Founder. Heritage Polo is now a trademark in the UK.

The concept was launched in 2006 with the first encounter between the British Army Officers playing a Pakistan Invitational team, captained by Col Talha Saeed (1), with overseas Officer Cadet Uqbah Hadeed Malik, who celebrated his time at Sandhurst winning the Overseas Sword of Honour in 2006 and has now been promoted to Captain in the Pakistan Army. Each year since then Pakistan has been involved and shown great interest in sponsoring the Cup, this year with HBL (Habib Bank UK). The event has grown in size and has developed into an official recognised polo tournament of 6 Nations, now played at 6 to 8 goal level.

T.M Lewin, Official Shirt and Tie supplier since the beginning of Heritage Polo in 2006 under the management of Fiona Vander, agreed to hand out the players kit in the flagship store in Regent Street London, then the players headed on to the



Ladies teams Liberty Freedom United Kingdom and Vanilla Rose Four Nations with Habib Bank sponsors and RMAS Commandant



Cavalry and Guards Club, Piccadilly for an invitation only Welcome Drink's Reception. The tournament draw was overseen by HPA Professional Umpire Matt Hind and he invited HBL Cup sponsor Assistant PR Manager Zeeshan Memon to select the teams' playing schedule.

'The HBL Pakistan Invitational Polo Team had the privilege of sharing the honour with RMAS of reviving the Polo Club of Sandhurst of 1885, after a gap of 125 years, in 2006. Since then we have played the Cup and have reached the final, having the distinction of winning in 2006. The team consists of players invited from various Polo Clubs of Pakistan mostly from Lahore Polo and Rawalpindi Polo Club the Team Captain has been Col Talha, who was one of the founding members since the revival of the 'Cup' quoted the Counsellor of High Commission Pakistan London.

With the humanitarian disaster in Pakistan in that week Sandhurst offered a donation for the flood relief victims. Quote by the Nation London, Friday 13th August 2010 "Expressing their solidarity with flood affected Pakistanis, The Royal Military Academy Sandhurst have donated £5000 to 'Pakistan Relief Fund'. The Commandant Major General Patrick Marriott presented the cheque to prominent Pakistani Bankers Hameed D Habib and Nauman Dar at the prize awarding ceremony at the Polo Club of the Academy on Sunday. "14 million

people are facing direct or indirect harm from devastating floods in Pakistan, heavy casualties and damages have been reported from the affected, which are a matter of great concern. We feel pity for them and extend our cooperation in a time of great odds", he said. Showing gratitude for this goodwill gesture, Mr Nauman Dar, CEO Habib Bank UK, said this sort of co-operation and friendship is a reflection of closer Pakistan -UK relations and we all are thankful for the sentiments of the Cadets.

The winners in 2009 were the Royal Pahang of Malaysia Polo Team, with 2 Lt HH Amir Ibrahim Shah, who was commissioned from Sandhurst that year to join forces with his 2 cousins flying in from Malaysia. HRH Crown Prince Abdullah of Pahang, Malaysia kindly donated the remaining 2 ponies of his string in England to the Academy.

Each year since 2006, Upender Mehra, tailor and owner of 'Liberty Freedom United Kingdom' has manufactured limited edition garments made especially for this event to bring to stage on the Round Ground polo pitch at Sandhurst. The concept is to surprise Lady Players and spectators to view stylish women in competition with a vintage touch. The attention to detail and flair of femininity, the aspect of non modern polo makes this match unique in the world. The concept and designs are made by the Founder of Heritage Polo, Barbara Zingg, who umpires on a side saddle, wearing a habit and top hat on a gelding named 'Belmondo', an 8 year old racehorse now playing polo.

Creator and Designer Dawn Atkins of Vanilla Rose sponsored the 4 Nations Polo Team and offered limited edition Union Jack Flag cushions to the winning English Ladies. Bespoke handbags with a vintage flair are piece by piece custom made, with unique designs and fabric to underline style and pay tribute to English heritage with Victorian and Edwardian inspiration. Also present was Douglas Simpson of 'Ascot Top Hats Ltd' with a selection of army pith helmets, top hats and English country caps.

The Shetland Pony Club was to entertain the little ones by Founder Rosie Gibson-Miller with a small collection of 4 Shetlands to underline the beautiful world of being a child promoting her business with the slogan: Shetland ponies, part of an English Childhood & Small ponies....Big dreams. Toffee, Hector, Prince William and Honeybee were all on show for the admirers big and small. The Club is based in Stoke D'Abernon, Cobham, Surrey. There were plenty of new members and children dressed in heritage clothing to show off English country living of the past. Shetland ponies are the smallest of all the native breeds in the UK, originating from the Shetland Islands up North, standing at between 35 to 40 inches high.

Penny Hill Park Hotel & SPA offered a sponsorship rate for all players and guests to a reduced Hotel price for this particular tournament week end.

The 3 musketeers of Polo photography were present with Tony Ramirez of Images of Polo capturing the action shots, Alec Whitby of Centaur Photographic



Officer Cadet Doug White in action

blending in with booked Team shoots and Peter Meade catching the best dressed Lady, Valerie Wagner, wife of Yves Wagner of the Polo Team Luxembourg, addressed as the “Lady in Red”.

On Saturday all six teams played to decide the play-offs for Sunday. As there would be three winning teams and three losing teams, the two best winning teams would play the final, the third winning team and the best losing team would play for third and fourth place and the two teams who lost by the most on Saturday would play off for the fifth and sixth place. So on Sunday, guests were welcomed onto the Round Ground from lunch-time on with the introduction of the display of music from the Band and Bugles of The Rifles before the play-offs of the 3rd to 6th place teams.

The match for the fifth and sixth placed teams was between Luxembourg and the USA Destinations of Polo Virginia team. Bert Poeckes, a Luxembourg national lives in Switzerland and has put together his own Team this year with Yves Wagner, President of the Polo Club of Luxembourg, established in 2004 and slowly but surely growing in ability. To

strengthen their team, polo professionals Martin Riglos (5) and Oliver Taylor (4) were drafted in but unfortunately did not achieve the breakthrough that they were striving for. The USA Polo Team directed by Team Captain Tripp Donnelly (0) with Alan Adler (0), Adrian Wade (5) and Doug Barnes (2) of Destination of Polo Virginia had two good games under the spell of stars & stripes and in the end the scores were level at 5 - 5.

The match for third and fourth place was between the Swiss team and the Pakistan team. EIM Helvetia, the Swiss Team, back for the consecutive 3rd time thanks to the support of Gilles Leraille, who won the Cup in 2008. The Team Sponsor EIM Switzerland was represented during the whole event by Gilles Leraille, a senior Manager at EIM Switzerland and Phillip von Habsburg, Manager of EIM London Office. Polo Park Zurich was established in 1998 by Markus and his wife Irene, hosting the Swiss Open (15 goals) the main event in the Swiss Polo calendar. The FIP Polo Championship will be held there in 2012. Habib Bank UK sponsored the HBL Pakistan Invitational Team of Azan Noon (1), Ahmed Tiwana (2), Hamid Ali (3) and Team

Captain Col Talha Saeed (1), Counsellor of the High Commission of Pakistan London. The Swiss managed to win by one goal with Justo Saavedra (6), professional of Fabien Pictet to open up the game and take the lead with Markus Graeff of Polo Park Zurich.

The Ladies Exhibition Match followed and has become a highlight of the tournament. Victorian, nostalgic & romantic Amazons once again played for friendship and exchange of culture. Giving an opportunity to stage a match wearing clothes similar to those used in Ladies' Polo at the beginning of this century, the two teams played an Exhibition Match of 3 chukkas before the Final match of the Gentlemen on Sunday. This event is unique in the Polo world and draws on the beauty and elegance of the early days of the Ladies Polo at the beginning of the 20th century. The English Ladies sponsored by 'Liberty Freedom of the United Kingdom' challenged a 4 Nations Polo Team, consisting of four Ladies of different countries and background from Switzerland Irene Graeff (0), Pakistan Mahnaz Malik (-1), the USA Allison Robbins (-1) & Dubai U.A.E Cariane HOFFIE (0). They played a role as Ambassadors for all lady players, who

HBL Pakistan team and EIM Helvetia (Swiss) team



compete and enjoy this sport going back to the Mogul times in Persia.

Starting with ½ goal handicap for the 4 Nations Vanilla Rose Team, play got off as an exciting start. Alice Gipps showcased a great game focused on the ball paying off with scoring several goals. Aurora Eastwood as ever good horsewoman and star player, now enjoying a +1 handicap, gave excellent passes to create set plays. Charlotte Champion scored the final goal for Liberty Freedom English Ladies to give them a 3-2½ win. The 4 Nations Team raffled together to play for friendship and exchange of culture playing without training to entertain the crowd and participate in what seemed a glorious day for Ladies Polo in the 21st century.

Defying the dramatic weather forecast on Saturday, the sun came out in full glory to shine on the EFG International Polo Team of British Army Officers when they took to the field against I4I Dubai Falcons to decide the winners and runners-up.

EFG International Team captain was Major Matt Eyre-Brook 9th/12th Lancers (1) and other team members were Officer Cadet Doug White (0), Robert Mehm (1) and Army Association Polo Coach Gaston Devrient (5).

Major Matt Eyre-Brook, certainly

great example for all Army polo players, started his career at Sandhurst as an Officer Cadet in 2000 learning how to play polo. Today, he is the proud owner of 7 horses. Under the watchful eye of the Commandant then, Major General Arthur Denaro and the Chairman of the Army Polo Association, Lt Col Simon Ledger, he progressed his skills to join a memorable tour to Jordan. Having joined the 9th/12th Lancers, posted out to Germany and member of the Rhine Army Polo Association in Hohne, the passion for polo saw him represent the Army in several important tournaments, such as the Rundle Cup and others, representing the Combined Services Polo Association (CSPA). He also had the opportunity to go on tour in India, hosted by the 61st Cavalry, the only fully horsed regiment in the world, based in Jaipur. He was a key player and took on the team, along with Gaston Devrient to provide the ultimate firepower for this 7 goal team. Gaston has had a profound effect on Army Players in 2010, proving that he is not only a cunning and skilled player but also a superb coach. He was unrecognisable with his shaven head look, the result of raising £15,000.00, with four other polo players, for a children's charity at an event at Ascot Park some days before. When put under pressure to

predict a result of the final match he said: "We are definitely not going to lose, they will have to beat us." Officer Cadet Doug White is in the intermediate term at Sandhurst, voted Best Player twice this season, at 0 goals he is a valuable addition to the team and is a rising star in Army Polo. Robert Mehm comes from Myopia Hunt Club (Boston, USA) one of the oldest Polo Clubs in America. He began polo in 1979 and is currently an active member of Vetey Polo Club, Geneva Switzerland.

The Dubai Falcons, who played in T.M Lewin green and white striped shirts & black silk tie, had 5 goal professional player Charlie Muldoon as playmaker and he and his team produced a game of suspense and high quality polo to entertain the crowds of Habib Bank UK and EFG International, as well as the Academy Staff and young Officer Cadets. I4I Polo Team (Potomac Polo Club) and the Dubai Falcons (Desert Palm Polo Club) teamed up to compete under the Name I4I Dubai Falcons. The Dubai Falcons are based out of Desert Palm Polo Club and have successfully competed internationally in multiple tournaments. The Falcons are represented by Patron Saeed Bin Draï and his Polo Manager Nicolas Petracchi. Earlier this year, Saeed's

Luxembourg team, Habib sponsors, RMAS Commandant, Barbara Zingg and USA Destination of Polo Virginia team



team won the prestigious annual winter Cartier Polo World Cup on snow in St. Moritz. Saeed has played a significant role in introducing and promoting the sport at a competitive level and they have had tremendous success as a team. The Potomac Polo Club was established in 1956 and is the oldest Polo Club in the Washington D.C area. Located in Poolesville, MD, it was originally established by the late Joe Muldoon. Today the Potomac Polo Club and School are managed and owned by his children, Charlie Muldoon, Joe Muldoon III and Mary Muldoon. I4I is represented by patron Omid Rajaei and Polo Team Manager Charlie Muldoon. In 2009 following the establishment of I4I Polo, he teamed up with Charlie and together they have played and won multiple regional tournaments at 12 and 18 goal levels. Charlie began playing as a professional in 1990 and achieved 6 goal ranking. In 2001 he won the 26 goal USPA Gold Cup and in 1983 and 1984 he, along with his siblings and father were the first family team in the United States to win the 8 goal President's Cup. In 2003 he turned semi-professional and dropped to 5 goals.

Starting with ½ handicap difference for the EFG International British Army Polo Team, this turned out to be a physical contact game, full of skilful manoeuvres, showing great anticipation and team awareness. The British were first to pounce with Officer Cadet White finding the goal twice in the early minutes of the opening chukka with no response from their opposition. In the second chukka Nicholas Petracchi scored for I4I Dubai Falcons but Matt Eyre-Brook responded with a goal after a great run almost the length of the ground, to make the score 3½- 1 at the end of the second chukka. A good team talk at halftime by Charlie Muldoon had the desired effect and in the third chukka, the Dubai team scored from a Penalty 3 and a Penalty 4 by Charlie Muldoon as well as a Nicolas Petracchi goal but the British Army team kept the lead through two great goals by Robert Mehm to put them at 5½-4 up at the end of the third chukka. Another goal by Nicolas Petracchi brought the Dubai team close but a

Penalty 4 struck well by Gaston Devrient, allowed the EFG International British Army team to beat the I4I Dubai Falcons by 6½ - 5.

Best Playing Pony was "Aguara" owned and played by Gaston Devrient, who received as a prize a raw hide head collar decorated with yellow roses and blue lilies, trademark of the Heritage Polo Best Playing Pony Award. MVP was Robert Mehm.

Sunday was full of entertainment with the Band of the Bugles and

Rifles, the RMA Staff College Drag Hunt Parade of Hounds with Huntsman Mark Beckett, Sword Guards Gunner Brown and Lance Bombardier Conroy of the King's Troop Royal Horse Artillery were on horseback to present the Final and also present on guard at the prize giving to round off a lovely summer day of polo of the past and future. ■



Nicolas Petracchi