

POLOWORLDCUP

A Z E R B A I J A N

Media Release

Polo World Cup Azerbaijan 2013

Polo Came Home

It was a very ambitious idea and a huge target, what M. Ahadpur Khangah had in mind when he started creating the first professional polo event in Azerbaijan. The vibrant city at the Caspian Sea belongs to the very early places where an ancient kind of polo named Chovgan was played around 3.000 years ago. Under the slogan „Bringing Polo Home“, the local entrepreneur, owner of the title sponsor Milla, M. Ahadpur Khangah proved impressively that Azerbaijan is ready to host the fast sport in its very modern version as well.

The competition weekend has proven: Polo came home to Baku – and Azerbaijan made a spectacular party out of it. With the remarkable prize money of 250.000 Euros altogether, the World Cup Arena Polo Azerbaijan was the first tournament on the European continent offering such a high amount to the teams. No doubt: that turned the chukkas in even more competitive games. The enthusiastic audience (10'000 in three days) supported the teams emotionally full-throated and they saw the international line-ups competing on a high-class level. It was Polo at its best in Baku.

Reto Gaudenzi (World Polo), the polo visionary from Switzerland has organized the grand polo debut at Baku perfectly in cooperation with the respective teams from World Polo and local partners. Mr. Gaudenzi had already founded tournaments across the world. The three-day tournament was sponsored by the Azerbaijan food company Milla and the team sponsors Chopard, Bentley, Montblanc and Baltika 7. World Polo and its local partners Tatyana Sulzenbacher (Event Organiser for Milla Az FPCo.), Etibar Quliyev (Manager Elite Horse Club) and Bahruz Nabiyev (Secretary General ARAF) were responsible for the production and organisation of this event. Experienced as he is, in the game of polo since decades, he created the entire concept and strategy of the tournament. 520 television stations worldwide covered the first World Polo Cup in Azerbaijan. All players agreed: The conditions were ideal to play polo. For the players on the one hand because of the quick and clean field, for the spectators on the other hand as they were enabled to attend the matches very closely and to watch each single actions from a short distance. The view was perfect as the audience sat on tribunes directly above the actions in the arena.

Just before the grand final on Sunday the audience witnessed a historical moment. A mixed team of polo and Chovgan players from Azerbaijan competed in an exhibition match combining the old and new version of the traditional sport of Polo. The entire tribunes of spectators from Azerbaijan got

M. Ahadpur Khangah has an absolute clear vision about the future of Polo in Azerbaijan: he is willing to build a new polo club with at least two fields. “We already have the 48 hectares where we are planning the club with all facilities. This year, we will set up a national team, which is going to be trained in Argentina but also here in Baku by professional coaches. It does not take him even a second to tell where he wants to see his polo team in a few years. “Look, people from Azerbaijan have sports, horses and the ambition to compete in their genes. My target is to make the Azerbaijan polo team number one in the world. We were restricted immensely by the Soviets – now this country is going back to his traditional roots

and passions, such as Polo, what we call Chovgan since hundreds of years.” Baku is ready to play a prominent role in the world of polo from now on. And the adventurous spirit of modern Baku is fitting to that game perfectly.

Also the representatives of the other sponsors of the first Polo World Cup Azerbaijan are amazed by the venue Reto Gaudenzi created in Baku. Xavier Lasserre, head of Chopard Europe based in Geneva: “We did expect a very proper organisation but we are definitely impressed about how perfect the tournament and whole program was organised.” Chopard was awarding four Mille Miglia Watches to the winning team. “After this fantastic success we are very optimistic to be part of the Polo World Cup Azerbaijan again”, said Lasserre.

Also Richard Caleel, President of the International Polo Federation was delighted about the polo debut in Baku. “I am deeply impressed by the high standard of the entire tournament. Equestrian sports belong to the history of Azerbaijan, so this step is absolutely appropriate. The interest in polo is increasing rapidly in this part of the world. The FIP’s mission is to encourage these ambitions. I never saw such a clear target and commitment to polo like here before.” More than 90 nations are member of the FIP today, most probably on December 5, the date of the congress of FIP, Azerbaijan will be the youngest one.

Surprising winner

Teams USA/Montblanc and England/Bentley were fighting for the third place at the final on Sunday. Sathnan Dhillon (+7) scored the first two goals of the day within the first few minutes for England. Pablo and Tito caught up for USA/Montblanc to an equal 2:2 the second chukka. But suddenly in the next round England pulled away the game through a goal series by Lala Andres Laplacette. The brilliant 25-year old talent from Argentina will continue his season in Singapore right after leaving Azerbaijan. At the start of fourth Chukka team England lead with more than convincing 8:3. With 9:6 final score England won the match for place three and cashed 50.000 Euros.

The air was on fire when the teams Europe with Thomas Winter, Raul Laplacette and Heinrich Dumrath and Argentina with Adrian Laplacette, Agustin Kronhaus and Manolo Fernandez Llorente lined up for the historical final of the Polo World Cup Azerbaijan and for the winner’s prize money of 100.000 Euros. Team Europe left the first chukka with a tight advantage of 2:1.

You might have to think twice to remember such a thrilling final like that. One goal was chasing the next. By the end of the second chukka both teams scored 4 goals. No ball and no millimetre of space to make the play were given to the other team. Absolutely exciting and to quote the brilliant announcer Sebastian Baker: “Polo players are warriors in times of peace”. At the beginning of the final chukka a 5:5 draw left everything open to the one and deciding round. The battle for the victory was an exceedingly intense match that went to an extra Chukka and „sudden death“. You could cut the air, mind-blowing and stunning, discussion with the Umpire certainly included. It was Thomas Winter from Hamburg who scored the golden goal for team Europe/Baltika. The crowd was celebrating an amazing success over the brilliant and favoured players of team Argentina/Chopard.

Raul Laplacette was awarded the MVP title of the entire tournament. And Tito Gaudenzi received the fair play award. Mare Samba of the famous Allegria Polo Farm Lobos in Buenos Aires was named Best Pony and got one kilo of carrots as trophy. This fascinating event ended with a great firework show.

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