



PRESS RELEASE

II FIP Arena Polo European Championship Baku: Packed Crowds at First Class Facility

Baku, 16 September 2022. **Polo Action at the II FIP Arena Polo European Championship continued yesterday, Friday 16 September, with two more avidly-awaited matches at The Elite Horse & Polo Club Baku, Azerbaijan. Before the first match of the day between Azerbaijan and Spain, the crowds packed into the grandstands around the impressive grass arena, with plenty of national spirit and Azerbaijani flags on display for the opening game and with General Elchin Guliyev, President of the Equestrian Federation of Azerbaijan Republic in attendance to add to the national pride.**



Azerbaijan is a nation with a long history of equestrian sport; Chovgan, the country's polo-like national sport, has been played by skilled horsemen for centuries and since 2013 has been included on the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding, so polo has been embraced with open arms – in this impressive host nation, polo is truly, “Coming home” and the enthusiasm of the crowd mirrored this.

Spain wins 8:5 against Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan and Spain had both flamboyantly won their opening matches on the first day of competition, so neither side was willing to give up their advantage in the tournament and rode out onto the field in front of packed stands with a steely look in their eyes. Despite receiving a 2 goal handicap start for their lower collective team handicap, Spain were remarkably strong. Despite multiple attempts on goal and the vocal crowd willing on the Azeri team, a well-disciplined Spain crept ahead and by half-time held a convincing 5-2 lead. In the second half, Azerbaijan turned up the heat, scoring right on the chukka bell of the third period to bring the score within a whisker at 5-4 as the local crowd roared their approval, waving flags aloft and jumping spontaneously to their feet. There was all to play for going into the final chukka and Spain quickly got to work. Despite the best efforts of an Azerbaijan side displaying equal measures of passion and skill, there was simply not enough time to do what needed to be done and Spain ran out the winners, 8-5 in a score that belied the close-matched skill of both teams.



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Austria beats Switzerland 7:5

Austria began the second match with a one goal advantage over Switzerland, but Switzerland made it clear they were a team to be reckoned with early on, notching up two goals in reply in the first chukka. It was a pattern which was followed for the rest of the match, as Switzerland and Austria battled it out in a fair and equally-matched game which showcased great defensive play from Switzerland, mirrored in equal measure by Austria's skill in attack. The result at half-time was too close to call with the scores at a closer-than close 4-3 in Austria's favour.

However, the danger was far from over for Austria in the third chukka as the Swiss collectively turned up the heat and Meier scored his second goal of the match, but Austrian Martin Bleier replied with an impressive under the neck goal, a sign of things to come. Diego Braun began the final chukka of the day with a goal, swiftly followed by another from the Austrian side. Ever-optimistic, Switzerland's persistence paid off and Meier stormed down the ground to score, but it was not enough and Austria finished the day with a 7-5 win.

Action continues on Saturday at 4pm local time to decide the Final and Subsidiary Final teams for Sunday.

The II FIP Arena Polo European Championship Teams:

Team Spain (10): Jamie Visser (1), Mario Gomez (4) & Nicolas Ruiz Guinazu (5)

Team Azerbaijan (12): Elcin Jamalli (3), Andres Fernandez Llorente (4) & Fabian Bolanteiro (5)
Reserve: Agustin Kronhaus (5) & Ali Rzayev (2) & Tarlan Gurbanaliyev (1)

Team Austria (10): Walter Scherb (2), Diego Braun (4) & Martin Bleier (4)

Team Switzerland (11): Fabio Meier (2), Tomas Ruiz Guinazu (6) & Tito Gaudenzi (3)
Reserve: Stefan Roth (1) & Katja Grauwliler (0)

Photographs: By Kathrin Gralla/www.derroteddrache.com

The photos of the tournament will be filed daily under the following link:
<https://www.derroteddrache.de/kunden-login/>

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About polo in Azerbaijan

2013 the unique sport of polo was brought back to Azerbaijan, as one of its origin countries, where the traditional polo version Shovgan was played over the centuries. Thanks to General Elcin Gulijev, President of ARAF, and his visionaries of a new polo era in his country, the modern sport of polo was raised from zero to a remarkable international level in Azerbaijan during the last years. Information about the tournament: <https://www.worldpolo.com/event/>

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