

## 2014 Tackeria Classic

Monday February 24th 2014

PTF Youth Player Event



A beautiful Monday afternoon at the Far Niente Polo Club showcased 12 young players 21 years of age and under in an exciting, fast paced 6 chukker round-robin. The Polo Training Foundation started the Youth Player Series over a year ago, as a continuation of the Florida Junior Polo Program. Although many of these 16 to 21 year old players are playing in various other tournaments, these Youth Games are often the highlight of the month. It allows friends and peers to come together in a fun but competitive one day event. As was the case with the Blanco TX Cup Youth game in January, the team that capitalized on the talents and skills of all four of its players was victorious!

The first 2 chukker matchup between the Red Team of Ayaan Quraeshi, Jonny Lavine, Alejandro Gonzalez and Connell Erb fought hard against a well organized Blue Team of Chase Schwartz, Michael Bellissimo, Lorenzo Merlotti and Mariano Gracida. Bellissimo was first to score for his Blue Team with an elegant cut shot to goal early in the first. Teammate Merlotti with the support of Gracida was able to put two more field goals on the board, ending the first chukker 3-0 for the Blue Team. With Connell Erb playing strong defensively, Ayaan Quraeshi was able to make a few good runs to goal but was denied by the strong defensive Blue Team. With the Red team still searching for a team balance, the Blue Team managed to get 4 additional field goals. Two by Bellissimo, one by Merlotti and a final goal by Gracida gave the win for first match to the Blue team.

The Red Team returned to the field for the second match against the White Team of Enrique Barco, Santino Magrini, Gonzalo Di Ciurcio and Matthew Coppola. As both teams battled to get the first goal on the board, it was the Red Team's Erb and Quraeshi who were able to capitalize on penalties putting their Red Team ahead 2-0 at the end of the first. The second chukker began with a penalty two, converted by Coppola to put his White team on the board at 2-1. Alejandro Gonzalez, playing his first Youth Series game, made a great run for a field goal for his red team, keeping them ahead 3-1. As the running game picked up, both teams fought hard, and Di Ciurcio made a field goal for his White team, but was quickly countered by Lavine for his Red Team, keeping the Red team on top 4-2. Young Santino Magrini, who was substituting for Liam Lott, finally found his rhythm and had the crowd on their feet with two beautiful runs on

“Macy” to tie the game at 4 all with less than two seconds left on the clock. “Macy” who has been awarded best Playing Pony in the PTF Junior Program on numerous occasions, was later awarded her first Youth Series Best Playing Pony Award.

The last match was between the White Team and the Blue Team and the winner of this match would be crowned the 2014 Tackeria Classic Winner. Bragging rights for the next month were at stake, and both teams fought hard in a fast open game. Di Ciurcio was the first to put a field goal on the board for the White Team. Bellissimo had a beautiful run to goal but Coppola was able to defend just in time. Coppola and Di Ciurcio worked the ball back to midfield, where they found Magrini ready and waiting. Di Ciurcio made a cut shot up to Coppola; Coppola tapped once and fired a beautiful pass up to Magrini. Magrini, already on the run, got one good hit before Gracida reached him to defend. To the excitement of the crowd, Magrini avoided the hook from Gracida, tapped it again as he broke away, and scored the goal. Gracida, now down by two, won the throw in and sprinted towards goal. As he approached the goal, the ball bounced up. Gracida, clearly his father’s son, tapped the ball in the air twice, settled the ball and finished it off with a gentle tap through the goal posts, making it 2-1. With a mistake by the White team, Gracida was then able to convert a penalty 2 and tie the game at the end of the first chukker.

As the tension was high for the start of the final chukker, another mistake by the White team enabled Gracida to make a gorgeous Penalty four and bring the Blue Team on top 3-2. Keeping the crowd on their toes, Coppola quickly tied it back with a quick run to goal. Not to disappoint, Gracida made a run of his own, putting his Blue Team back up 4-3. Magrini shooting out of the throw-in had the crowd on their feet, but Merlotti was quick to stop Magrini. Di Ciurcio, following the play, made a quick play to Coppola who passed to Barco at about the thirty, giving Barco his first goal of the game and tying the score once again at 4 all. With the clock winding down, the 30 second horn went off just after the throw-in at midfield. As the ball popped out, Gracida quickly jumped on the line and both teams man to man, battled down the field towards goal. Gracida, with Coppola on his hip, desperately trying to stop him, ran into the right goal post with just seconds left in the game. Even though his horse was jumping over the falling goal post, amazingly, he was still able to push the ball through the goal to win the game for his Blue Team and earn the Most Valuable Player of the day for his efforts.