

2014 Tackeria Cup

PTF Young Player Program

International Polo Club

In the afternoon of December 30th 2014, spectators lined both sides of field #4 at the International Polo Club in Wellington Florida. This was not the usual 26 goal or even 20 goal game that is common at the prestigious International Polo Club, this was better, way better! 4 teams of 16 young players between the ages of 16-21, battled not only for the coveted Tackeria Cup but for honor and pride. Clean, Classic Polo, mixed with the energy that only teenagers possess, made for an afternoon of exciting, nail biting polo that we don't see often enough anymore.

The Tackeria Cup is the first tournament in the Polo Training Foundation's Young Player Series. In 2012, the Polo Training Foundation began this program with the help of Jimmy Newman and the International Polo Club. The program is designed for the graduates of the Junior Program who age out at 16, to continue to play with and amongst their peers.

In 2012, Santi Torres, Wesley Bryan, Mary and Matt Collins won the first annual Tackeria Cup at Bellissimo Field. In 2013, Matt Coppola, Caroline Hardie, Lorenzo Merlotti and Trevor Niznik won the second annual Tackeria Cup at International Polo Club.

The draw for the 2014 Tackeria Cup brought the Casablanca Team (Benjamin Avendano, Santiago Avendano, Lorenzo Merlotti and Matias Gonzalez) against the Tackeria Team (Guillermhe Maia, JP Vasquez, Alejandro Gonzalez and Matthew Coppola) in the first two chukker game.

Coppola and Gonzalez, having been teammates and friends for many years came out running and were quick to get two field goals on the board; first by Ale Gonzalez and second by 16 year old JP Vasquez. The Casablanca team fought back hard but couldn't sneak by Coppola, thus ending the first chukker 2-0.

The second chukker was back and forth runs to goal. Coppola was finally able to put a 3rd goal on the scoreboard with a beautiful field goal. Casablanca, towards the end of the chukker, were finally able to get on the scoreboard with a field goal by Benjamin Avendano, but it was not enough, and Tackeria advanced to the final having won 3-1 in this first round.

The second qualifying game matched GJ Racing (Liam Lott, Isfandyar Patodie, Keegan Walsh and Wesley Bryan) against World Polo News/Escue (Jose Merielles, Jr., Ayaan Quraeshi, Sloan Stefanakis and Wesley Finlayson).

Both teams battled back and forth trying to find a balance with their teammates. Wes Finlayson's conversion of a penalty 3 early in the chukker gave WPN/Escue a one goal lead that they kept until the end of the first chukker.

The second Chukker was owned by WPN/Escue as Wes Finlayson came back on the field with an organized team, making use of all four players. The GJ Racing team fought to get a score on the board, but with Wes Finlayson at back, continuously shutting down any attempts at goal and quickly clearing

the ball to his teammates WPN/Escue was able to put 3 goals on the scoreboard (one by each Merielles, Quraeshi and Stefanakis,) while the GJ Racing team were left scoreless against the well-organized WPN/Escue team. At the end of the 2nd chukker, up by 4 goals, WPN/Escue earned their ticket to the final against Tackeria.

When the two consolation finalists took the field to determine 3rd and 4th place, the crowd was treated to a spectacular display of polo as these eight players continued to give their all, as polo should be played. The Casablanca team took the field with a new strategy with the Avendano brothers defending and blocking so Merlotti could hit up to Gonzalez on run to goal which resulted in an early goal for Casablanca, 1-0. JG Racing were quick to pick up on the new Casablanca play and Wes Bryan began covering Gonzalez man to man, keeping Gonzalez from breaking away again.

The second Chukker was back to back runs by both teams, with neither being able to score, finishing with Casablanca 1-0.

The two finalist teams lined up for the final two chukkers of the day to determine the winner of the 2014 Tackeria Cup. The Wold Polo News/Escue team after having found their rhythm in the final chukker of their first game were on top form with Jose Merielles Jr. scoring 2 field goals to put them on top 2-0. A determined Tackeria team fought back with a strong offense and was finally rewarded towards the end of the first chukker with a field goal by Coppola to bring the score to 2-1. Wes Finlayson got his team covering man to man in the second and final chukker in an attempt to hold off the strong offense of the Tackeria Team. Finally with less than a minute on the clock, JP Vasquez and Ale Gonzalez made a hole in the WPN/Escue defense, enabling Coppola to take off on a breakaway to score the tie-breaking goal. 2-2.

With seconds before the 30 second horn, umpires Biddle and Onetto through the ball in. Everyone scrambled, and out comes WPN/Escue with the ball straight to goal. Everyone is on their feet, this is it...ball goes wide. End of regulation, tied 2-2.

The officials, umpires and both team captains: Finlayson and Coppola, have a brief meeting allowing the team captains to decide how to determine the tie-breaker. A compromise was made, a 3 minute rainbow-rule overtime chukker, and if the tie wasn't broken after the 3 minutes they would proceed to a shoot-out.

The rainbow rule is a simple and fast way to have an overtime chukker. The ball is thrown in at midfield and the first team to hit the ball over their endline wins.

It's often said that winning throw-ins will win you the game, and this is even more so with a rainbow rule overtime chukker. Umpires Biddle and Onetto lined up the eight anxious players and threw the ball. The ball rolls through, and 16 year old Sloan Stefanakis from Texas gets a hold of the ball and strategically runs flat out towards the corner near his endline, thus distancing himself from the opposing players. Coming fast on his heels are Coppola and Gonzalez but just as they reach him, he makes one last hit, sealing the victory for his WPN/Escue Team as the 2014 Tackeria Cup Champions!!

At only zero goals, and tying for top scorer of the day, Jose Merielles Jr. was named the Most Valuable player. Wes Finlayson, always the gentleman, received the Sportsmanship award. The Best Playing Pony award went to Matt Coppola's Mimosa which he played in the final chukker of the day.