

## *Snow Polo Scores Again*

*by Susan Redstone*

When the Roaring Fork Polo Club welcomed members of the Moscow Polo Club for their debut visit to the Eleventh Beluga World Snow Polo Championships in Aspen, Co, December 16-19 – the only USPA sanctioned Snow Polo event in North America -- it was touch-and-go that conditions would be wintery enough for the stunning and unique picture-postcard event on Aspen's Wager Park. With temperatures hitting a seasonal uncharacteristic dry and warm spell, Event Director Barry Stout wondered if Beluga's beautifully crafted VIP-tent ice-sculptures would make it through the event! He need not have worried. Prayers to the Snow Gods were answered, and Team's Audi, Beluga, Harry Winston, Bombardier and Lucchese battled it out while snow fell hard on and off all weekend long, preparing the town for a thoroughly white Christmas. Spectators thrilled at the seasonal conditions and supped on hot food and sipped on title sponsor Beluga Noble Russian's iced Vodka which flowed freely throughout the weekend's festivities.

Although Moscow club members playing for Beluga, Anastasia Rodkianko, Misha Rodzianko, Gaston Laulhe, Hernan Traverso Ladlau and Alejandro Traver (who interchanged throughout the tourney) looked quite at home in the Rocky Mountain Conditions, it was Wellington-based Team Audi who sped to victory to retain their title as World Snow Polo Champions for a second year. Although they have played and won on turf and sand, the cohesive twelve goal team comprising Melissa Ganzi, Juan Bollini and Kris Kampsen are becoming hard to beat on snow. It was Audi's Kampsen who earned MVP taking charge in the final match, scoring four of the five goals when they beat Beulga 5-1. Barry Stout, owner of the Roaring Fork Polo club, mounted all the players and teams with his string of altitude -conditioned horses, raised, shod and worked in the conditions, who won the Best Playing Pony accolade for his string as a whole.

With Team Bombardier placing third (Tommy Biddle, Andrew Seibert, Matthew Fonseca) and Team Harry Winston (Bash Kazi, Carlos Gracida, Doug Barnes) and Team Lucchese (John Muse, Andres Weisz, Luis Escobar) rounding out the tournament, the sixteen chukka competition was filled with international well-recognized faces. Playing to win Lucchese watches and Tiffany trophies, the festive event, so close to Christmas, felt like one large luxury holiday gift.

The excitement built early on Sunday, in the final, when Alejandro Trava fouled and smacked his mallet into the Beluga Vodka sign creating a hole two feet wide, shooting the competitive tension upwards.. From this moment onwards, both teams frantically attempted multiple goals

with many misses on both sides. Team Audi's answer from Kris Kampsen was to shoot the next goal directly through the hole in a moment of wild elation and dramatic response. Head Umpire Darrel Schwetz had his work cut out for him, as play heated up more. Inevitably though, it was the partnership plays of Kampsen and Bollini, skilled at the Snow Polo tactics that outplayed the competition in all their matches.

With wintery conditions, created a great bonhomie and intimacy in the VIP tent. Warmed with blankets, heat lamps and a DJ, skilled game announcers Christian Moon and Will Schorre kept the crowd excited, spurring on the players drive for victory. Neither the ponies nor players would disappoint. Audience participation was at its very highest. Feeling like a large but very close-knit family event, spectators stood side by side Nic Roldan and Marc Ganzi, who exuded excitement from the sidelines. With the cracking and smashing of mallet heads, everyone remained involved, riveted and glued to a series of dramatic plays. It was a great weekend to reach out to a wider audience. With both The New York Times and New York Post running feature items during the weekend of the event, players, ponies, Barry Stout and his crew made sure to put on a spectacular show. Not that hard a feat, of course, when you consider seasoned high-goalers Tommy Biddle, Carlos Gracida, Andres Weisz, Luis Escobar and Doug Barnes were all in the mix.

Of course, repeat polo-playing visitors to Aspen can hardly pass up a shuss on the slopes. Some made early morning first tracks before trading in their skis for mallets and helmets. And most everyone participated in the lavish and upbeat after-hours scene. With cocktail parties hosted by Kemo Sabe, Aspen's premier Equestrian store, dinner at The Caribou Club on and a party held by Aspen Peak Magazine, players and their entourages enjoyed Aspen's varied fine wining, dining, skiing and entertainment scene fully. The event which has grown incredibly from its much smaller beginnings to a firm marker on Aspen's social calendar each year is now the perfect mix for a year-end fixture to cure our insatiable appetite for polo fever.

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