

FREE • THURSDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2010

THE ASPEN TIMES

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BELUGA WORLD SNOW POLO CHAMPIONSHIP (USPA) 2010



DECEMBER 18-19 • 10 A.M. - 3 P.M. • WAGNER PARK • ASPEN

PHOTO BY DAVID LOMINSKA



Into the big time: Snow Polo Aspen Style

BY LINDA LAFFERTY

St. Moritz, Switzerland. A winter resort extraordinaire, where the rich and famous ski and play. A place for an international crowd of movers and shakers, and the sophisticated elite with exquisite tastes.

Aspen, Colorado. Well, ditto.

And now those two world-class locales have one more thing in common: They both attract an international crowd of top polo players to compete in a world-class snow polo tournament.

St. Moritz unquestionably led to way in this icy arena, with matches going back decades, but Aspen is showing its stuff this year, elevating its game with the Beluga World Snow Polo Championship.

This year's edition of Snow Polo in Aspen is bringing top-ranked players and five international teams, including the first U.S. appearance of the Moscow Polo Club. (Appropriately enough for a tournament sponsored by Russia's Beluga Vodka.)

The international competition kicks off the Aspen holiday season, with polo matches this Saturday and Sunday, December 18 and 19, beginning at 10 a.m. at Wagner Park. Games are expected to run until 3 p.m.

The Snow Polo games are an Aspen

Christmas tradition started by Barry Stout, local rancher and founder of the Roaring Fork Polo Club. His polo ranch is located above Baldy Creek, near New Castle.

Aspen's snow polo tournament used to be a smaller, quieter affair. For years the December event was staged at Rio Grande Park, with skijoring by local riders and Christmas carolers serenading the small crowd.

But now the competition has moved right into the middle of town, at Wagner Park. Along the way, it has also become a much bigger event. Last year's crowd of spectators at Wagner Park was estimated to be near 1,000 people, according to Stout, and even more are expected this year.

The line-up of players is a list of Who's Who in the Polo world. As with St. Moritz's games on ice, some of the players coming to Aspen hold high handicaps (polo players are rated with handicaps running from zero to 10 goals, higher is better) — including some ranked among the best in the world. This year players hail from Florida, California, Hawaii, Russia, Costa Rica, Argentina, Liechtenstein, France, and the U.K.

And with sponsors such as Beluga, Lucchese, Audi, Bombardier and Harry Winston, this is shaping up to be a pretty deluxe affair.

SNOW POLO TRADITION

Aspen has followed St. Moritz's lead in hosting snow polo and attracting an international crowd. (Who wouldn't want to enjoy the pleasures of a top-notch ski resort and mountain after climbing off a polo pony?)

The Swiss version is played on a frozen lake. Admittedly, Aspen's is staged on a frozen rugby field, but with that knock-out view of Aspen Mountain's ski runs dropping right into town in the background, who needs ice?

The first snow polo tournament in St. Moritz was played in 1985, although winter horse racing on the lake began in 1907. Aspen's Snow Polo tournament began much more recently, but it's already known throughout the polo world.

Earlier this year St. Moritz announced that their tournament was on hold. In recent years, temperatures have been rising and the lake ice was getting thinner, threatening a catastrophe should the thundering horses break through. For a while, it looked like the ice was going to be too thin to risk staging the tournament this year. As of last month, St. Moritz has reversed the decision due to colder temperatures and the tradition seems ready to continue at least for 2011.

WARMING UP

Flanking the snow polo field, heated

tents will serve as a sanctuary to warm up VIP spectators and chilled polo players.

According to Stout, "Beluga girls" will be serving cocktails, L'Hostaria will serve hot food, and coffee will be served by Victoria's.

For those not holding VIP tickets, there's always the long tradition of a polo tailgate party, the most chic of picnics. (And a thermos of your favorite hot beverage can chase the chill away as you watch the games from the sidelines.)

SISTER CITIES? OR KISSING COUSINS?

St. Moritz and Aspen share a lot in common: They both have the glamour and glitz of elite ski resorts; they both have an international clientele, and now they both host world-class polo tournaments.

Chamonix may be Aspen's official sister city in the Alps, but St. Moritz must be at least a kissing cousin.

ABOVE: Nacho Figueras controls the ball, as Colleen Clark, left, and Olivier Girard look for an opportunity to make a move. DAVID LOMINSKA PHOTO

ON THE COVER: Kris Kampsen smacks the ball upfield in last year's Aspen Snow Polo Tournament. DAVID LOMINSKA PHOTO

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The Teams

Team Bombardier

▪ **ANDREW SEIBERT ...** Andrew Seibert is a member of the Denver Polo Club and plays for the Luciano Barbera Polo Team — although he is competing here with Team Bombardier. He was on the winning team in the 2008 Denver Polo Club Arena Challenge, the 2009 and 2010 Denver Polo Club July 4th Classic, and the second-place team in the 2010 Denver Polo Club Arena Challenge.



Andrew Seibert

▪ **TOMMY BIDDLE ...** Tommy Biddle has been playing polo professionally for 23 years — ever since he was 18 years old. He carries a 7-goal rating outdoors (and a 9-goal rating indoors). In 2002, he was on the winning team at the U.S. Open. He also won the 2007 Canadian Open, as well as the Monty Waterbury competition in 1987, 1999, 2009 and 2010, and the U.S. Arena Handicap in 2010. He has played in the U.S., England, Argentina and Canada.

▪ **MATTHEW FONSECA ...** Born in England, the son of a world-renowned polo pony trainer, Matthew Fonseca started his polo career at a young age, turning pro at 15. In the years since then, he has traveled all over the world, playing in Argentina, Chile, Jamaica, France, Belgium, Italy, New Zealand and Australia. Matthew has played for actors Tommy Lee Jones and Stephanie Powers, and for the Crown Prince of Pahang, Malaysia. He lives at the MWF Polo Farm in Aiken, S.C., where he plays professionally and trains and sells polo ponies.



Team Audi

▪ **MELISSA GANZI ...** Aspen's Melissa Ganzi has played — and won — with Team Audi on grass snow and sand. Their victories include last year's Aspen Snow Polo tournament. She is married to Marc Ganzi. Her parents and siblings all live in Aspen now (and her brother and two sisters all attend Aspen Country Day School). She recently played in the longest polo game officially recorded — 32 chukkers. She holds the record for the most consecutive chukkers ever played by a woman — 30 — equaling the men's record, held by Luis Escobar. This year she is playing the 26-goal season with her Audi teammate Juan Bollini, as well as Nachi Heguy and Lolo Castagnola.



Melissa Ganzi

▪ **KRIS KAMPSEN ...** Kris Kampsen is a 6-goal polo player. Kampsen was on the Audi team that won last year's Snow Polo Championship in Aspen.

▪ **JUAN BOLLINI ...** Juan Bollini is a 6-goal polo player. Bollini was on the Audi team that won last year's Snow Polo Championship in Aspen.



Juan Bollini



Team Harry Winston

▪ **BASH KAZI ...** Bash Kazi learned to play polo in Pakistan, but he has been a resident of Orange County, Calif., for the past 10 years. Bash completed his bachelor's and master's degrees in engineering at McGill University in Canada, as well as post graduate studies at Stanford University. He is the CEO of KIG, a U.S. security and defense technology and contracting firm headquartered in Irvine, Calif., with operations in the U.S., Afghanistan, Pakistan, UAE, Israel, South America, Africa and Mexico. Bash lives with his family in California and spends a couple of weeks every month in Washington, DC.

▪ **NIC ROLDAN ...** At age 28, with a 9-goal handicap, Nic Roldan has become the highest-rated polo player living in the United States. Born in Buenos Aires and raised in the U.S. and Brunei, Nic comes by his talent naturally, by way of his father, Raul Roldan, who played for the Sultan of Brunei's team for many years. Nic captured his first major win at the U.S. Open in 1998 with team Escue, shortly after reaching professional status at age 14. He ended his inaugural season with the Young Player of the Year title. He has played on five continents and his major victories — in addition to the U.S. Open — include the Camara de Diputados of Argentina, the Bronze and Gold Cup in Sotto Grande, Spain, and the Melbourne Cup in Australia. His avowed goals include stepping up to the highest 10-goal ranking, winning the Argentine Open and capturing at least one more U.S. Open Polo victory.



Nic Roldan

▪ **DOUG BARNES ...** Doug Barnes is returning to Aspen for his second time competing in the Aspen Snow Polo Championship. He has played all over the world including England, Argentina, Scotland, Chile, and Italy. In addition to playing polo he has also sold many horses that have gone on to play high-goal polo in Florida and in the Argentine Open. He currently lives in Virginia in the summer and Florida in the winter where he owns and operates Destination Polo.



Doug Barnes



Team Lucchese

▪ **JOHN MUSE ...** John Muse is chairman of HM Capital, a private equity firm based in Dallas. He is also chairman of Lucchese, the leading Western boot brand, which operates out of El Paso, Texas. He is been playing polo for 10 years and high-goal for three years. This year, Team Lucchese won the Ylvisaker Cup in Florida and the Pacific Coast Open in California.

▪ **ANDRES WEISZ ...** Andres Weisz is a professional polo player from Argentina.

▪ **LUIS ESCOBAR ...** Luis Escobar is a professional polo player from Costa Rica. He holds the record for the most consecutive chukkers ever played by a man: 30.



Team Beluga

▪ **ANASTASIA RODZIANKO ...** Although she started playing polo in Russia, with the Moscow Polo Team in 2003, Anastasia Rodzianko is a U.S. citizen who is now a student at Skidmore College, in Saratoga Springs, N.Y., where she is captain of the Women's Polo Club. Playing with a zero-goal handicap, she won an all-star award at the Eastern Regional Collegiate Tournament at Cornell University in March 2010. She has played at the Ham Polo Club in England, and at the St. Tropez Polo Club in the France-Russia Cup in 2009 and 2010. She has also competed in the Argentina Cup, the Moscow Polo Club High Goal Festival, and the Russian Open for the Moscow Polo Club



Anastasia Rodzianko

▪ **HERNAN TRAVERSO LACLAU ...** Hernan Traverso Laclau is a native of Argentina who started his polo career in 1995 at age 21 in South Hampton, N.Y. Currently carrying a 4-goal handicap, Hernan has played and managed for polo clubs in El Salvador and San Francisco and is now managing the Moscow Polo Club. He has played around the world, appearing in the UK, France, Dubai, Guatemala and Kenya, as well as his native Argentina. His major tournaments include: the Guatemala Open 2002, the Kenya Open 2003 (2nd place), the El Salvador Open 2004, the Russian Open 2006, 2008 and 2010, the Russian Cup 2006 and 2007, and the Copa Estimulo Argentina 2007 (2nd place).



Hernan Traverso Laclau

▪ **MISHA RODZIANKO ...** Misha Rodzianko, like his sister Anastasia, started his polo career in 2003. For the past three years, he has traveled to Argentina to play the season there. He won the Fair-Play award in La Copa Primavera at La Aguada in 2009. Currently carrying a 1-goal handicap, he has played in tournaments in England, France, Germany, Argentina and Russia.

▪ **GASTON LAULHE ...** Gaston Laulhe is certainly no stranger to snow polo, having played on snow and ice in Cortina D'Ampezzo in 2005 and St Moritz in 2009 and 2010. Gaston is a 7-goal player who competed in the prestigious Argentine Open in 2004 and 2006. He won the Camara de Diputados in 2003. He played with the Argentine team that defeated England in the Coronation Cup in the UK in 1995. He has played twice in the US Open in West Palm Beach, Fla. And has appeared for eight seasons in English High Goal competition.



Gaston Laulhe



A Spectator's Guide to Snow Polo

When most people think of polo, the game they call to mind is a fierce contest of galloping horses on a vast green grass field in balmy weather. That's not what you'll see this weekend at Wagner Park in the center of Aspen.

The Aspen contest will be fierce and the horses will gallop — but the field will be white with snow and, although Wagner Park is large, a regulation polo field is almost three times as big. And, of course, though the skies are often bright blue, December in Aspen is rarely considered “balmy.”

Still, the grace and speed of the horses and the skill, courage and competitive spirit of the riders are a constant in polo — summer or winter, grass or snow.

Here are a few pointers for those new to the sport:

The basic idea of the game is simple enough. Players on horseback drive the ball down the field with their mallets and try to knock it through the opponents' goal. (Think of soccer, in terms of fluid, continuous play, with the ball changing hands constantly.)

In snow polo, there are three players on a team (as opposed to four in regulation polo) and the snow polo ball is large (about the size of a grapefruit), bright-colored and inflatable — as opposed to the small, white, hard-plastic (originally willow) ball used in the regulation game.

The game is divided into periods called chukkers. Players change horses between chukkers.

PENALTIES: KEEPING IT SAFE

Perhaps most difficult and most important for a new spectator to understand are the rules governing penalties.

The basic idea behind polo penalties is simply maintaining the safety of players riding at high speeds on large horses.

The essential rule to achieve that is respecting “the line of the ball.”

Once a player hits the ball, imagine there is an invisible line that follows (and precedes) the ball as it travels. Other players must respect this line. If they cross the line, a penalty will be called. This protects riders from dangerous collisions. (Think about cars on a freeway. You can't change lanes recklessly and cut someone off without risking a collision.)

Penalties can also be called for reckless or dangerous play.

The result of a penalty is a free



Carlos Gracida with Clemence Pierre in pursuit in Snow Polo action on Wagner Park last year. DAVID LOMINSKA PHOTO

shot — most often from the spot where the foul occurred, although that can vary based on the severity of the foul. Also, depending on the severity of the penalty, the defensive players may be allowed to line their horses up in front of the goal to prevent the opponents from scoring or must leave the goal open.

GETTING AGGRESSIVE

Despite these rules, however, defensive players can be quite aggressive as they try to stop the other team's drive to the goal.

A defensive player can use his mallet to hook an offensive player's mallet as he swings at the ball. Watch closely and you'll see players standing up in their stirrups and leaning way out of the saddle — at a full gallop — to hook another player's mallet in mid-swing.

A player can ride alongside an offensive player and use his horse to force the other player's horse away from the ball. He can't cut in front of the player (that's “crossing the line”) and he can't bump the player in a reckless or dangerous way — but the ride-off battles are often intense and very physical. If

an offensive player is driven off the line of the ball, the defensive player can take control of the ball and go on the offensive.

POSITIONS AND STRATEGIES

The three players on a team are known by their position numbers: 1, 2, 3.

Player 1 is mostly offensive, usually scoring the most goals. Player 2 is also considered mostly offensive (on a smaller field such as snow polo). Player 3—a defensive player—is usually the powerhouse of the team, often taking the penalty shots.

These positions are fluid, however, and if a player is in position to make a play or take out another opponent, the team adjusts accordingly.

The first rules of polo strategy are “take the man” that is, cover your opponent; establish the line of the ball; and, only then, hit the ball. Often teammates behind the leading offensive player will shout, “Leave it!” if they have a clear shot and their teammate ahead of them has an opportunity to take out the opponent. Look for good teamwork where a player covers an opponent to give his teammate a chance to make a play.

In snow polo, players sometimes hit the ball off the mesh snow fence and catch it on the rebound.

“The wind plays a much bigger role in the game,” says Anastasia Rodzianko of the Moscow Polo Club. “And ball control and quickness is much more important than speed.”

Between games, a Sno-Cat will groom the field to even out the playing surface, which can become extremely rough and pitted.

FOLLOWING THE ACTION

Announcers Wil Schoore and Christian Moon, both accomplished polo players themselves, will announce the game and help spectators identify the players, understand the game, and follow the action. Listen to these knowledgeable experts who can help explain plays — and deliver lively banter.

And as you listen to their descriptions of the action, keep in mind that players have to hold the mallet in their right hand (no lefties in polo). A shot hit on the right side of the horse is called an off-side shot. (This has nothing to do with “off-sides” as used to denote an infraction in football, soccer or ice hockey.) A shot hit on the left side is called a near-side shot.



Polo ponies race through the deep snow at the Stout Ranch on Baldy Creek, high above the Colorado River in New Castle, west of Aspen.

RABEA NORTON PHOTO

Gearing up for Snow Polo

BY LINDA LAFFERTY

Not surprisingly, players and horses are outfitted differently for polo on snow in December than for a mid-summer match on turf.

Players put on their long underwear, extra thick socks, neck gaiters, ski masks and long-sleeve fleece jerseys.

The horses come by part of their winter garb naturally. As the days grow shorter and shorter, the thick coats of the horses grow longer and longer. The polo ponies of summer take on a bit of a woolly mammoth appearance, with shaggy coats that offer protection in temperatures that can drop well below zero on Colorado mountain ranches.

In order not to slip on the icy surface of the field, the ponies are shod with special shoes. A thin rubber rim around the inside of the shoe vibrates and shakes the snow loose, to keep the hollow of the hoof from packing with ice. Two square cogs on the front of the shoes and one plate in the back give the horse much better traction, especially when turning. (Contrary to some rumors, there are no long, sharp spikes on snow-polo horseshoes.)

The horses' legs are wrapped with fleece bandages and then covered with tendon boots to protect them from injuries, especially in the quick turns and tight contact on the snow field.

Local rancher, Barry Stout is organizing the event and providing the more than 30 horses needed to mount the six teams.

Stout's 1,200-acre ranch in the mountains around Baldy Creek, above New Castle, is situated at an altitude over 8,000 feet, so all of Stout's horses are thoroughly acclimated to the Rocky Mountain harsh winter conditions. To keep the horses in shape, Roaring Fork Polo Club members — who ride and have tournament play from May through October — come up to condition Stout's horses for snow polo.

“You have to condition the horses to running in the snow,” Stout explained. “They need to get used to the movement of breaking through the snow surface, sort of like post-holing. We work the horses in the snow to get them accustomed to that feeling and to build up their tendons.

“We use sweat sheets — not blankets — to put on a hot horse coming off the field,” added Stout. “The lighter sheets let the horses cool down slowly, instead of keeping them hot and sweaty the way normal winter horse blankets would.”





Mischa Rodzianko of Team Beluga fights for position on a grassy polo field.

PHOTO COURTESY TEAM BELUGA

About those Handicaps

Polo players are rated by “handicaps.” In polo, unlike some other sports (golf, for example), the higher the handicap, the better the player. Handicaps run from minus-2 to plus-10. The 10-goal ranking is currently held by barely more than a dozen players in the world. Players with a handicap of 2 or above are generally considered professionals. In tournament play, the combined handicaps of all the players on each team are compared and the lower-rated team is awarded extra goals to even out the score. So, if a team with a combined handicap of 12 goals plays a team with a combined 8-goal handicap, the 8-goal team has four goals added to its score.

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From Russia with ... ponies? Moscow Polo Club Comes to Aspen

BY LINDA LAFFERTY

The Moscow Polo Club — Team Beluga — is coming to Aspen to play snow polo.

While Bolsheviks must be spinning in their graves, the Muscovites presence here will be an exciting addition to Aspen's snow polo tournament. It is the first time the Moscow Club has come to play in the U.S.

How can you not be intrigued by a polo club whose big tournament is called the Ivan the Terrible Polo Challenge?

A LITTLE HISTORY

Polo had a brief, perhaps glorious, history in pre-revolutionary Russia. The country's first polo tournament was reportedly held in 1884, with players including a sampling of Russia Royalty. All that came to an abrupt halt with the 1917 revolution (which disrupted a great deal more than just polo).

These days, post-Soviet Russia has neither commissars nor czars and polo is coming back.

“Polo is new to Russia,” said Alex Rodzianko, president of the Moscow Polo Club. “The first match since the Russian Revolution of 1917 was played in Moscow in 2003.”

Now there are two polo clubs in Russia: the Moscow Polo Club and the Russian Polo Club. The sport has even spread to Siberia, where some amateur matches were played last year.

Polo is growing in Russia, but slowly. “We get good news coverage by the national sports channel, and lots of

people attend the important matches, but there are only about 30 players living in Russia now,” says Rodzianko. “I am working to bring in more players and expect the sport will continue to grow as more people in Russia become familiar with the sport.”

The record crowd for a polo tournament came in 2009, when the Moscow Polo Club moved their horses to winter in the Russian countryside near Penza, 600 km southeast of Moscow. “The manager of the farm organized for us to play an exhibition in the local town's soccer stadium and we had a crowd of over 3,000,” said Rodzianko.

The Moscow Polo Club is located in an exclusive district in North Moscow, at a “super luxury golf and polo club near the village of Tselevo,” according to Rodzianko.

The Russian polo season runs from May through September, and then starts up again for a snow polo tournament in February.

For the past four years the Moscow Polo Club has played in London at the Guards Polo Club and at Ham Polo Club. The club has been guests at Arabian Ranches Polo Club in Dubai. In the fall they play tournaments in Argentina. This weekend will mark their first visit to the United States.

A TOUCH OF ELEGANCE

As before the revolution, Russian polo is attracting royalty — and celebrities (our modern-day royalty).

Actor Kevin Spacey was a guest at one of the Moscow club's tournaments in London, where Russian Princess Olga Romanova and the Russian

Federation ambassador to Great Britain presented trophies. Back home in Russia, celebrities often attend the polo tournaments — including opera singers entertaining the crowds at gala dinners.

Women wear fine apparel to the matches and surrounding events. “Dressed to the nines,” says Rodzianko, “with designer dresses and hats.” Also spectators sometimes wear period costumes from the 1800s. Champagne is de rigueur.

Russians are known as great partiers, but they don't stage the traditional elegant polo-field tailgate parties. “All the action is in the infamous ‘after-parties,’ at clubs in the city,” said Rodzianko, adding, “But for details, you'll have to ask my kids.”

Two of his children, Misha and Anastasia, will be playing in the Aspen tournament.

THE RUSSIAN LINE-UP

This year's Beluga Team consists of Hernan Traverso, a polo pro; Gaston Lauhe, winner of last year's St. Moritz snow polo tournament; Anastasia Rodzianko, a 20-year-old student at Skidmore College; and Misha Rodzianko, 22. Misha has spent the last three seasons playing in Argentina.

Anastasia, an attractive, athletic young blonde, says she is looking forward to her time in Aspen. “I've never been to Aspen and I hope I'll go skiing after the polo tournament.”

Mischievously, she adds, “I hear that beer flows like wine in Aspen.”

Sounds like she might be hunting for an “after-party.”



EVENT DIRECTOR

• **BARRY STOUT ...** Barry Stout breeds, breaks and trains horses at his Stout Ranch on Baldy Creek, high above the Colorado River outside of New Castle, west of Aspen. Stout is the highest rated American player in Rocky Mountain Polo history, with a 5-goal indoor and 2-goal outdoor handicap. He is the founder of the Roaring Fork Polo Club and plays at his ranch and around the world.



Barry Stout