



modern event with the old-world charm of a century ago. The culmination of 16 weeks of high-goal winter polo filled with thrills, surprises and world-class sport was a breath-taking white-knuckle final match battle between near-equals Mannix's Alegria and Bob Jornayvaz's Valiente, a result of last-minute rider misfortune, quick changes and lucky team coalescence.

We have Alegria facing the fight of the American season to block a Triple Crown bid by Valiente and to win the highest polo prize in America. We have Valiente with wins over Alegria in the run-up tournaments, the C.V. Whitney Cup and the Piaget USPA Gold Cup, so close to the coveted Triple Crown they could probably taste it. And we have an amazing venue and backstory

to this year's U.S. Open Polo Championship Final.

THE INTERNATIONAL POLO CLUB PALM BEACH:

Arriving in Palm Beach and very excited to take an early preview look at the U.S. Open Polo Championship grounds and get a feel for the area, we decided to explore a bit in the Village of Wellington, 20 miles west of Palm Beach, not only the home of the International Polo Club Palm Beach but also the host of both the largest and longest running horse show in the world, the Winter Equestrian Festival, and more than forty weeks of equestrian competitions per year, including the Global Dressage Festival. It is truly a major international equestrian destination for multiple horse

sport competitions and a magnet for the stars of the horse world, sport and film. The Village of Wellington is well known for its settled equestrian community.

The International Polo Club (IPC) is most impressive, reached by means of a palm-lined lane, built in the breezy white-washed Old Florida style with terra cotta tiled roofs over the buildings and shade for the spectator areas. In addition to the three state-of-the-art polo fields, the club offers a pool, spa, and the famous Mallet Grille Patio, where the elite of Palm Beach County brunch on Sundays.

MUSEUM OF POLO AND HALL OF FAME:

On the way to the IPC grounds we found the comprehensive and fascinating Museum of Polo and

110TH MASERATI U.S. OPEN POLO CHAMPIONSHIP A STUNNING WIN BY MANNIX'S ALEGRIA

By Bridget McArdle McKinney

IT WAS ALL LIKE A DREAM OR AN INCREDIBLY CHIC ON-CULTURE NOVEL OR A LAVISH HOLLYWOOD PRODUCTION – AND IT INVOLVED MY FAVORITE HORSE SPORT POLO AND I WAS IN IT! THE U.S. OPEN EXPERIENCE IN PALM BEACH IS SO AMAZING THAT THE ONLY WAY TO TRULY APPRECIATE IT IS TO JUST RELAX, ACCEPT THE IMPROBABLE, DRINK THE CHAMPAGNE, AND ENJOY THE ACTION.

This was the 110th running of the 26-goal U.S. Open Polo Championship, America's highest ranked and most prestigious polo tournament and her only WPT Grand Slam event, sponsored by Maserati

and hosted by the groomed and gracious International Polo Club Palm Beach in late April.

In 1904, the gentlemen of the Wanderers Team met and beat the Meadowbrook Freebooters

at genteel Meadowbrook Polo Club in Old Westbury, New York in the first U.S. Open Polo Championship ever. Fast forward to the 2014 U.S. Open Polo Championship in Wellington, Florida, a powerful high-tech



Bob Jornayvaz (Valiente) Hilario Ulloa (Alegria)

Hall of Fame, a rich repository dedicated to the preservation of the grand history and tradition of the sport of polo for the generations of the future. We were lucky to walk in and be greeted by the Executive Director of the Museum, former polo player, very knowledgeable polo expert and really nice guy with a lot of insider polo information, George J. DuPont, Jr., who introduced us to the Museum, explaining that the Museum began as a vision of four polo players, H. Jeremy Chisholm, Phillip L. B. Iglehart, Leverett S. Miller, and George C. Sherman, Jr., who had dreamed of establishing a place to honour and preserve the history of the sport.

Soon to expand even further, the Museum is home to an extensive collection of historic documents

and physical treasures which include extraordinary works of art, magnificent trophies, artefacts, books, statistical records, periodicals, films, videos, recordings and much polo memorabilia, a real treat for polo aficionados, not to be missed on any trip to the area.

STOP WITH THE TOURISM AND GET TO THE FINALS!

Okay, but first there's the back-story. Coming into the semi-finals in a match against Lechuza Caracas, Valiente (Bob Jornayvaz, Santi Torres, Sapo Caset and star 10-goaler Adolfo Cambiaso) was very well placed to make it into the finals and was the clear favourite for many, but early in the first chukka, disaster struck - Cambiaso was bumped hard reviving a previous injury.

After a valiant try to carry on, Cambiaso retired and he and Jornayvaz were subbed by Carlitos Gracida and Brazilian 8-goaler Rodrigo Andrade. Understandably, the 'team-on-the-fly' had their problems coalescing and establishing the necessary solidarity to work as a unified team, but they came together in the third chukka and never looked back ending with a thrilling and improbable 15 – 11 win for Valiente putting the team in the final and a run at the cup.

Adolfo's retirement from the tournament put the pundits into a bit of a tizzy. Who would substitute for Adolfo in the Final? With only a limited number of 10-goalers available to take Adolfo's place, what was Jornayvaz going to do? There were questions also of whether any of the players in



Team Alegria



Easter Egg Hunt

the tournament could play on the Valiente team without violating the USPA rules. As it turned out, to huge relief Lechuza Caracas' Juan Martin Nero was announced by Jornayvaz to substitute just two days before the final match. Once Lechuza Caracas was eliminated in the semifinals, its 10-goaler Juan Martin became eligible to replace Cambiaso in the Valiente lineup and things got really interesting. People were saying that without Adolfo, the teams were pretty equally balanced. Anyone could take the cup now.

On the morning of the Final, Easter Sunday April 20, the very fun, hospitable and efficient event organizers, Venue Marketing Group, and in particular VMG's Enid Atwater, generously invited us to join them for a deluxe lobster and caviar brunch at the IPC's Mallet Grille and ushered

us into the Maserati hospitality tent for champagne and then settled us into our comfortable box seats with one of the best views of the field of any.

The throng of post-brunch feathers, fashions, champagne flutes, boaters, fedoras, and floaty summer frocks drifted into its seats. The battle of the Titans was about to begin.

In what has been called 'all-out polo' (by polo journalist par excellence Alex Webbe), Alegria defeated Valiente 11-10 with the winning overtime goal scored by Hilario Ulloa. It was truly championship polo at its finest, with the score alternating between the two elite teams throughout six action-packed chukkas. The sold-out, record-breaking crowds cheered on their favourites with unbridled enthusiasm, the action and the crowds duly filmed

by flying camera drones and broadcast on the big screen. The Alegria team were awarded the prestigious Maserati U.S. Open Polo Championship trophy at the jubilant tournament presentation in front of thousands of fans and friends. Zavaleta was awarded the MVP award while Ulloa's Mia received Best Playing Pony honours.

Polo fans, players, and patrons celebrated the winners, the match, and the tournament dancing the night away in the clubhouse and toasting another successful and Palm Beach polo season. 🍷

For a recap of the Maserati U.S. Open's final match, please watch the following video produced by Pololine:

<http://vimeo.com/92754707>.

Photos by Alex Pacheco