

DUBAI POLO GOLD CUP 2014 BACK HOME AGAIN IN THE UAE

By Bridget McArdle McKinney

RETURNING TO DUBAI FOR THE BENTLEY EMIRATES GOLD CUP IN MARCH WAS A LITTLE LIKE COMING HOME - FRIENDLY FAMILIAR FACES, THE USUAL WARM WELCOME, CATCHING UP ON NEWS AND GOSSIP WITH POLO PALS, AND IMMEDIATE OFFERS OF ASSISTANCE AND CONTACTS, ALL EXPECTATIONS OF THE LEVEL OF SERVICE AND INFORMATION MET AND EXCEEDED. IN THE FIVE YEARS SINCE ITS INAUGURAL, THE 16-GOAL DUBAI POLO GOLD CUP HAS DEFINITELY HIT ITS STRIDE AND FOUND ITS MÉTIER AS A SOLID WELL-ORGANISED AND ACCESSIBLE EVENT. I WAS HAPPY TO BE BACK ONCE AGAIN AND OBSERVE THE NEXT STAGE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THIS IMPORTANT CHALLENGE CUP EVENT ON THE GLOBAL POLO ITINERARY.



Ghantoot Bentley Emirates Champions



Mahra vs Abu Dhabi



Mahra Power Horse Cup Champion



Bin Draï vs Desert Palm



Ghantoot team

As always the opportunity to arrive early enough to witness the semi-finals is a huge benefit in helping to understand the state of play, strengths, weaknesses, horses, and player line-up and capabilities before the final big day. It is not enough to be aware of what is happening, it is essential to see and feel it in person.

I arrived on the first day of the semi-finals to see Mahra Polo and Dubai Polo each earn a berth in the Power Horse Cup Subsidiary Final, which ultimately went to Rashid Al

Habtoor's Mahra Polo 8 to 7.

Tuesday, however, was the big day for me, especially the first match which pitted my two favourite teams, Mohamed Habtoor's Habtoor Polo (Mohamed Habtoor 0, F. Elizalde 7, Guillermo Cuitino 6, M. Panelo 3) and HH Sheikha Maitha bint Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum's UAE Polo (HH Sheikha Maitha 0, Ollie Cudmore 5, Lucas Monteverde 9, T. Gagliardi 2) against each other for a place in the Gold Cup Final, which Habtoor took 10 to 5 ½.

In the second match of the day, Ghantoot ADCB Polo (Ali Al Merri, Oscar Colombres, Facundo Sola 8, Pelayo Berazadi 4) pipped Desert Palm Polo 2 (T. Al Bawadi 1, S. LaBorde 5, A. Taranco 6, M. Machado 4) seven to six giving Ghantoot the right to fight for the Gold Cup on Saturday.

This left the Cup Final to Ghantoot and Habtoor, two well-manned and well-matched teams wanting that Gold Cup. Ghantoot took control of the game from the first chukka despite some active push-

back by Habtoor in the last seven minutes to close the gap to only two goals, but Ghantoot took the Bentley Emirates Gold Cup, the most important tournament of the season in the United Arab Emirates, by a 7-5 score. The Ghantoot team brought home a second precious metal trophy in a row at the Dubai Polo Gold Cup Series 2014 after also winning the McLaren Silver Cup. Berazadi was named the Most Valuable Player of the Final and Cenicienta, ridden by Facundo Sola, was named the Best Pony of the game.

Okay, I will admit that I was a bit star-struck this time to meet some of the players in person and I suppose that it may also be true that I'm probably the oldest polo groupie on the planet. But when you consider the physical, mental, psychological and financial resources that come into play in a sport which combines the very best of human endeavour with the very best of horse endeavour, then maybe I can be excused for my enthusiasm.

After a record 10 teams taking part

during the series, and a superb level of competition being played throughout, the Dubai Polo Gold Cup Series continues to grow on the international polo calendar. The Dubai Polo & Equestrian Club is certainly one of the most attractive spots in the world for polo and next year, with the handicap level increasing to 18 goals, I'm guessing that the best players (Palm Beach – beware!) and great polo are guaranteed to be there. I'll be. 🏇

Photos by Gonzalo Etcheverry