

Royal Jaipur Team vs. Team Canada Challenge

Polo For Heart, June 17 – 19, 2011

Polo today is played all over the World. The polo community is a diverse blend of many different cultures, but all in it are bound by a common passion for the sport. To paraphrase the great Winston Churchill, “Polo is your passport to the world.” No matter what country a polo player lands in, generally speaking if they find the local polo club they are welcomed instantly. It is this camaraderie that makes the sport so special, as it is just as much about the game on the field as the friends and experiences that come with it. This year the Toronto Polo Club is excited to welcome the Maharaj of Jaipur and the Royal Indian Polo team to play at Polo For Heart in June in the first ever India vs. Canada team challenge.

Perhaps what makes this Challenge so unique and special for us Canadians is that it truly will be a meeting of two Worlds – the old and the new. Though the origins of Polo are lost in the mists of antiquity, India has rightly been called the cradle of modern Polo. While Polo may have grown to maturity in the Americas, it was in India that the modern game was 'discovered' and nurtured. Played in the rough form for centuries across remote regions of India, polo was played in public for the first time in 1863 at the Calcutta Polo Club - which holds the proud title of being the oldest Polo club in the world still in existence. By 1865 the game had taken root in Bengal and by 1869 had spread throughout British India where it was at once taken up by army officers and civil officials. Soon reports of the 'New' game began to appear in the British press at home, and it was in 1869 that the first inter-regiment match on an English ground took place. Within a decade it had spread across the globe like wildfire.



In the 1870s a new element was introduced into the polo world, which was to have a profound impact upon the subsequent development and spread of the game. This was the advent of the Indian princes upon the Indian polo scene. Armed with their hereditary equestrian skills and with the enormous resources at their disposal, the Maharajas took the polo world by storm. In an exceedingly short period of time they achieved a standard of excellence in polo that has yet to be rivaled anywhere in the world. The heyday of Indian polo, which lasted from the end of the nineteenth century until the outbreak of the Second World War, saw unmatched performances by the teams of the princely Indian states. In 1933, the famous Jaipur Team established a unique and unbeaten record till date, by winning all the open tournaments in the United Kingdom and the Indian Championship, successively from the year 1930 to 1938.

The outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, coupled with the mechanization of the Indian Cavalry in the late 30's, almost sounded the death knell of Indian polo. A good seventeen years were to pass before Indian polo rose again, from the ashes of the war and the aftermath of independence and partition. Polo continues to change and evolve in modern India. The Royalty is back with a vengeance. Maharaj Narendra Singh, of Jaipur, is doing his part to promote Indian polo. He is the FIP (Federation of International Polo) ambassador for India, and in his mission to safeguard the interest of the game, has joined hands with many of the great polo patrons of the World to initiate inter-continental play. Maharaj Narendra has also worked very hard to engage corporations to support the young and upcoming stars of polo in India. Maharaj Narendra has played a large role in bringing Indian polo back in to the World arena.

By comparison to the deep rooted origins of polo in India, polo in Toronto really didn't start until the beginning of the twentieth century. It was mainly played by military officers in the 1920's and 30's at the Woodbine Racetrack and at the Armory on Avenue Road. As with polo in India and most of the rest of the World, polo activity in Toronto ceased at the outbreak of the World Wars, but was revived in the late 1950's when a group of equestrians, including Colonel Michael Sifton, Jim Elder, Tom Gayford, Gary Smellie, and Major Kindersley, decided it would be a good arena game to play in the winter months when

there were no other equestrian events taking place. By 1960 the Toronto Polo Club was re-instated in the United States Polo Association. In 1965 Colonel Michael Sifton purchased Fox Den Farm in Gormley, which became the headquarters of the Toronto Polo Club. Colonel Sifton was the club President until his death in 1995, and his son Cliff is now the current President of the club.

In 1980 Colonel Sifton saw an opportunity to combine his commitment to charitable causes, particularly heart and stroke related, with his love of polo, by organizing the very first Polo For Heart tournament. This inaugural event was a resounding success, bringing in a crowd of 600 people, and raising \$25,000 for charity. Fast forward 32 years and Polo For Heart is still going strong. The event has raised over \$5 Million dollars for heart and stroke related charities. The Sifton family is still very much involved, continuing the traditions their father started. Polo For Heart is now Canada's largest polo charity tournament, with visiting teams coming from around the World to play each year. Because of Colonel Michael Sifton's vision, this event has become instrumental in promoting awareness of the sport within Canada, as well as putting Canadian polo on the World map.

It is to the survival of the game in the remote regions of India thousands of years ago that the World owes the genesis of modern day polo. The Toronto Polo Club and Polo For Heart would like to welcome Maharaj Narendra Singh and the Royal Jaipur Polo Team to Canada this June. Along with years of experience in polo, these visiting players and grooms will bring new traditions and their own flavor to Canada that is a refreshing influence on our Western culture.



Polo For Heart runs from June 17 – 19, 2011
Two polo games are played daily, along with plenty of other entertainment.
For more information, or to buy tickets, please go to www.poloformheart.org