

OC Polo with the Win in United States Polo Association Women's Arena Open

OC Polo Team Brings East Coast Energy to the West in Arena Polo Championship

ORANGE COUNTY, CA, USA, December 23, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [Arena polo](#) is fast, physical and reaction times are quick. Three players per team, mounted on horses, use the walls of the arena to play angled passes and control the play. With a smaller playing field than grass polo, arena polo gives spectators the opportunity to be up close to the action. The [United States Polo Association](#) Women's Arena Open is the pinnacle tournament for female and equine athletes in the sport. The tournament featured the highest rated female arena player in the US, Marissa Wells.

After a weekend filled with top-tier polo, impressive horsemanship and winning camaraderie, the first ever USPA Women's Arena Open on the West Coast came to a thrilling conclusion at [OC Polo](#) Club (Silverado, California) boasting a packed crowd at its gorgeous facilities, enlivening the atmosphere and adding to the tournament's buzz



OC Polo's Cindy Halle leans into the bump on Rancho Arroyo-Luna Polo's Audry Persano. ©Josh Kizziar

Starting off the tournament on Friday, September 23, OC Polo first met Lakeside (Nicole Bankhead, Molly Agee Bankhead, Cory Williams) in the semifinal. OC Polo created a solid 5-1 lead with an electric first chukker, which they would not relinquish throughout the game. Raising the score to 16-11 as the final horn blared the home team earned their spot in the title match. Shortly after, Rancho Arroyo/Luna Polo met Tres Leches (CPC/DPC) (Maria Dahlmann Gupta, Becky Gonzalez, Erica Gandomcar-Sachs) in the second semifinal. Rancho Arroyo/Luna Polo generated early offensive success and did not pump the breaks, powering to a commanding 18-5 victory to claim their place in the final.

Both teams entering the final after dominant semifinal performances, the first chukker of play

set the tone for an aggressive first half. Early in the chukker, the grey horse Caviar, Wells was able to find the goal for OC Polo. "He's just so handy," said Wells about Caviar. "He gets around so quick. I felt like I had a lot more handle, I beat Jenny and Audry to the ball on him." Her initial strike was matched by two goals off the mallet of Rancho Arroyo/Luna Polo's Alexy. Wells and Slutzky were both able to work together to create scoring opportunities, ending the chukker 3-2 in favor of their team.

With the start of the second chukker came a reenergized Rancho Arroyo/Luna Polo. Wells and Alexy traded two goals apiece to spearhead the action, followed by two more goals from Wells. Alexy was able to find the goal once more, but her effort was matched by Halle, who was able to add her name to the scoresheet to give her team a 7-5 advantage at halftime.



2022 USPA Women's Arena Open Champions_ OC Polo - Mila Slutzky, Cindy Halle, Marissa Wells. ©Josh Kizziar

After taking time to regroup, OC Polo planned to execute their updated strategy to take more time and focus on controlling the ball and the game. Wells returned on Caviar and OC Polo generated a seemingly endless stream of offensive power; four goals coming from Wells and

another one added by Halle. "I always played Caviar in the third chukker because I knew the arena was dragged fresh, and the ground was soft," said Wells. Hammering down on the defensive front with the same vigor they invested in their attack, OC Polo held Rancho Arroyo/Luna to just a single goal to double up the score and end the third chukker ahead 12-6.

“

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Marissa Wells

The final chukker placing a firm time limit on the opportunity for a comeback from Rancho Arroyo/Luna Polo, Persano and Alexy combined forces to score five goals in a valiant effort to close the gap. All OC Polo team members contributing to the score in the final chukker, a nearly matched four-goal fourth chukker helped the local favorite cling to their game-long lead and claim the title 16-11.

Overjoyed with her team's victory, Slutzky was thrilled for the opportunity to just participate alongside her teammates and opponents. "This win means a lot," she shared. "It's my first big

tournament at this level, and I learned so much—the win is a bonus.”

For her incredible performance, including 24 goals over the course of the weekend, Marissa Wells was named Most Valuable Player. Crediting a lot of her success to her horses, specifically her third chukker horse Caviar, Wells noted, “Thank you George Dill for that gray horse! The third chukker both days, he owned it. I would get on him, and the confidence was just there!” Wells was also thankful to be able to play alongside Halle, a former rival turned teammate. “Cindy and I have always been competitive rivals in Maryland because she was coaching for Garrison [Forest School] and we were team Maryland. It was great getting to play with her. Polo’s a great community, it’s a small world and, at the end of the day, we’re all friends and we can be teammates on the field.”



OC Polo's Marissa Wells leads the pack on George Dill's horse, Caviar. ©Josh Kizziar

Jenny Alexy’s second chukker horse, Fifi, was awarded Best Playing Pony honors. 10 years old and standing at just 14’2”, Fifi does not let size stop her from dominating the field. Alexy shared, “She’s a little tank. She has such incredible handle, and she can push a horse of any size. She knows how to use her little body—she’s small but mighty.”

The competition also recognized 11-year-old chestnut Izzy as Best Playing Thoroughbred in partnership with the Jockey Club Thoroughbred Incentive Program (TIP). Played by Audry Persano in the first and third chukkers Izzy is also owned by Jenny Alexy. “Izzy has a lot of heart,” said Persano. “She hasn’t played in the arena much, this was her first tournament, but she’s super quick, really nice and light.”

The Sportsmanship Award was presented to Mila Slutzky for her winning attitude and pure desire to learn throughout the weekend. A bit nervous going into the tournament, Slutzky was grateful for all of the support and advice she received from her teammates and other competitors. “I know polo players in general are supportive, but getting to this level, you’d think it would get intense and aggressive—which it does, but everybody in this tournament has been so supportive and so amazing.”

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