

National Arena Amateur Cup Arena Polo Tournament Played At Legends Polo Club in Texas

Arena Polo Players from Across the United States Converge in the Dallas Area for a Unique Sports Competition

DALLAS, TEXAS, USA, November 25, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The 2023 United States Polo Association (USPA) National Arena Amateur Cup (NAAC) took place at [Legends Polo Club](#), November 2-5 in Kaufman, Texas, to much anticipation. Players and spectators alike from across the United States have been awaiting the return of this recently reformatted tournament that has been up-and-running since 1987. The NAAC brings in players via invitation each year, resulting in a roster as ever-changing as the gameplay itself. With some traveling multiple states to attend, eight teams arrived ready and raring to compete for a shot at Sunday's finals.



2023 National Arena Amateur Cup Champions Patton Polo - Lance Stefanakis, John Womble, Tammy Havener photo by Murrell Photography

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[Arena polo](#) is similar to its outdoor cousin with players on horseback hitting a ball with polo mallets through a goal, but that is where the similarities end.

"I compare arena polo to hockey on horseback," says USPA Arena Committee Chair Robin Sanchez. "It's a quicker game with players using the walls of the arena to gain an upper hand. Bouncing passes to teammates, using the wall as a defensive strategy. Arena polo is also up-close for the spectators, allowing them to get "into" the game. If you haven't experienced it - for a sports fan or equine enthusiast, it's a must see."

In order to qualify for the NAAC, players must first accrue points from various USPA arena polo tournaments. Only USPA circuit, sanctioned and National tournaments qualify for player rankings which are adjusted throughout the year. The amount of points a player receives is based on the number of teams in each tournament and where a team places after play concludes. Individual player standings at the end of each tournament also have an impact on final rankings that are used to determine who receives an invitation to compete.

"This is my first time playing in Texas. I was very excited to play in the NAAC. In order to qualify, I had to play a bunch of arena tournaments and score well enough in them in order to be able to come play here in Texas. I will say the polo here is amazing. Everyone here has been so friendly and supportive along the way and I can't wait to come back. This was just a blast."-Megan West-Koll from Chicago.

Players must have a handicap no higher than 3 in order to be eligible to play. The 2023 roster was packed with many talented amateur players, some of which had never played arena polo together previously.

Megan also added, "One of the neat things about this tournament is while some of the players know each other or maybe are related; on my team, we didn't know each other. So, it took us a few games to really get dialed-in and figure out how we play and who does what best. That was part of the fun as well as getting to meet so many people and getting to play with so many people. Shoutout to Nacho (Estrada) and Legends Polo Club for hosting and thank you to Robin Sanchez and the umpires of the USPA for making this a possibility."

The first series of games commenced Thursday to kick-off the quarterfinals. The first game of



David Brooks and Lance Stefanakis in a ride-off during National Arena Amateur Cup photo credit - Murrell Photography



Faris Hanna and Mark Osburn hook mallets during the National Arena Amateur Cup arena polo tournament photo credit - Murrell Photography

the day featured a matchup of Cereal Asesinos (Jose Velez, Leslie Brooks, David Brooks) and Hopward (Jill hunt, Megan-West Koll, Joss Leufancois) with a final score of 13-10. C-Horses (Ava Abboud, Luca Abboud, Chuck Stanislawski) took on Elite Caballos (Kelly Coldiron, Amanda Massey, Don English) with a final score of 8-18. Both early games saw powerful matchups that pushed all players to keep up with a fast and furious play style. All competitors exhibited stamina and resilience, keeping up with the ever-changing line of the ball and showcasing the athleticism of their horses.

"I thought it was a great effort. We were tag-teaming and we got as far as the finals, and I think that shows the caliber of our team. It was good to be able to rise to the occasion and compete for the cup. The teammates I played with were Leslie and David Brooks, they came from North Carolina, and they have the Triangle Area polo club out there. This may have been the first time they were able to play together but it was obvious to me that they worked great together. Where I came in was with some defensive moves to try and free them up to do their tag-teaming. I think it worked very, very well," commented Cereal Asesino player Jose Velez.

"Fortunately, I got to play with my wife Leslie and my friend Jose Velez who I met coming out to a previous NAAC tournament. I was exited to play with Jose because he is a great guy and our teamwork and chemistry was good and we made it to the finals," said David Brooks who drove with horses from North Carolina to play his second NAAC tournament.

The third game of the day came down to a close finish with [Patton Polo](#) (Tammy Havener, John Womble, Lance Stefanakis) pulling off a one-point lead in the final seconds of the game over The



Lance Stefanakis carries the ball while being ridden off by Megan Rahlfs during National Arena Amateur Cup arena polo tournament photo by Murrell Photography



Joss Leufancois of Hopward polo team shoots on goal during National Arena Amateur Cup arena polo tournament photo credit - Murrell Photography

Team to Beat (Amanda Osburn, Matthew Schloemer, Mark Osburn) to wrap up the game 15-14. The final game of the day showcased the efficiency of all competitors as Urban Legends (Jordan Upchurch, Faris Hanna, Samantha Leach) took on Legends Polo Club (Kimberly Vaughn, Sydney Morris, Megan Rahlfs). With both teams fighting hard for the goal, Legends Polo Club kept the pressure on and secured a 23 over 12 win to end the day.

Even the teams that did not advance on Thursday had the opportunity to compete in the Admiral Chester W. Nimitz Cup on Friday. By incorporating multiple tournaments in the scope of one weekend, players were afforded many opportunities to see action in the arena.

Chuck Stanislawski traveled from California to compete, "It was a lot of fun. This was my first time and to get the invitation alone was a big surprise. I was thrilled to get invited and to come to Texas. I love Texas. I have a lot of great memories here because my daughter graduated from SMU. To come back to Dallas was a really good time. We were lucky enough to get some rental horses. Ola Polo drove them in from Florida. Great people - a bunch of fun people here. Everyone is having a great time; the party was fun, and the play is exceptional. I love that there were two different tournaments for double the fun which was fantastic. Overall, it was a big win and big plus and it was very, very enjoyable."

Although no NAAC matches took place on Friday, all participants were encouraged to spectate the Admiral Nimitz Cup semi-finals. C-Horses won out over Hopward in the first game with The Team to Beat securing victory over Urban Legends in the second.

Winners from the Thursday quarterfinals advanced to play in the semi-finals on Saturday. The first game on Saturday featured a fast-paced game between Cereal Asesinos and Elite Caballos. After four chukkers, Cereal Asesinos came out on top with a nail-biting final score of 16 to 15. The heated performance only served to excite and build anticipation for the final matchup of the day between Patton Polo and Legends Polo Club. Legends Polo Club demonstrated great handling of the arena while Patton Polo kept the pressure on. With both teams vying for a spot in Sunday's finals, Patton Polo eventually emerged victorious 18 to 13 over Legends Polo Club. With both winning teams moving on to the Sunday finals, competitors were able to spectate the finals while cheering on their fellow players. The atmosphere stayed electric going into the finals of two tournaments on Sunday.

Sunday featured both the finals and bronze medal matches of the Admiral Chester W. Nimitz tournament and National Arena Amateur Cup. The Admiral Chester W. Nimitz Cup finals commenced with C-Horses and The Team to Beat battling it out for the win. After a heated four chukker game, The Team to Beat emerged true to their name as they pulled off the final win 17-8.

The highly anticipated NAAC finals got off to an impressive start with both teams scoring 2 pointers as their first goals, giving their all in the final match-up of the National Arena Amateur Cup. Cereal Asesinos hammered on and staged a coordinated defense to come up ahead at

halftime with a tight lead of 10 over Patton Polo's 8 points. Heavy hitters from both teams showcased their dedication and skill and drove their teammates to goal, alternating front-runners as all teammates showcased their strengths in ball-control and a few crucial penalty conversions. Powerful performance from both balanced teams ended in no additional goals being made in chukker three. With a tie score of 12-12 at the end of chukker three, both teams bolted into the fourth and final chukker with vigor. Patton Polo showed fierce focus and never let-up, ending up scoring four additional goals in the final chukker to secure a final win of 18 points over Patton Polo's 14.

With all games concluded, The Team to Beat was declared the victors of the Admiral Chester W. Nimitz military tournament. Matthew Schloemer was declared the MVP of the Admiral Nimitz Cup and was recognized for his contribution to his team who congratulated him to much acclaim. Megan West-Koll was named the Sportsmanship Award winner for her exemplary attitude in play and fluid cooperation with both her team and other competitors. Mark Osburn's horse "I'wii" was named Best Playing Pony at the conclusion of the Nimitz.

Patton Polo took the National Arena Amateur Cup 2023 championship title. Lance Stefanakis was declared Most Valuable Player of the NAAC and continues to show great promise with the SMU collegiate polo team. Mark Osburn was awarded the NAAC Sportsmanship award - voted on by all of the teams in the tournament. The NAAC Best Playing Pony award was granted to David Brook's 6-year-old quarter horse "Swan".

"We bought Swan last fall and we started playing him this winter. He is a 6-year-old running quarter horse. He took to it [polo] pretty quickly and he has really developed fast. He developed and fell in love with polo. His strongest attribute is everything really. I can play fast, run-and-gun, and play slow and he drops his shoulder and rides horses off. He's like the total package. His AQHA name is Red Corona. Leslie and I switch back and forth on him."-David Brooks.

"Tammy (Havener) and John (Womble) did a great job taking a man, they were super focused in the final chukker which gave me so much time and allowed us to take over. I'm excited I got into this tournament - it's my first time playing in NAAC and we won!" exclaimed MVP Lance Stefanakis of Patton Polo.

"It was great to have the opportunity to play with and against so many other people. Where we are in North Carolina, we have to travel a lot to play other clubs and players. This was a great opportunity. The polo was fast and clean, really good games and for me, a learning experience," said Tammy Havener of Patton Polo.

In a true reflection of the fast and ever-evolving sport of arena polo, the NAAC continues to promote the sport of polo by adapting its roster and tournament format to keep players involved in the sport for longer. It is the aim of the NAAC to keep players invested in arena polo and to encourage them to hone their skills year-round. It is through this initiative that the level of play is continuously elevated, and players of all levels are encouraged to stay connected and stay

active in both their home circuits and on a national scale.

"The USPA Arena Committee feels that this is one of the most important national tournaments. The National Arena Amateur Cup and the US Open Arena Polo Championship are what we consider our top two tournaments in the United States for arena polo. The reason why the NAAC is so special is that, with the format that it's based on, players who play in this tournament have already made a significant commitment to arena polo in the United States by playing in multiple USPA tournaments. This year we had players that came out of Texas Arena League, Pacific Coast Arena League, Chicago, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, California and North Carolina - from all around the entire US. It's an amazing tournament to bring all these arena polo players together to one place. Nacho Estrada has been a fantastic host with Legends Polo Club to host this tournament for the past several years. And we, the arena committee, are excited about this tournament and what it means to arena polo in general. One thing that makes arena polo so attractive and so accessible is that it's an amateur sport and you don't have to hire a pro. You can come in as an amateur, you can play great polo, and that's what makes this so amazing." - Robin Sanchez, chairman of the USPA Arena Committee.

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