

USA and India Faceoff in International Arena Polo Competition at Lakeside Polo Club

USA defeated India in the Buddy Combs International Arena Challenge while India took top honors in the International Military test match

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EINPresswire.com/ -- The San Diego polo scene was abuzz as Friday Night Under the Lights at the [Lakeside Polo Club](#) arena played host to the 2024 Buddy Combs International Arena Challenge. This year's competition both promised and delivered a heart-pounding showdown between two polo powerhouses: India and the USA. After a thrilling back-and-forth battle, Team USA secured victory by edging out Team India by a mere two-point lead. The tournament as a whole served as a showcase of the intensity of international [arena polo](#) at its best.



Robby Pizarro (USA) and Arsalan Khan (India) go head-to-head in the Buddy Combs International Arena Polo Challenge at Lakeside Polo Club photo by Tequila Sunsets Photography

"There is historical significance to this match-up of countries. India is the birthplace of the modern-day game of polo and arena polo was invented in the United States. A USA team recently traveled to [Hyderabad Polo and Riding Club](#) in India for an International arena polo event there. We welcome the opportunity to extend hospitality to the Indian players after they so graciously hosted the US," Robin Sanchez, United States Polo Association Arena Committee Chair.

In this year's competition, three All-American players were chosen to represent team USA: Nicole Bankhead (California), Robert "Robby" Pizarro (Wisconsin), and David Brooks (North Carolina). Each player brought their A-game to the field to represent the red, white, and blue. Though each were individually skilled players, it was a first for all of them to play together on Team USA in The

Buddy Combs International Arena Challenge.

“Hosting the Buddy Combs International Arena Polo Tournament was a remarkable experience for Lakeside Polo Club and the local polo community. Bringing together talented players from across the US and from India, added unique energy and excitement to the event which was a first for Lakeside Polo Club! In addition, being selected to represent the USA was an honor and an experience of a lifetime! Having the opportunity to play with David Brooks and Robby Pizarro was fantastic and I learned a ton as a player.” -Nicole Bankhead.



Arena polo players representing India and USA - Mrityunjay Chouhan, Arsalan Khan, Pritvi Rathore, Chaitania Kumar, umpire Robin Sanchez, Nicole Bankhead, Robby Pizarro and David Brooks

The Indian Polo Association presented a no-less formidable lineup of accomplished players:

“

[the] Buddy Combs International Arena Challenge is a watershed event in International Arena Polo and marks the beginning of many more bilateral International events between USA and India.”

*Col V S Kahlon, VSM; Secretary
Indian Polo Association*

Chaitania Kumar, Arsalan Khan, and Lt. Col. Prithvi Rathore. The presence of Col. Vikram Singh Kahlon, Secretary General of the Indian Polo Association, as a guest of honor further highlighted the significance of the event.

“The atmosphere at Lakeside was electrifying, and what stood out the most was the growing importance of international arena polo. Events like this not only showcase talent from across the globe but also serve as critical platforms to promote and propagate the sport beyond its traditional strongholds. The close collaboration between the Indian Polo Association, the United States Polo Association (USPA) and the American International Polo Foundation in organizing the tournament demonstrated

the commitment to fostering deeper bonds and expanding arena polo's reach.”- Chaitania Kumar, Team India.

The Buddy Combs International Arena Challenge served a melting pot of skill and healthy competition, bringing players from both countries together for a chance to test their mettle in the arena. Additionally, adjustments were made by the USPA International Committee to ensure even footing for both teams at the start of the games. In light of the fact that the Indian Polo

Association does not assign arena handicaps, the USPA International Committee followed a previous model used in the Arena World Cup by adding one goal to each Indian player's outdoor handicap. In light of this, Team India received a 4-point handicap at the onset of the match.

Gameplay kicked off with an explosive start as India quickly seized the advantage with Chaitania Kumar of Team India being the first to put a point on the board for either team. Team USA responded in-kind with both of their first-chukker goals coming from sharpshooter Robby Pizarro, keeping the game close and setting the stage for an intense battle. Team USA surged ahead in the second chukker, scoring 5 goals to India's 3. Despite this, India kept their strong start, dominating the board in the first half.

"Playing against the players from India was an honor and tough. Seeing the blend of their skill, tenacity and passion for polo was truly inspiring. Events like these continue to solidify and highlight the importance of arena polo! Thank you to the USPA, India polo association, U.S. Polo Assn., Ed Armstrong with AIPF, Robin Sanchez, and Lindsey Ebersbach for supporting this event and making it possible!"-Nicole Bankhead.

The second half of gameplay saw a dynamite performance from Team USA, the tandem teamwork of the USA players adding 4 more goals to their score. India's defense never let-up though, resulting in an all-around tie-score of 11-11 going into the 4th and final chukker. Though India kept a tight line and kept the pressure on, Team USA secured three goals in the nail-biting last minutes of the game. Robby Pizarro sealed the victory for Team USA with the final goal of the 4th, securing a hard-fought 14-12 win. In addition to Team USA's win, Arsalan Khan of team India was declared most valuable player (MVP) for his contribution to his team even in the peak of competition. The best playing pony (BPP) award went to "Maco 7" who was played by Robby Pizarro, owned by George Dill.

"Winning the MVP at the Buddy Combs International Arena Polo Challenge is an incredible honor, but it wouldn't have been possible without my amazing teammates, Chaitania and Lt. Col Prithvi, who fought relentlessly alongside me. Arena polo brings an unmatched intensity to the sport, and competing at an international level challenges us to grow, adapt, and sharpen our skills. It's moments like these that remind me of the importance of teamwork, strategy, and the global spirit of polo. I'm proud to represent India and grateful for this opportunity. The



Arsalan Khan (India) and Nicole Bankhead (USA) anticipate the play in the Buddy Combs International Arena Polo Challenge at Lakeside Polo Club

experience has been invaluable, and I'm excited for what lies ahead."-
Arsalan Khan

The action didn't end on Friday with the Buddy Combs International Arena Challenge as additional gameplay between India and USA spilled into the weekend. On Saturday, October 5th, Lakeside Polo club featured Indian Army vs. US Military for the International Military Test Match. The US Military team, consisting of Jim Deal (Marine Corp), Mark Liarikos (US Army), and Araam Safai (Air Force) took to the arena at the ready. Team US Military faced off against the Indian Army team, comprised of Maj. Mrityunjay (MJ) Chouhan, Lt. Col. Prithvi Rathore, Lt. Col. RK Gautam, and Lt. Col. Yatinder Kumar.

In a fast-paced and competitive game, India emerged victorious to take home the win. Also joining the Indian Army team were Brijesh and Sushma Mathur, along with Indian Polo Association Secretary, Col. Vikramjit Kahlon. The event showcased a fantastic display of skill and sportsmanship from both teams, underscoring the strong bond between India's polo community and the international polo scene. Jim Deal was named most valuable player while the Best Playing Pony award went to Crown, played by Jim Deal, owned by Poway Polo.

"My experience at the Buddy Combs tournament was exceptional. The passion, sportsmanship, and global camaraderie were palpable both on and off the field. The Lakeside Polo Club was a fantastic venue that brought out the best in all players, and the level of competition reaffirmed how vital it is to continue growing



Jim Deal (US Marine Corps) and Lt. Col. Prithvi Rathore (Indian Army) represent their countries' military in an India vs USA Arena Polo competition



USA Military player salutes the flag during the National Anthem

international tournaments in arena polo. International tournaments like this are crucial for the future of arena polo, providing opportunities for players from diverse backgrounds to test their mettle and build lasting relationships within the polo community. This event further solidifies arena polo as a dynamic and exciting format of the sport, gaining momentum on the global stage. – Chaitania Kumar, Team India, Hyderabad Polo and Riding Club.

The 2024 Buddy Combs International Arena Polo Cup was not just a thrilling display of polo, but also a celebration of the unity and camaraderie that exists between the polo communities of India and the USA. This year's arena competition stood testament to the fact that polo endorses both competitive spirits as well as collaborative teamwork-- with a perfect blend of both being necessary to win. Players and spectators all rallied in remembrance of Dr. Clarence C. "Buddy" Combs Jr., making for a weekend of fun that carries on his legacy. As the international polo scene continues to evolve at a rapid pace, polo lovers everywhere can look forward to more thrilling lineups in the future.

"The match was played under lights in front of the home crowd which also included members from the Indian community living in and around San Diego. In a thrilling match the USA team defeated the Indian team with a score of 14-12, with Mr. Arsalan Khan being awarded the MVP. On behalf of the IPA and the players, I would like to convey my special thanks to Ms. Robin Sanchez and Mr. Ed Armstrong for the brilliant planning and conduct of the event. With the growing popularity of Arena Polo in both countries, the 2nd Annual Buddy Combs International Arena Challenge is a watershed event in International Arena Polo and marks the beginning of many more bilateral international events between USA and India."- Col V S Kahlon, VSM; Hony Secretary IPA

The International Arena Challenge is named for Dr. Clarence C. "Buddy" Combs Jr., an American polo player inducted into the Hall of fame in 1992. In addition to becoming the namesake of the Buddy Combs International Arena Challenge, Combs was also an accomplished veterinarian with a Doctorate of Veterinary Medicine from Cornell University. Combs inherited his love of polo and horsemanship from his father and was able to hone his skills during his time at the Pennsylvania Military Academy. Combs continued to evolve as a player well into his time at Cornell and went on to lead his team to win Cornell's first intercollegiate championship title in 1937. The Combs polo legacy didn't stop there though as he went on to win the Junior Championship (later renamed: National Arena Chairman's Cup) on three separate occasions and the Senior Championship seven times during his arena polo career.

By the end of his arena career, Combs had become only the second player to ever reach a 10-goal indoor handicap in 1951. However, his skill was not just contained to arena polo. Upon hitting the grass, Combs won the U.S. Open Polo Championship in 1947 and 1956. Combs played at the highest levels of his sport for almost 50 years all while maintaining a full-time veterinary practice in New Jersey. The Buddy Combs International Arena Challenge now stands a testament to his legacy and an opportunity to help not only the players, but also the sport of polo to flourish.

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