

Area Commander Polo Cup
Jaipur, Rajasthan

Military precision

An all-army side rides to a commanding victory in the season's opener in Rajasthan's Pink City, says **Gaurav Chand**

The first competitive tournament of the Indian season kicks off every September in the Pink City of Jaipur. The capital of Rajasthan, it is top of the list of must-see tourist destinations in India. But apart from the royalty, castles and palaces, Jaipur is also home to seven polo grounds.

The eight-goal Army Commander Polo Cup is played over six days in late September. It is hosted by the 61st Cavalry Division, the only active fully mounted cavalry regiment in the world – largely responsible for keeping polo alive in the Indian Army. The regiment has produced a number of fine polo players, including the present coach of the Indian team, Brigadier VP Singh, who reached a seven-goal handicap in his prime.

Played over on the 61st Cavalry's three adjacent grounds (considered to be the best in India), the tournament attracted almost all of India's most highly rated players, who helped form the nine teams vying for the season's first serious title. Among them were some of the country's most exciting emerging talents, Gaurav Sahgal and Zahan Kapoor, both too young to vote, drink or drive. Picking a favourite from the outset was an impossible task, with quality players spread liberally throughout each of the sides.

With the early league stages out of the way, at the semi-final it was South Western Command and Equi Sport that advanced to the final, with victories over Jaipur Polo Company and the 61st Cavalry respectively.

South Western Command's formidable attacking trio of Navjit Sandhu, Ravi Rathore and Vishal Chauhan were initially matched goal for goal by Jaipur Polo Company's Vishal Singh, Lokendra Singh, Varun Sharma and Zahan Kapoor but, in the second half of the game, SWC sped away to what was eventually an easy victory, securing their berth in the final.

The other semi-final saw Samir Suhag at his best, though he couldn't prevent his 61st Cavalry side from defeat in an extra seventh chukka at the hands of Team Equi Sport's



Above: Amer Fort, a short distance from the city of Jaipur, one of India's busiest polo centres



Photographs by Gaurav Chand and Zakir Kahn

Left: the winners, South Western Command (l-r: Capt Vishal Chauhan, Capt Arjun Patil, Maj Ravi Rathore and Lt Col Navjit Sandhu), with the Army Commander Polo Cup

Adhiraj Singh, Ransher Singh, Abhimanu Pathak and Bhupinder Singh. Equi Sport were well-balanced and played four-man team polo, moving the ball around well.

However, the game was much disrupted and, with failing light and the teams tied at 7-7 at the end of regulation time, organisers were forced to postpone the final seventh chukka until the morning. One such disruption was when Equi Sport's Ransher Singh suffered a fall early in the game, although bizarrely, if anything it appeared to make him stronger. Sure enough, they went on to win and were looking a good bet for the final. Yet, in what many anticipated would be a

thrilling match, the final was something of a tame affair. Aside from a late last-chukka burst from Equi Sport, when the game was truthfully already lost, South Western Command dominated throughout, winning in some style, 7-4.

Tournament: Area Commander Polo Cup

Dates: 23-28 September 2008

Host: 61st Cavalry

Handicap level: 8 goal

Winner: South Western Command

Number of team entries: Nine

Final teams:

South Western Command (8): Capt Arjun Patil -1; Capt Vishal Chauhan 2; Maj Ravi Rathore 3; Lt Col Navjit Sandhu 4

Equi Sport (8): Bhupinder Singh 1; Abhimanu Pathak 2; Ransher Singh 2; Adhiraj Singh 3

Further photographs and details of the tournament are available at www.indianpolo.com

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