

Playtime in Mumbai

John Bunn reports back from an eventful few days in India, where he and three British players of note slipped to a narrow defeat to their hosts



The event received national press coverage, including (clockwise from left) in *The Sunday Times of India*, in *The Bombay Times*, and in *DNA After Hours* magazine



With the International Arena Test Match between

England and Scotland out of the way in late February, the All England Polo Club Hickstead turned its attention to the next of its overseas tours, as I accepted the job of forming a 15-goal invitational side to play in Mumbai in March. It followed a medium-goal match against an Indian side at Guards Polo Club in summer 2009, billed as the Asia Cup, and another return fixture has already been confirmed for this season, at Guards again on 26 June.

I have already led sides to the snow polo at Klosters in previous years and we also play at least once a year in Barbados, but this was the first time I had formed a team to play in India. Organisers Celebrasian, an events company concentrating on occasions with a UK-India focus, asked me to bring players that were people of influence or importance to UK polo.

In calling upon Jamie Morrison, Jack Kidd and Henry Brett, while I might not have picked the UK's top professionals, I certainly brought some of the best "players" in the game!

Sure enough, a thrilling four days was the result. The organisers flew us out first-class by

Kingfisher Airlines and put us up at the Imperial Palace Hotel on the outskirts of Mumbai (though the locals still call it Bombay).

With a successful warm-up game under our belts, and the promise of more new ponies from the Amateur Riders' Club for the main "international" game on our final day, we set off to join in the fun and games of the Indian Premier League cricket (IPL), and an IPL party with some of the world's best players on the top floor of the Four Seasons Hotel.

It may not have been the ideal preparation for our main game, but we made a good start in front of the 400-500 spectators, opening up a three-goal lead with a penalty and two field goals. We maintained a two-goal advantage all the way through to the final chukka, when we were eventually out-horsed and ARC India snuck past us to victory, 9-8.

However, Henry Brett finished as the game's most valuable player and the quality of polo was deemed to be fairly good, given the slightly agricultural appearance of the ground, which actually played a lot better than it looked.

The challenge has already been re-laid again for a rematch in 2011, when Celebrasian's Neil Sen hopes to expand the tour to include some polo in Delhi as well. ☒

University challenge: Oxbridge in Delhi

EARLIER THIS SPRING, Oxford University students Tom Mayou, Tessa Lord and Max Kirchoff joined forces with Cambridge University's Lucy Sturridge to form a mixed Oxbridge side to take on Team Army at the Army Equestrian Centre, Delhi Cantonment, on 4 March. Kirchoff was also captain of the Cambridge University Polo Club for two years as an undergraduate, and Lord is this year's Oxford University club captain.

Their visit coincided with annual dinner celebrations of the Oxford and Cambridge Society of India at the home of the British High Commissioner, Sir Richard Stagg.

The tourists drew 3-3 with their Indian Army hosts, as captain Mayou scored all three goals to ensure the diplomatic result. A skilful display of tent pegging by members of the 61st Cavalry followed the game, before Lady Arabella Stagg presented the trophies and the players and spectators unwound with an evening of tea, cucumber sandwiches and kebabs.

Oxbridge (-2): Tom Mayou (Oxford, Mansfield) 1; Tessa Lord (St Cats, Oxford) -2; Max Kirchoff (Harris Manchester, Oxford) 0; Luci Sturridge (Homerton, Cambridge) -1

ARC India vs AEPC, Hickstead; 20 March; Amateur Riders Club, Mumbai

Result: ARC India beat Hickstead, 9-8

Principal sponsor: Celebrasian

Handicap level: 15 goal

Number of team entries: two

Most valuable player: Henry Brett

International teams:

ARC India (13): Harsh Piramal / Shyam Mariwala 1; Vishal Chauhan 3; Ravi Rathore 4; Samir Suhag 5

AEPC, Hickstead (14): John Bunn 0; Jamie Morrison 4; Henry Brett 6; Jack Kidd 4



Clockwise from left: Henry Brett, named MVP, and team-mate Jack Kidd; Jack Kidd (red hat) during the showdown in Mumbai; Hickstead and ARC India clash on the dry ground at the Amateur Riders' Club; teams, sponsors and hosts relax after the game. A rematch is already scheduled for next year, with action in Delhi as well

