

# AMERICA'S CUP OF POLO

by  
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Photos by Eduardo Galliani



Blackwater USA provided the spectacular flag jump onto the polo field.  
(Photo by Hay Hardy)

After 18,000 truck loads of new dirt, the venue was ready on May 12 for the inaugural America's Cup of Polo festivities held at Morven Park near Leesburg, Virginia. The event was a gala unsurpassed in the polo world in the US. Two of the sport's most well known competitors joined forces to spearhead the event: Tareq Salahi and Charles Muldoon, both with a background in phi-

lanthropy and polo events, set out to make this event memorable. Along with a dedicated committee they spent three years planning and executing the day's polo match and activities.

These two polo enthusiasts were joined by the Morven Park Foundation to transform a hay field on the historic property into a polo field. The event centered around America's 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary and

Loudoun County's 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Sponsors for the day-long extravaganza included Loudoun County, Land Rover, Merrill Lynch Private Banking, Market Salamander, SunTrust Bank, Lansdowne Resort, Rehau, Inova Healthcare and the two team sponsors, Cartier and Ritz-Carlton.

The event was designed to benefit the Journey for the Cure Foundation, a



David King of the US and Howard Hipwood of the British team battle for a shot on the ball.





David King of Cartier USA hits a near side back shot to put the ball back toward his goal and his teammates.



The first America's Cup of Polo Trophy presentation to the winning Ritz-Carlton British team

The American team with Rita D. McClenny (center)



public charitable foundation that raises funds for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society and the MS Society, and for Historic Morven Park. The Cure Foundation supports science grants to help find a cure for diseases such as leukemia and MS. Their secondary goal was to showcase Virginia, its heritage, history, and products such as Virginia wine, which has gained such popularity in the last few decades. Tareq Salahi's family-owned Oasis Winery has won countless awards and has been ranked as one of the top 10 wineries in the world.

A festive atmosphere unfolded during the day as the spectators descended on Morven Park. The women were dressed to the nines with garden party dresses and large decorative hats. The gentlemen were dapper in their bowler hats, seersucker suits, bow ties, and other finery emulating the young bon vivants of years gone by. Washington luminaries such as David Gregory of NBC News were spotted in the crowd. Other notable attendees included Italian ambassador Giovanni Castellaneta; Afghan ambassador Said Jawad; Qubad Talabani, son of Iraqi President Jalal Talabani; Salamander Hospitality Owner and Washington Mystics co-owner Sheila Johnson; Redskins' offensive coordinator Al Saunders and *America's Most Wanted* host John Walsh. There were huge tents with the food provided mainly by Market Salamander of Middleburg.

Preparation for the event began in earnest at Morven Park last October. They took a relatively flat hay field and created berms on either side as viewing platforms. Thus, the 18,000 truck loads of dirt got put to use. The lack of rain and cold in the spring wreaked havoc with the idea, but in the end the mission was accomplished. On the day of the match the berms were festooned with tents for sponsors and their guests. The tents surrounded by picket fences created a garden area for each sponsor, and additionally there were ringside seats on the field—a remarkable feat and



Sponsors' tents festooned the berms beside the polo field. (Photo by Hay Hardy)



Young bon vivants Christopher Sheeron and Frederic deSibert (Photo by Hay Hardy)

and great deal of work by Morven Park and estate manager Will O'Keefe.

The venue was further enhanced by a full stage and sound system at the end of the field on which entertainment was a constant and ongoing treat. Bands such as No Speed limit, Rock Band Journey and The Webb Sisters from UK were there together with The Urban Nation H.I.P.-H.O.P. choir. If you missed something, there was a huge screen TV at the other end of the field to cover the action and show replays.

Before the match there were performances by fife-and-drum corps and dances by Native Americans to welcome attendees. There was even a fly-over by Navy F-18s. Entertainment at the half of

the match consisted of a well-executed musical ride by the US Park Mounted Police and a Coast Guard helicopter demonstration for the kids. The traditional divot stamping was also part of the audience participation at half time. There were elaborate fireworks displays during half time and after the match.

The America's Cup of Polo Match itself featured an exhibition match between players from the United States and Great Britain. The American team, sponsored by Cartier, consisted of Tareq Sahali, Charlie Muldoon, David King, and Michael Hoffman. The Americans were coached by the venerable Joe Muldoon. The British team, sponsored by Ritz-Carlton, was led by former 9-goaler Julian

Hipwood, Howard Hipwood, Max Secunda, Jeff Davis, and Debbie Nash. Every player needs at least six ponies to play the full chukker game. The caliber of the polo ponies was exceptional. They were provided for the players by local polo farms and Destination Polo from Texas.

The action was intense and the crowd was treated to some very good polo playing. Player Michael Hoffman commented that there were really great athletes on the field, and he was proud to be on their backs. The commentary by "Cowboy Bob" was entertaining with a capital E. His fellow announcers acted as straight men for the venerable and well-known polo announcer.

The British team scored the first and second goals very quickly and Charlie Muldoon answered with the first American goal. The play was quick and the goals hard won. The final score was British 7 and Americans 3. The British team was proud to accept the first America's Cup Polo Trophy.

This is a work in progress as Morven Park plans on building more polo fields, and perfecting the one just built, for the next America's Cup of Polo Match and other polo events as well. Next year the tradition will continue with the Cup match between the United States and Italy. Be sure that you put the event on your spring calendar and be at Morven Park to enjoy a magical event at a magical site.

For more information, see [morvenpark.org](http://morvenpark.org) and [americascupofpolo.com](http://americascupofpolo.com).

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