



ZACARA

ON FIRE

Vital Stats at a Glance:

What: The 109th Maserati US Open

When: 21st April '13

Where: International Polo Club Palm Beach

Who:

Zacara

Magoo Laprida (8)
Lyndon Lea (1)
Facundo Pieres (10)
Mike Azzaro (7)

26

Valiente

Bob Jornayvaz (A)
Pelon Stirling (10)
Adolfo Cambiasso (10)
Santi Torres (6)

26

Winners: Zacara

Worthy: Most Valuable Player = Facundo Pieres

Well done! Best Playing Pony = Medallion owned by Bob Jornayvaz and played by Pelon Stirling

Months spent in preparation, days of watching endless game footage, hours spent discussing plays and tactics all boiled down to two hours on a perfect pitch with glowering clouds threatening rain over Wellington Palm Beach when two polo super powers, Zacara met Valiente in the Final of The Maserati US Open.

There is always a charge of electricity running through the crowd when superstars take to the pitch – and never more so when Cambiasso and Pieres ride out. Even in the pre game, calm before the storm when they are warming up, you can feel a definite thrill amongst the spectators. They know they're about to witness the game of polo at the absolute top level and the excitement is palpable.

It helps also that International Polo Club Palm Beach really knows how to put on a show. Not only is it possibly one of the most beautiful polo locations in the world with its emerald pitches and dusty pink hued grandstand filled to a bursting capacity; not only because Veuve Clicquot flows freely at half time and jets fly over head and not simply because as the final bell rings the sky is turned into a riot of colour as red, white and blue streamers turn the ground into carnival. It is also the culmination of a long and tough season of high goal in Palm Beach. It is no doubt that The US Open is the tough mark of these polo playing assassins, but they've struggled through The C.V Whitney Cup and The USPA Piaget Gold Cup – where Valiente managed a win over Zacara – so they've had more than enough target practice.

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Charley Larcombe Reports

On paper, it was a harsh job to contest either team. Cambiaso, on a good day is deemed unbeatable, but there have been one or two chinks as of late in what was his impenetrable armour. Pelon Stirling is widely regarded as not only a gentleman off the pitch, but an outstanding one on the field and most deserved of his 10 goal rating. Their teammate, Santi Torres had lit up the US high goal season and is on course to raise his 6 goal handicap whilst Valiente patron, Bob Jormayvaz has made playing and successes in the 26 goal a regular occurrence.

Their opposition, Zacara are basking in the warmth of an incredibly successful few years with British Open wins in 2011 and a win in last year's US Open already to their credit. Facundo Pieres, at only 26 has already notched up more wins in The Argentine Open and the world's greatest high goal tournaments than anyone thought possible in someone so young. Magoo Laprida is arguably under-handicapped at 8 goals whilst Mike Azzaro, a Hall of Famer and one of America's most victorious players is a welcomed addition to any team.

Both teams were undefeated in their campaign to US Open Finals' day and so it was with much trepidation that the crowd picked their allegiance and waited with baited breath for the ball to be thrown in.

Anyone hoping for a close Final with plenty of edge-of-their-seat plays and will-they-won't-they muscle clinchers were certainly not disappointed. Like greyhounds let out of the stalls on a racetrack, both teams fiercely attacked each other as seven goals were scored in the first chukka, with Zacara just coming out on top.

By the second, both teams were more guarded and deliberate with their defence but nonetheless still lead to some exciting end-to-end polo and some impressive goals. In a match where the score was tied eight times, there were certainly plenty of in-your-heart moments.

Heading into the last chukka, the score was 13: 12 to Valiente after Torres secured a penalty conversion just before the bell in the fifth. Both teams knew what was within their grasp and the pressure must've been mounting. Facundo drew the score level in the opening moments before nudging his team ahead with his 11th goal of the game shortly after. A third goal from Zacara gave them some breathing room and undoubtedly forced Valiente into desperate frenzied fouling. A commotion near the Valiente goal with less than three minutes left on the clock saw the ambulance drive on to the pitch to tend to Cambiaso but it was merely stalling the inevitable at such a late stage. Valiente were awarded a midfield penalty but Cambiaso protested and hit the ball forward as soon as the umpire placed the ball on the pitch. It was a little unclear if Cambiaso then removed himself from the game or whether a red card was shown, but nonetheless in a goodwill gesture of sportsmanship he shook hands with the Zacara players before riding off the pitch.

Unsurprisingly Cambiaso's demonstration awarded a penalty to Zacara and for the eleventh time, Facundo connected with the ball and sent it flying between the posts, clinching The 2013 US Open and retaining the title for a second year.

The stands erupted, streamers filled the air and a real party atmosphere lit up the Palm Beach Club. As the presentation got underway, all the Zacara grooms cheered and sang, celebrating their involvement in the winning side. The team now up polo sticks and head to the UK, where Lyndon and Facundo will look to add a 2013 Queen's Cup and maybe a British Open to their growing list of accolades.

A Final such as The US Open watched in such incredible surroundings is a must for any polo enthusiast. The pomp, ceremony and exhibition of high goal polo are second to none.

