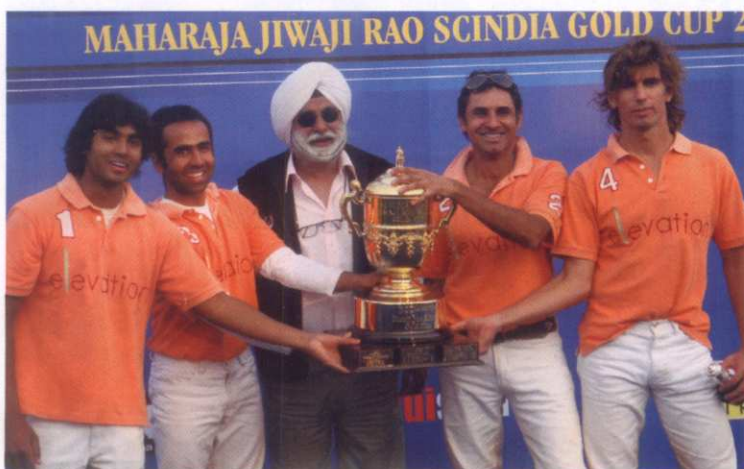


Ignition in India

This month sees **Gaurav Chand** begin his regular column, bringing us news and views from the 2008-2009 Indian polo season. With polo now well underway, having kicked off at the start of September, he previews what promises to be a very busy next six months

Photographs by Gaurav Chand



Elevation, winners of the Maharaja Jiwaji Rao Scindia Gold Cup in New Delhi, with Col KS Garcha (l-r): Hamza Ali (2); Bhavani Kalvi (2); Satinder Garcha (2); Gerardo Mazzini (6)



Action from the final of the Vodafone Sirmur Cup at the Rambagh polo ground in Jaipur, as four-goalers Uday Kalaan and Manupal Godara ride-off for the ball

From polo at 11,000 feet in Ladakh, to the cradle of modern polo in Manipur, to the oldest existing club in the world in Calcutta, to the land of the Maharajas in Rajasthan, to the aggressive and spirited polo in Delhi, to glamorous and expensive venues in Mumbai, India has it all.

Sunday 7 September saw the beginning of our season in Hyderabad, followed shortly by the Area Commander's Cup in Jaipur, played at the four polo grounds of the 61st Cavalry, the last fully horse mounted cavalry regiment in the world. By mid-October, we will have proceeded to Delhi, the nerve centre of Indian polo, where a series of what is likely to be 8 goal competitions will take place, continuing right up until early December.

This is only the beginning of what the Indian players have been preparing for throughout the northern hemisphere's summer: the ongoing polo season here snakes its way across the country and runs all the way through to March and is a gruelling series of hard, rough, energy-sapping, fiercely competitive matches. Winning is everything.

Polo in India increasingly attracts more and more of the 'who's who' from the local corporate,

political, fashion and social circuits, all present in their smartest and chicest attire.

In December we move to the Umaid Bhavan Palace polo grounds in Jodhpur, the Blue City, for three weeks of polo in Rajasthan, which this year sees an international match between India and Russia. The region's polo heritage and pedigree is infamous. In 1925, the Jodhpur side beat everybody, including the US Army team, and won the Hurlingham Champion Polo Cup and the Roehampton Open Polo Cup in what was a memorable season, announcing the region on the polo map. Scheduled for Saturday 20 December, a reciprocal India versus England match is planned in Mumbai, the first match, as was covered in the August issue of *Polo Times*, having been played at Guards Polo Club in June.

The 2009 leg of the season kicks off at the Rambagh Polo ground in the Pink City of Jaipur. The game of kings in the 'land of kings', polo matches in Jaipur are graced with the presence of Maharajas and royalty. And support there is widespread amongst fans from all other walks of life as, on every chilly Sunday afternoon in January, the Jaipur polo fans stand shoulder to shoulder in the sunlight, perched in trees or poles, along the sidelines and behind the goal posts cheering on

their favourite teams and blaming the umpires every time theirs is denied a goal. Jaipur is then set to host an international arena polo tournament featuring six international teams later in the month, likely to be India, Pakistan, England, South Africa, Singapore and Jamaica. The sides are scheduled to participate at a new, air-conditioned, state-of-the-art, indoor polo arena with over 1,500 seating capacity near the airport in the southern part of the city – the first in Asia.

In February, polo once again returns to Delhi for another four weeks. Then, if it is March, it must be Mumbai: the action shifts to the financial capital of the country, the home of corporate India and, of course, the set of Bollywood. Movie stars mingle with corporate honchos, enjoy the hospitality and experience the Mumbai nightlife and polo's raucous after-parties. Last March saw Mumbai host a 14 goal Test Match between India and Australia, as was covered in the June issue of *Polo Times* and in which India prevailed, 8-4½. The same week, early this year, also saw the inaugural Unitech Shivalik Night Arena Polo Match played under floodlights.

Do join me every month for the next few issues and discover just how much you didn't know about polo in India.