

Press release, Thursday, January 14th 2016

Polo makes its grand entry at the Longines Masters



Polo, the oldest of team sports, will be on the programme for the first time at the Longines Hong Kong Masters. This is effectively a homecoming for this equestrian discipline, which was played in Asia back in 600 BC, to which several Asiatic prints and sculptures from the period bear witness. Next February, from the 19th to the 21st, and after 30 years of absence, polo will come back to Hong-Kong through the Longines Masters and thanks to their new official partner, the luxury brand Shanghai Tang.

SHANGHAI TANG
上海滩

EEM, the founding company and organiser of the Longines Masters series, is constantly evolving and always on the lookout for innovative ideas. It has always made a point of opening up the Longines Masters to other disciplines that stand to benefit from show jumping's extensive media coverage, as well as giving audiences the chance to discover or better understand other sports. This year, dressage was magnificently showcased in Hong Kong and Los Angeles; and in Hong Kong again, the racing world (very popular in Asia) encountered the world of show jumping last February. The equestrian show, as we saw once again in Paris in December with Sylvie Wilms, also plays an important part in the Longines Masters' programme. From 19th to 21st February 2016, after 30 years' absence, polo will return to Hong Kong thanks to the Longines Masters.

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Accompanying the star horses on the international jumping circuit, eight horses from the Chantilly Polo Club will be flown out to Hong Kong at the start of February. They will take part in an arena-polo demonstration tournament: the Shanghai Tang Polo Cup.



Polo was discovered by the English in India in the 19th century and imported back to England with English rules. It is normally played outside on a 275m by 145m (10-acre) grass field, but there is a more “packagable” version of polo, played on a sand (arena means sand in Spanish) surface that is both smaller and closer to the spectators. Whereas the full version of polo is played by two teams of four, arena polo involves two teams of two players and has simplified rules to make it more accessible to a wider public. It’s an ideal format for a thrill-seeking audience that has never watched polo before!

The games will be fast-paced, dynamic and spectacular to watch, especially as the players from 3 continents who will be in Hong Kong are all hugely talented professionals: the French no. 1 and six goaler, **Brieuc Rigaux**, the Australian six goaler, **Dirk Gould**, winner, among other victories, of the **Al Habtoor Royal Windsor** this year, Great Britain’s **Malcolm Borwick** (six goaler) and **Nico Curto**, the Argentinean five goaler, a professional player who is very much involved in polo in this part of Asia.

The players will battle it out in four periods (called chukkers in polo) of 4 minutes each. With stoppage time and changes of horse, each chukker will last around 30 minutes.



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EEM's desire to encourage Hong Kong audiences to discover polo goes beyond the professional matches. The Longines Masters arena will be open to local players, who will be able to participate in a penalty shoot-out to qualify to play alongside the professional players. Introductory polo sessions with wooden horses and small foot mallets will be run for children as well as adults throughout the weekend.

Polo is a fast-growing sport in Asia: clubs are springing up in China, for example in Tianjin which is organising the **Snow Polo World Cup** at the end of January, polo is played in Malaysia and in Thailand, which organises top quality tournaments with professional players from Europe and Argentina, and polo has been re-introduced into Mongolia by a German, where it is mainly played by nomads. So this return to Hong Kong is very much part of polo's recapture of its ancestral lands. The audience at the **Longines Hong Kong Masters**, who love games and adore thrills and spills, will quickly be smitten by the **Shanghai Tang Polo Cup**. Especially as, for this première, EEM has once again called on the services of some excellent partners: the specialists from Chantilly Polo Club, one of the three biggest clubs in Europe, as well as some big-name professional players who will bring all the flavour of a major sporting event to this demonstration tournament.



** The handicap corresponds to a polo player's level (it varies between -2 and 10). A player's handicap evolves according to his playing ability, the quality of his horses and his tournament results. The best Brits (and thus the best Europeans) are seven goalers and the best French player is a six goaler: Brieuc Rigaux who was trained in Chantilly. Since 1913, only 48 players have been ten goalers in Argentina: there are currently nine Argentineans and one Uruguayan.*

The level of the team is determined by adding the handicaps of the four players together. For the French Open, there are teams with "16 goals", i.e. a one goaler, an eight goaler, a five goaler and a two goaler. The Shanghai Tang Polo Cup will be played at a 12 goal-level, i.e. the equivalent of 24 goals in outdoor polo which corresponds to the highest level of polo outside of Argentina.

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