

Bringing people together again for the Rundle Cup felt like a very overdue moment!

The Rundle Cup since founded in Malta 1910, has only never taken place for three separate reasons;

One was the transition of the prestigious polo tournament being transferred from Malta to the UK. The next was due to a World War and the third due to the Coronavirus Covid-19 pandemic in 2020.

Even in 2021 it seemed touch and go that the tournament would even take place, what with the pandemic; pandemic and the generally atrocious weather leading up to the day. As storm Evert ripped its way through Tedworth Park Polo club lashing down with torrential rain and gale force winds the night before, it seemed that rebuilding the shopping village was a job to do twice, as well as the event organisation. However, the hard-working new management team at Tedworth Park Polo Club were well prepared and optimistic, that the already twice postponed day would go ahead with a rejuvenated sense of energy, bringing backing back the crowds for a historical Rundle Cup.

Incredibly the weather god granted our wishes for clear skies as circa 4000 people strolled through the gates, having dusted off their pretty summer dresses and the men hunted out their brightly coloured trousers. It truly was a splendiferous sight watching the grounds fill up with friends and families enjoying picnics once again and sponsors being entertained in their hospitality facilities. The British Polo gin stand was certainly keeping everyone refreshed. The Charity Fair Association shopping village was buzzing being back to business and Col Simon Ledger (rtd) was once again, super excited to be back in charge of the mic entertaining the crowds with his exuberant commentary. The day of polo ahead really was just the ticket and the boost we all needed after such a torrid time.

To launch the polo proceedings, we welcomed a new match supported by the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust and Tedworth Equestrian Charity, which is a wellbeing & welfare charity providing opportunities for people in and out of the armed forces, utilising the incredible power of equine therapy. The Veterans v Heroes Polo Teams from the first line out showed a dramatic increase in ability and skill since Peter O'Rourke's Strategic Shipping took over their sponsorship in 2017. They robustly showed that the hard work, determination, and road to recovery, is much more successful as a team with polo ponies! After such lifechanging injuries teamwork really does make the dream work, where they played an outstanding level of polo you would expect from fully able-bodied players.

With a final score of Strategic Shipping Heroes 2 ½ goals to Veterans 1 goal, Peter O'Rourke commented 'I am in awe of how much everyone has improved. They gave the crowds a proper game of polo and as a result a much higher level of confidence radiated from everyone. I am having another proud moment!'

Leading us to the second match of the day there was plenty more action both on the pitch and above it, as the REME Lightning Bolts parachute team dropped out of the sky before Her Majesty's Band of the Royal Marines marched on the teams for the Indian Cavalry Officers Trophy. Again, a new match born on Rundle Cup Day 2021 which will continue annually into the future. With the new format this gives the playing members of Tedworth Park Polo Club

the chance to have their day of glory, playing on the number one ground against the UK Armed Forces Polo Association. (UKAFPA) The match certainly did not disappoint as they gallantly showed what dynamo teams they were! Four seriously impressive fast and accurate end to end chukkas that whipped the crowd into a frenzy of excitement. It really was on the edge of your seat stuff and apparent the sportsmanship, tactics and determination from both sides was going to be seriously spirited. For the first two chukkas it was fairly neck and neck with both teams slotting the ball through the posts, however the Tedworth Park Polo Team of Haigh, Whittington, Talbot-Rice and Hankinson really got the party started and pulled out some sensational moves as they went into the half time pitch invasion two goals in the lead. Arguably the UKAFPA young'uns had more to prove with Mawby opening the third chukka with his second goal of the day. Then Fair backing him up pulling it back to 4 ½ goals (UKAFPA) to 4 goals (TPC).

Together they created a dazzling fast game of polo where the tactical acumen of Haigh and Whittington for TPC fell into perfect symmetry in the final chukka. It was like they were an old married couple with Haigh knowing where Whittington was going to be and Whittington knowing where Haigh was going to defend and hit the ball. With their hard man marking from Talbot- Rice and Hankinson, they convincingly outperformed taking them to a 7 1/2 to 5 goal victory. Although Fair for the UKAFPA showed a hard-fought final minute, as he broke his stick in half galloping flat out to goal, flipped it round like a world class magician and hit the ball straight through the posts with the handle. Who needs a stick anyway?

Best Playing Pony: Roulette, owned and ridden by Ed Whittington, sponsored by Thales UK Ltd.

Most valuable Player: James Haigh – Tedworth Park Polo Club

The crowds then got comfortable with their front row seats for the skirmish between the Army and Navy for the illustrious Rundle Cup. As the battle commenced both teams lined up engaging in polo combat and both sides meaning business. The newcomer Capt Scarlett Glover was the first to score for the Army however, the navy responded quickly, retaliating with Spiller saying, 'take one back!'

The next two chukkas saw both teams getting into deep trouble with both sides having to play a hefty defensive game. There at the back for the army side was the Navy's most frustrating level of Army defence, as Selfe seemed to have an automatic tracking system on the ball and was always there hitting it away again. As hard as the Navy team tried, they just couldn't make clear water despite several attempts peppering the goal, but just the wrong side of it. By chukka three the army team were starting to really gel together as Glover scored her second goal for the Army and The Honourable Will Cecil was like a heat seeking missile charging on the ball scoring goal after goal. It was full steam ahead, however, it just wasn't going to be the Navy's day.

Closing this prestigious polo tournament, the Army team were victorious 9 goals to the Navy's 2 1/2 putting the Army into the Rundle Cup Hall of Fame for 2021.

Best Playing Pony: Ruby, owned and ridden by Harry Rourke, sponsored by WL Gore & Associates

Most Valuable Player: Lt The Honourable Will Cecil, sponsored by Forensic Risk Alliance.

We would like to thank our incredible sponsors who give their continued support to The Rundle Cup:

Forensic Risk Alliance, Fine Wines Direct, Turner and Sons, Thales UK Ltd.

We also would like to thank our umpires for the day including Tim Brown, Stevie McCraith, Gaston Devrient and Matt Evetts.