



AL HABTOOR ETON VS HARROW POLO CUP
 HABTOOR POLO OXBRIDGE CHALLENGE
 DUBAI, UAE
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An English Arabian classic

Hugo Eliot

A classic English summer's day came to Dubai in February when Eton and Harrow lined up on the desert turf at Dubai Polo and Equestrian Club to contest the inaugural Al Habtoor Polo Eton vs Harrow Polo Cup.

The brainchild of Dubai-based old Etonian Tom Hudson of the Old Etonian Association Middle East, the event marks the latest addition to a series of sporting encounters between England's two eminent schools that stretches back to 1805. In recent years polo has increasingly been included in the Eton, Harrow and Oxbridge sporting calendars with both Princes William and Harry, possibly the two best known Old Etonians of all, regularly in the saddle. However, while seeing Britain's top educational institutions represented at Smiths Lawn may be commonplace, the chance to witness such an encounter in Dubai was a first.

Not surprisingly given the historic aspect of the occasion, hundreds turned out to enjoy the day and the clubhouse at Arabian Ranches took on a strictly English garden party atmosphere as cucumber and egg sandwiches fit to make the most pernickety Anglo-Saxon grandmother proud were proffered and stocks of Earl Grey disappeared faster than its namesake could pass a Reform Bill.

JET-POWERED ETON ECLIPSES HARRIED HARROW

Up first on the field were Harrow and Eton with Harrow enjoying half a goal handicap opening lead. It didn't last long however... John Nery was the first to score for Eton. Having brought his own horses over for the occasion, Nery clearly intended to make full use of them and his first goal was to become one of many as he quickly emerged as the man upon whom Eton's fortunes rested.

However, Nery's match was not without mishap and Harrow's first goal followed a nifty nosedive from the Etonian when his pony slipped and fell in hot pursuit of his rivals. Both pony and player were quickly back on their feet, but Harrow was quick to capitalise on the mishap, belting the ball through the Eton goal to close the first chukka ahead, 1:1.5.

Play resumed with the Harrow squad on form and the Household Cavalry's Rupert Lewis, playing at no. 2, scoring again for Harrow before Nery moved in to reply, closing the second chukka 3:2.5 for Eton. It was in the third chukka that Eton truly began to assert with Nery playing constantly upfront, supported ably by Dubai-based Raj Madha. With the score reading 4:2.5 in Eton's favour Madha sustained a crashing tumble mid-tackle, but happily remounted to cheers from an evidently anxious crowd.

FACING PAGE: Al Habtoor beat Oxbridge convincingly in the afternoon's final thriller.



Photos: © Lucy Monro.



The fourth and final chukka opened with a penalty for Harrow that Rupert Lewis was quick to convert, moving his team to within half a goal of their opponents. Within minutes the tide had turned for Harrow as Lewis followed up with another power ball through the Eton posts to move his squad ahead 4:4.5.

Nery and his jetset ponies were having none of this and, with some tremendous team support from the entire squad, he morphed into an Etonian attack dog - thwacking not one, but two, goals between the Harrow goalposts in the closing minutes to notch a 6:4.5 victory up for Eton by the closing bell.

HABTOOR POLO THRASHES BRITISH BRAINIACS

While Eton celebrated on the terrace by washing crustless cucumber nibbles down with bubbles, Oxbridge went head to head with Habtoor Polo with somewhat less success. Oxford and Cambridge may be home to some of the world's most celebrated intellect, but their combined force failed to withstand the sheer force of Emirati attack on the polo field!

Mohammed Al Habtoor's squad enjoyed a ½ goal handicap lead, but appeared not to need it as the dark-shirted foursome dominated from the outset, putting the first goal on the scoreboard in the opening minutes of the first chukka.

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ABOVE: There were plenty of spills as well as thrills, with all the games hotly contested.

FACING PAGE: A large crowd brought picnics and bottles of bubbly to enjoy some quintessentially English scraps between old public school rivals Harrow and Eton.



Photo: © Lucy Monro.

A handsome helping of end to end play made for great spectatorsport but no further goals in the opener, but Mohammed Al Habtoor was quick to score with a great under-pony shot when the action resumed in the second, moving Habtoor Polo ahead 2.5:0.

The third chukka opened with Oxbridge's Jacqui Hooper suffering an alarming crash into a goalpost, but like everyone else who had hit the deck in the course of the afternoon she remounted and returned to the fray – after all British honour was quite definitely at stake!

Oxbridge kept the pace up but the Habtoor squad was taking no prisoners - as the whistle blew at the end of the third chukka the home team led 4.5:0.

Play resumed in the fourth with some technical attack and defence from both sides but it was Habtoor Polo that again converted technique into goals with young Habtoor Al Habtoor scoring not once, but twice, to secure a 6.5:0 victory for his father's team.

As so history shall record that the might of English intellect was vanquished on Arabian turf... and it didn't even make the front page of *The Times!*



Photo: © Lucy Monro.