



Sapo Caset and Agustin Merlos in action.

PHOTO BY DAVID LOMINSKA

# LUCCHESI 40-GOAL POLO CHALLENGE RAISES \$375,000 FOR INJURED, ILL PLAYERS AND GROOMS

By Catherine Zachariadis and Callie Clement

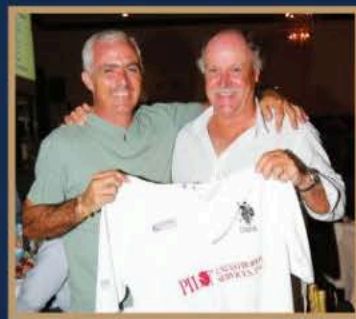
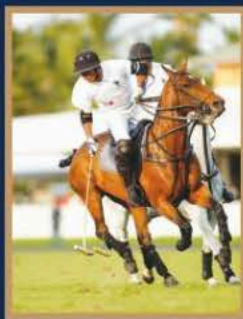
*Polo players and fans convened at the renowned International Polo Club Palm Beach on Feb. 16 for the annual Lucchese 40-Goal Polo Challenge. The match is the marquee fundraising event for the Polo Players Support Group, a nonprofit that provides financial support for seriously injured and ill polo players and grooms. The event raised \$375,000, which will be used to help members of the polo family in need.*

The event featured two star-studded lineups. The opening act, the Future 10s match, was a four-chukker display of the future. Junior polo players with familiar surnames, such as Hope Arellano, Miki Novillo Astrada and Antonio Aguerre, were joined by young Americans, such as Jack Whitman and Aiden Meeker. The

youngsters impressed the crowd with masterful moves usually seen at the top level of the sport. U.S. Polo Assn. (Antonio Aguerre, Finn Secunda, Jack Whitman and Hope Arellano) slid past Port Mayaca Polo Club (Florencio Lanusse, Miki Novillo Astrada, Aiden Meeker and Milly Hine) to end the match 4-3.

The high-goalers had a tough act to follow, but they were able to deliver. Four 10-goalers and four past 10-goalers made up the Airstream (Nacho Novillo Astrada, Polito Pieres, Sapo Caset and Miguel Novillo Astrada) and Pilot Catastrophe Services (Agustin Merlos, Mariano Aguerre, Hilario Ulloa and Facundo Pieres) teams. The game started with what would turn out to be the Tito's Handmade Vodka Longshot of the Day award, made by Polito Pieres in the first 30 seconds of the game. Play throughout the first half remained open and fast, giving spectators the unique opportunity to view an impressive high level of polo. ▶





(L-R) Facundo Pieres takes control of the ball; Best Playing Pony went to Sapo Caset's Pucho; and Mariano Aguerre on the field. PHOTOS BY DAVID LOMINSKA

Mariano Aguerre and Gonzalo Pieres Sr., winner of Aguerre's Jersey.

At the halfway point, Airstream held the lead by one, thanks to two vital goals by Miguel Novillo Astrada. The third chukker began with Airstream's Caset catapulting his team ahead by scoring two consecutive goals. Pilot's Ulloa responded with his first goal of the game in an attempt to put his team in the lead for the first time. The rest of the third chukker, and into the fourth, Airstream held onto the lead, despite goal attempts from Pilot's Aguerre and Facundo Pieres. The final score of the game settled with Airstream winning 8-6. Best Playing Pony, sponsored by 5-Star Builders, was awarded to Pucho, played by Caset. Players received Rich Roenisch bronzes, sponsored by Port Mayaca Polo Club, Gillian Johnston and the Orthwein family, in memory of Steve Orthwein Sr., a great supporter of the organization who passed away in 2018.

Despite Airstream's repeat victory, players from both teams were happy to donate their time to this vital fund-raising event. "Playing in the 40-Goal Challenge is a great opportunity to help others, and I think that anybody in our situation would do the same thing to

help out," said former 10-goaler Mariano Aguerre, who has played in the 40-Goal Challenge nine times.

Ulloa, a 10-goal player, also enjoyed playing for a good cause. "I like playing the 40-Goal Challenge because it's a way to help people who need our support," he said. "It's a great way to raise funds for people who need help."

Miguel Novillo Astrada, who has been playing in the event since 2004, noted on the importance of participating. "I've been playing for many years, and I think it's a very good cause. It's a way of helping a great organization that gives a lot to polo. It's great to be here," he said.

Following the game and awards presentation on the field, attendees made their way to the Pavilion at IPC, where they enjoyed a cocktail hour while bidding on silent auction items before piling into a sold-out steak and lobster full-course dinner, sponsored by the Whitman Family. High-priced items such as a complete set of Paul Brown prints sold for \$5,300 to Chris Desino; the Costa Rica vacation, donated by the Escobar family, sold for \$14,000 to Steve

and Jessica Carbone; and newly inducted Museum of Polo and Hall of Fame Iglehart Award winner Karlene Beal Garber purchased the unique vacation to Costa Careyes for \$5,000.

In addition, all participating player jerseys were auctioned off throughout the evening. Continuing the momentum of the games on display throughout the day, the highest jersey bid was not from a 10-goaler's jersey but from junior player, Hope Arellano, whose father, 8-goaler Julio Arellano, received financial assistance after a traumatic polo-related accident in 2018. Her jersey was won by superstar show jumper Ashlee Bond, winner of the \$72,000 NetJets Classic at the Palm Beach Masters that day at nearby Deeridge Farms.

The Polo Players Support Group thanks the sponsors, players, donors, ticket and table purchasers, volunteers and more. Thanks to the annual 40-Goal Polo Challenge and its supporters, the organization has awarded more than \$2.5 million to 80 seriously injured and ill polo players and grooms.

Learn more about the Polo Players Support Group at [www.polosupport.com](http://www.polosupport.com). ■

(L-R) Carol Pennycook and Polito Pieres, winner of the Tito's Handmade Vodka Longshot of the Day prize; the 2019 teams, Airstream and Pilot; Antonio Aguerre, Mariano Aguerre, Gonzalo Pieres Sr., Tony Coppola and Dave Offen; and Ashlee Bond with Hope Arellano.

PHOTOS BY ALEX PACHECO

