



High horses

As the fifth-oldest polo tournament in the world, the Argentine Open is one of the most important events in the sport's annual season and a high point of the social calendar, writes **Edward Payne**

The Argentine polo season is widely considered to be the pinnacle of the sport, as the world's best players descend on the South American country for three months of prestigious tournaments. The Campeonato Argentino Abierto De Polo, or Argentine Polo Open Championship, is the grand finale of the season and is

the most important international polo event at club level. Along with the two tournaments that precede it in the calendar – the Tortugas Open and the Hurlingham Open – the Campeonato Argentino Abierto De Polo also forms part of the illustrious Argentine Triple Crown of Polo – the highest honour in the polo world.

The tournament – which was first staged in 1893, making it the fifth oldest polo event in the world – is held each year at the Campo Argentina De Polo, known as the 'Cathedral de Polo'. Located in Palermo, a suburb of Buenos Aires, matches take place against a backdrop of the city's skyscrapers in and mark the official close of the Argentine polo calendar.

As the climax of the season, it is one of the best-supported polo tournaments in the world and attracts a glittering mix of showbiz stars, business leaders, politicians and other well-heeled spectators from around the world. The 15,000-capacity arena that surrounds the playing field is usually sold out well in advance,

as thousands flock to see the likes of Adolfo Cambiasso and Facundo Pieres compete for glory.

Last year's final was one of the most thrilling to have been seen on the grounds of the Campo Argentina De Polo in recent years. La Dolfina, marshalled by the imperious Cambiasso, held out in the final few moments of the weather-affected match to secure a record-breaking victory in front of thousands of delirious fans.

The 2016 edition, which takes place from 19 November to 10 December, sees La Dolfina, again led by Cambiasso, attempt to win the title for the fourth consecutive year. This year's event could ➤

Main: The Argentine Open is the pinnacle of club-level polo



Above: Ellerstina last triumphed in 2012 Right: Adolfo Cambiasso (right) is chasing his 13th title

also be the last opportunity for fans to see the legendary Cambiasso at the tournament, with the 41-year-old reportedly on the verge of retirement.

La Dolfina, which was founded by Cambiasso and former polo player Bartolme Castagnola in 2000, is the third most successful team to have ever competed at the Argentine Open, winning the tournament nine times. The two most successful teams are Hurlingham, which won the inaugural tournament in 1893 and 14 titles overall, and the legendary Coronel Suarez quartet, which dominated the event in the 1960s, 70s and 80s, winning 25 titles. Challenging the dominant

La Dolfina team this year will be Ellerstina, led by Facundo Pieres, the 30-year-old who is Cambiasso's closest challenger for the title of world's best player. His quartet is a family affair, with Facundo joined by brothers Gonzalo Jr and Nicolas, their cousin Polito completing the line-up. Ellerstina, which will be attempting to reclaim the title they won in 2010 and 2012, finished as runners up at last year's tournament, as the magnificent Cambiasso and his La Dolfina team swept all before them to claim the Triple Crown.

Among the four other teams guaranteed to compete at Campo Argentina De Polo, none have managed to capture the Argentine Open title. Alegria, however, could prove to be strong challengers in Palermo, with their side containing



two players with a 10-goal handicap – the highest ranking in the sport.

With the finest polo players in the world battling it out for supremacy, the 2016 Argentine Open promises to be another exciting edition of the prestigious tournament, with La Dolfina aiming to win four consecutive titles at Campo Argentina De Polo for the first time in their history. The last team to win four consecutive Argentine Open titles was the all-conquering La

Espanda quartet from 1987 to 1990, and a fourth consecutive title at Campo Argentina De Polo for Cambiasso would take his personal number of Argentine Open crowns to a staggering 13.

That number may be unlucky for some, but for the world's greatest-ever polo player it may just be the perfect way to bow out at the top of the sport he has dominated ever since he won his first Triple Crown in 1994. ■

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