

## Ivan the Terrible Twilight Polo Challenge

30 May, Guards Polo Club

# Bona fide Russian leaves Guards team with nothin'

Celebrities, Russian royalty and visitors from the Moscow Polo Club flocked to Smith's Lawn on a balmy summer's evening to watch the fifth annual Ivan the Terrible Twilight Polo Challenge, in which hosts Guards Polo Club fielded a 10-goal team to take on Russia.

The visitors – including an Argentine contingent with Russian connections – trailed in the first half, but it was the one bona fide Russian, Mischa Rodzianko, who saved his team's bacon. With his team trailing 4-2 in the third chukka he slotted in a lovely goal, and team-mate Alejandro Traverso followed with another to level the scores. It was all square in the last until just before the bell, when Mischa scored again, clinching the match for Russia. The 20-year-old from Moscow also walked away with the most valuable player award, presented to him by HH Princess Olga of Russia, who watched the proceedings from the Royal Box.

Vivienne Westwood and Jay Kay from Jamiroquai joined some 200 guests in the newly built clubhouse for a three-course sit-down dinner. The event's sponsors ensured vodka flowed all evening and guests learnt to do shots "Russian style". After an auction, the tables were re-arranged on the terrace and a DJ provided entertainment late into the night.

Russia (10): David Geovanis 0; Mischa Rodzianko 1; Alejandro Traverso 5; Adolfo Casabal 4  
Guards Polo Club (10): Guy Schwarzenbach 1; Ed Hitchman 4; Peter Webb 5; Clive Reid 0



Moscow Polo Club's Alejandro Traverso, Adolfo Casabal, David Giovannis and Mischa Rodzianko lift the Twilight Polo trophy



Nineties' pop sensation, Jay Kay



Designer Vivienne Westwood and Andreas Kronthaler



Princess Olga presents the BPP award to Guards PC's Clive Reid



Max Pokrovsky



Natalia Chubin and Jules Wright



David Giovannis (standing) enjoys lunch in the new clubhouse with British and Moscow-based guests of the Russian team



Charles Stisted (right) with Guards PC guests

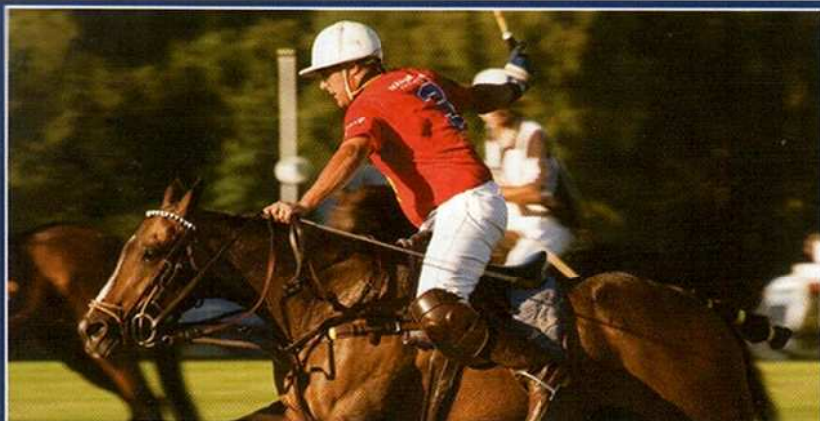


Azad and Natalia Cola, Dimitr Chebotarev and Princess Olga of Russia

Photographs by Alec Whibly, of Centaur Photographic



Ivan Rubinich and a friend eat lunch before the game



Moscow's playmaker Alejandro Traverso sends his pony into top gear after the ball



Guy Schwarzenbach and Mischa Rodzianko

## How polo is flowing in vodka country

Alexis Rodzianko, who owns the Moscow Polo Club, one of two in Russia, fell in love with the sport – as did his family – six or seven years ago. "I started taking my youngest daughter to a municipal riding school in Moscow, where the instructor asked if I wanted to have a go. I was hooked," he says. Alexis's employer at the time, Deutsche Bank, sponsored polo around the world, and he was introduced to Victor Huaco, who now runs the Russian Polo Club. Alexis graduated from riding to polo, as did his daughter and two of his sons.

Alexis says there is a lot of interest in polo in Russia at present, and several young players are receiving lessons in return for helping out with the ponies. The Argentine pro Bernardo Cormick is among those who have been sharing their expertise with club members.

Mischa, the fifth of six children and now a one-goal player, was born in New York but has lived for more than half his life in Moscow. Now 20, he is studying business administration at Moscow's Touro University. "The first time I played polo, six years ago, was also the first time I sat on a horse. I was handed a mallet and just fell in love," he says. "During the season I try to practise three times a week. I spend half of October, November and December in Argentina, playing 15-goal tournaments with Miguel Novillo Astrada, which has made a big difference to my game."

It is partly thanks to his Argentine contacts that Mischa organised all his team's ponies for the Ivan the Terrible game himself this year rather than, as in previous years, renting through John Horswell – described by Alexis as "the Avis of polo ponies".

Mischa puts his love of polo down to his father. "Dad has put a lot of time, money and effort into polo in Russia, and I have a lot to thank him for." He adds that he hopes to play the odd tournament in the UK, but will continue to live in Moscow because he likes his way of life there.



David Giovannis before the game



Alexis Rodzianko and Dimitri Chebotarev



Peter Webb gets in the zone



Captain Misha Rodzianko accepts his MVP award from Princess Olga of Russia



Mr and Mrs Gerald Blazevic



Rarely has so much vodka populated the presentation table