

Thailand's Four Day Royal Elephant Festival the King's Cup Elephant Polo Tournament Kicks Off in Bangkok



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Bangkok, March 9th: The 2018 King's Cup Elephant Polo tournament kicked off today on the banks of Bangkok's mighty Chaophraya River. The early morning proceedings began with a traditional ceremony blessed by monks who placed sacred garlands over the necks of the stars of the event, the ex-street elephants taking part. Thailand's last elephant spirit men (Kru Ba Yai), who possess spiritual control over all of Thailand's elephants, also presided over the early morning rituals.

The opening day was attended by players and media from all over the world along with over 600 school children who were treated to a day of educational activities relating to Thailand's national animal. The children were almost as delighted as the elephants during the much loved elephant breakfast buffet and many hands fed them bananas, sugar cane and pumpkin ahead of the first game.

The opening match saw an Anantara all-star team consisting of India's National Polo team players the Kalaan brothers, Uday and Angad, and Thailand's own celebrity professional polo player Ploy Bhinsaeng. Pitted against them were the traditional elephant mahout team consisting of Tao, Mui and Sompotch. It was an exciting first match with the traditional mahouts showing impressive natural flair due to their close relationships with their elephants, though this was still no match for the skill and experience of the all-star team. The game ended with a close 2-0 win for the all-stars team.

The match of the day was between Johnnie Walker Blue Label captained by Thailand's Elephant Polo President, Christopher Stafford and King's Cup debutants, 'Challenge Everything' from New York captained by David Partridge. The first chukka ended with Challenge Everything ahead by a nail biting 3-0. By the end of the second chukka, seasoned veterans Johnnie Walker Blue Label made a stunning comeback due to the outstanding prowess of player Bjorn Richardson, scoring five goals in a row, securing a victory of 5-3.

A total of 25 unemployed ex-street elephants are taking part in this year's event, during which they receive full veterinary checks from the Zoological Parks Organisation of Thailand, under the patronage of His Majesty the King of Thailand and the Department of Livestock Development. In addition, all elephants are given essential vitamins, food and care which are not available to them during their normal daily lives.

Now in its sixteenth year, the festival has become one of the biggest charitable events in Southeast Asia with over THB50 million raised and donated to projects that better the lives of Thailand's wild and domesticated elephant population.

Day 1 - Scores

Johnnie Walker Blue Label v Challenge Everything 5-3

For more information on the 16th Annual King's Cup Elephant Polo Tournament, please visit www.anantaraelephantpolo.com.