

POLO



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POLO TEAM

EFG Bank/Equus & Co.

Written By John Hood

When the world polo community descends upon Wellington for the 2010 Palm Beach Polo Season, one of the teams people will be keenly watching is the team fielded by Equus & Co. and sponsored by EFG Bank. Though the team has only been on the International Polo circuit for three years now, they've made more than a rather admirable go of things. In fact in '09 EFG Bank Polo Team made it to two High Goal Polo Game Finals – the Bobby Barry Memorial Cup (vs. Mount Brilliant) and the George Hass Cup (vs. Lechuza Caracas); and they made it to the Semifinals of the Pennell Cup too.

Much of that success must be credited to EFG Bank Polo Team captain Jim Whisenand, founder and CEO of Equus & Co., the company that arranged EFG Bank's entry into and global presence in the world of polo. Whisenand's not only blessed with business acumen, but his global in-country expertise is right in line with the polo Sport's prestige. In fact it was Whisenand who also put together the much-heralded Bombay Sapphire Polo Team of 2003-2006. And he was at the helm when the Bombay Sapphire Polo Team was in the finals the Outback Polo League championship in 2005.

With Equus & Co.'s polo team sponsorship presence, Bombay Sapphire (owned by Bacardi) and EFG Bank have supported a team in the annual Polo Players Support Group's (PSSG) 40 Goal Game with 8 of the best 10 Goal polo players in the world for a total of 80 Goals. In 2005 and 2006, Bombay Sapphire was on the winning side of this extraordinary 40 Goal game. All eyes are on the 2010 EFG Bank Team in the 40 Goal Game for it to have its first victory. All of this Equus & Co. organized corporate polo team sponsorships assist PSSG in – the purpose of the 40 Goal Game – raising money for injured polo players and grooms. No better give back to the Sport of Polo than that.

Whisenand's an old hand at the ancient sport, and his equestrian roots reach all the way back to his Midwestern childhood, as does his love of and passion for the ponies.

"I've been riding since I was eight," Whisenand says. "First, United States Polo Club events, and then many years participating in combined training for 3 day events. I have always had a passion for polo, and equestrian sports."

And though Whisenand "played some polo during the summer months in college," he "didn't get serious about the sport until participating in the Sport at International Polo Club in Palm Beach." Also, that was the year when Equus and Co. entered the Palm Beach polo arena and began carving out their unique niche and platform in the world's highest marketplace.

"Equus and Co. was formed to be the Private Advisor to the Global Equestrian (Polo) community," he explains. "We focus on creating eight different sector global corporate-sponsored polo opportunities."

"One of our eight sector corporate sponsorship categories is wealth management and we have an affiliation with EFG Bank, which is the third largest private bank in Switzerland with 55 offices in 30 countries. We've created and organized a global polo team sponsorship program with them. Keith Gapp, Head of Strategic Communications and Media, and Member, Executive Committee of the Bank has been strongly supportive of the Program. For EFG Bank, Equus & Co. has organized corporate sponsored polo teams and official bank sponsorships in Palm Beach (the platform), England, Sotogrande (Spain), Dubai, Shanghai, Argentina, Punta del Este and expanding in to new global markets in 2010 with a focus on Europe and Asia."

On paper (and in practice), Equus's bringing EFG Bank into the polo fold is a natural. But the affiliation came to be in a rather roundabout way.





“In addition to the Equus & Co. business, I have had an international law advisory practice in Miami since 1978,” says Whisenand. “And in that world we’ve constantly come into connection with many of the global financial institutions, and EFG Bank was one of them. Keith Gapp at EFG Bank thought that the affiliation with the international polo community would be beneficial for EFG Bank, plus they wanted to contribute something to the actual sport itself, and to establish the corporate sponsorship of global polo teams. EFG Bank wants to be a material participant in the global advancement of the sport of polo.”



Equus & Co.’s endeavors, however, extend well beyond EFG Bank and Palm Beach. And either “directly or via other corporate sponsors, [the company] supports corporate branded global polo teams in Punta del Este, Shanghai, and the Away Team as part of the Cartier International Day each July in England, participating in the Coronation Cup at Guards Polo Club with Prince Charles or the Queen of England presiding.”

And while Equus & Co., has for the most part adhered to the more traditional global season, commencing each January in Palm Beach (International Polo Club), then to England for the summer, August in Sotogrande (Spain) and culminating in Argentina from September to December, Whisenand says that they’ve “looked at also being involved with Beach Polo,” and that he and Equus & Co. are even “entertaining the idea of entering a Polo Team in the South Beach Polo this spring

If what Equus & Co. and EFG Bank have accomplished in Palm Beach is any indication, they’ll undoubtedly take South Beach and global polo by the same proverbial storm. Granted its more reserved cousin to the north is mostly associated with high finance, but Miami’s most glamorous stretch of sand also attracts its share of heavy hitters, albeit primarily in the realm of arts and entertainment, but it’ll be exciting to see how Equus & Co. links the two communities, and corporate sponsored professional polo teams.

Then again, the two already have at their core a common bond, and that of course is polo, a sport that has linked disparate peoples for centuries. And it’s a cinch that Whisenand has long had that fact in mind. With offices in Wellington, Miami and Madrid, and a global polo presence second to none, one might also say that Equus & Co. is already set up to serve as special liaison. And why not? The company certainly has proven itself to be all the right things to just the right people in each of the

world’s four corners. No reason why a few more of the right people wouldn’t readily agree.

Equus & Co.’s successful approach of integrating global companies and the sport of polo stems from their ability to speak both languages (global business + polo) and integrating the global business venues + the global polo venues with the Polo Lifestyle which is best emulated by a platform based at International Polo Club – Palm Beach. Predicated on America’s best polo at IPC, Equus & Co. then creates a bespoke global polo presence for the corporate sponsor in key countries and the fabulous polo venues. All the time making certain the corporate polo team sponsor is truly a peer participant of the Sport. Ultimately, Equus & Co. would like to see corporate supported polo team with the companies providing polo players with fully funded teams and multi-year contracts – always globally advancing the sport

Yes, business may always be business. Still this is a sport that transcends the deal, no matter how artfully it’s been consummated. And just as Jim Whisenand has discreetly made his company the global leader in its high-powered niche, he knows that leading his polo team to the finals is but a small part of the charm and benefits inherent in the sport that he loves.

“People play polo for the sport and the passion,” he says. “That always comes first.”

Passion for sport and talent for business: sounds like just the recipe for that great dish called success.