

FIP QUALIFIERS

With four out of five qualifying matches played, the standard has been set for a fast and exciting Polo World Championship, says Carolina Beresford



The international polo world came together once again in preparation for this year's XI FIP Polo World Championship. Qualification matches took place all over, from France to Thailand, Argentina to the USA. The top teams have shown their strength and are ready to travel to Australia in October, in the hopes of claiming the coveted championship. Current title-holders Chile qualified for the tournament directly after their narrow 12-11 OT win over USA in the 2015 Polo World Cup in Santiago, while hosts Australia also received a golden ticket. Only six spots left – so who rose to the challenge?

The South American qualifiers were up first. Argentina gave a great performance in their Zone B playoffs at Uruguay's Punta

del Este Polo Club in late January. They claimed their place in the championship after beating Brazil, Peru and Uruguay in style. The Argentines boasted experience and skill and cruised through the playoffs undefeated, playing attractive, open polo. Their 2015 performance was underwhelming, to say the least, but this Argentine squad showed they mean business.

The final of the Asia-Pacific playoffs saw New Zealand and Malaysia go head to head at the Thai Polo & Equestrian Centre in early February. The match brought up memories of a previous Zone D final, in 2011, where Malaysia beat New Zealand. This time, the Kiwis were ready; they defeated their opponents 9-5½ in a competitive match

to earn a spot in the final stage of the Polo World Championship.

Zone A saw a three-team round-robin between USA, Mexico and Guatemala. The Americans were not going to leave anything to chance this time; after a disappointing 2015 loss in Chile, Team USA put together a formidable nine-man team and took to training, travelling to Australia in April to sharpen their skills. With Canada pulling out last minute, USA only had two teams standing between them and the final round of the World Cup. USA faced Guatemala first at Port Mayaca Polo Club in Okeechobee, Florida; they dominated the match and claimed a crucial 10-6½ win. The Zone A playoff final therefore pitted USA against