

Preparation of the snow polo arenas in St. Moritz and Kitzbühel

Fighting with and against nature for the safe grip of the horses

The winter sun seems picturesque, the snow glistens in the arena. Dressed glamorously, the high-society resides in the tribunes cheering with a glass of fine champagne, while the top-class polo teams at the Snow Polo World Cup in St. Moritz and in Kitzbühel deliver thrilling duels.

However, before the more than fantastic athletes on four hooves and their riders at the two world's most prestigious snow polo tournaments can fight for victory, specialists are in demand whose work is done in secret.

The snow arena measures 220x140 meters and is conjured by Dario Pedrolini and his team on the frozen lake in St. Moritz. The arena in Kitzbühel is only half as big, but the challenge is no less demanding for Christian Steinbach and his team. In both places, know-how, organizational work, but also flexibility is required from the specialists to manage the struggle with and against nature. And so much was anticipated, as the playing fields in both places were once again in excellent condition.

In St. Moritz, the thickness of the ice surface and its load-bearing capacity is the basic requirement for the construction of the arena. While in the last three years, for lack of snow, the playing field had to be built with about 5,000 cubic meters of artificial snow, the large quantities of snow and relatively warm temperatures on the days before the event challenged the specialists quite a bit.

This is because natural snow is much less dense than artificial snow and therefore must be much more compact. "This year we started to condense the floor of the arena early before the event daily due to the heavy snowfall. It took a lot of time, but nature dictates the work plan," explains Dario Pedrolini, adding: "We fight with and against nature and always have the goal in mind to create a playing surface, which on the one hand is fast and yet always offers enough grip for the horse hooves. At stops and fast turns a horse can bring up to 3.5 tons of pressure with a hoof on the ground, so the snow cover must withstand a lot. Security is the top priority in our work."

In Kitzbühel it snowed heavily this year too. Here the company Steinbach Alpin is responsible for the preparation of the snow arena. In a first step, the team of chef Gitti Weber condenses the humid underground with the help of the Steinbach Alpin a self-developed injection spray bar. The device, which was developed and patented by Christian Steinmann, has also been used for years in the preparation of ski slopes for World Cup races and at Olympic Winter Games.





Gitti Weber explained his function to us: "First we measure the moisture in the subsoil and based on this data we calculate how much water per second is shot into the ground by means of the injection spray bar. With the injection spray bar, we spray pure water in a zigzag pattern under the snow cover. The duration of the treatment and the water pressure decide how hard the playing field becomes. The surface of the arena remains largely dry because the water is injected about 30 cm below the snow surface. In contrast to surface irrigation, the playing surface hardens with the spray bar system from bottom to top. No additional treatment is required before or after the spray bar use. The playing surface, which is treated with the injection spray bar, is very resistant to the strain of horses' hooves and the effects of temperature."

