

**Daniela Walther**

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**Betreff:** Death of James Ashton, Interim FIP President

**Polo Contacts Worldwide****A message to all members of Polo Contacts Worldwide**

This release was authored by Chris Aston for the Federation of International Polo.

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By Chris Ashton, with photograph by Nicolas Levin

The untimely death of interim FIP President James Ashton, 69, following a polo accident in Bangkok on Sunday 14th February, has sent shock waves through the world polo community, and the Federation of International Polo (FIP) in particular.

James Ashton was appointed interim FIP President on 23rd November 2009 in Buenos Aires, following the sudden resignation of the incumbent, Patrick Guerrand Hermes. Within the FIP community, it was accepted he, Ashton, would be elected unanimously as the next FIP President at its 27th annual General Assembly, deferred from November to 29th March, and relocated to Wellington, Florida.



The respect he enjoyed as an international polo administrator began with FIP's 6th 14-goal World Cup championship, held in Melbourne in 2001 under his direction as President of the Australian Polo Council. The quality of horses lent by the Australian polo community, coupled with Ashton's decision to expand the contest from six to eight teams, prompted senior FIP officials to describe it as the best since the FIP World Cup began in 1984.

In recognition of his achievement, and in his absence from the FIP General Assembly which followed, he was elected FIP treasurer, serving successively under presidents Glen Holden and Patrick Guerrand Hermes.

Reflecting the concern of spectators and commentators that polo as a spectator sport is declining, allied to recent initiatives by the Hurlingham [British] and Argentine Polo Associations to address this by issuing "clarifications" of the rules of polo, James Ashton was committed to harnessing FIP under his presidency to those same objectives.

In the relationship between the FIP President, his Administrative Council and its 57 constituents, the national polo associations, he was also committed to restoring greater transparency and accountability to FIP's role in developing and implementing policy objectives; and to devolving responsibility from the FIP executive to co-coordinators of FIP's four global zones to initiate and manage their own zone tournaments and clinics for umpiring and coaching children.

Responding to news of his death, FIP has received emails from across the spectrum of the global polo community voicing shock and dismay, and paying tribute to his leadership qualities: calm, courtesy, an integrity devoid of hidden agendas and a willingness to listen to the disparate viewpoints to seek accommodation of different views within FIP's proscribed goals.

Born in 1941, the eldest son of Irene and James Ashton Senior (captain-manager of a team of four brothers who dominated Australian polo from 1929-39 and who won the Hurlingham [British] Gold Cup Championship in 1937), James Junior took up polo at 21. He rose to a four-goal handicap before a debilitating disease, contracted from cattle, ended his polo career for 18 years. Following recovery, he played ever after, contesting the first and second 14-goal FIP World Cups in Buenos Aires and Berlin. As President, first of the NSW (New South Wales) polo association (1994-98) and of the Australian Polo Council (1998-2002) he assumed the role of mediator between traditional amateur polo

clubs grappling with the advent of patron-professional polo.

Polo was just one dimension of a life lived at full throttle. In 1965 he married Susan nee Kirkby, with whom he had five children, twin sons, twin daughters followed by a third daughter. From Sydney University he graduated with a bachelor degree, and during his illness, graduated from the University of NSW with an MBA. In his mid-20s he took over from his father the management of Millamolong, the family's 8,000-acre sheep and cattle station, to which he later added a vineyard, producing award-winning wines. To Millamolong he also added a polo club, together with guest accommodation in the large family homestead in which he was raised, a polo school, and annual tournaments, one of which was a ladies international contest, the other in memory of one of his two sons, Jamie, who died in a road accident. In public life he served for a time on the NSW Executive Council of Liberal Party, and in 1977 contested, albeit unsuccessfully, a seat in the national parliament. He also served on his local shire council.

James Ashton (1941-2010) is survived by his wife Sue, his son Andrew, his daughters Sally, Emily and Georgina, five grandchildren, by his sisters Rosemary Foot and Joan Masterman and his brother Wallace. The FIP community offers his family its sympathy in their grief and bereavement.

*Chris Ashton, a cousin of James, writes for [US] Polo Players Edition magazine, was the author of Geebung: The Story of Australian Polo (Australian Polo Council, 1993) and was a contributing author to Profiles in Polo: Players Who Changed the Game, edited by Horacio Laffaye (MacFarland & Co., USA 2008).*

PCW supports Chris Ashton, the FIP and the broader international polo community in our shock and sadness at James' death. We kindly extend our condolences to the Ashton family.

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