

Water Polo Women: Day 5: ESP 9 USA 6

FINA Communication Department

It was the Olympic final all over again. This time the script had changed and Spain won instead of United States of America. Four times USA came within one goal of Spain, but that was it. Spain won 9-6 — a six-goal turnaround from the London Olympics just a year ago. There was no Maggie Steffens five-goal haul but there was a Jennifer Pareja four-goal procession in the first half as Spain turned at 4-2, levelled the third quarter 1-1 and won the last 3-1. This was all about Spain, five times the bridesmaid and twice finishing level with USA in major competition, but never winning before tonight.

The landscape has changed and USA is no longer the dominant force of last year (many retirements), and slipping further from the bronze medal gained at the World League in Beijing a month ago.

The match was electric, mainly because of the Spanish surge, two Pareja goals making it 3-1. She scored either side of the first break, had four goals and saw her team 5-2 ahead.

Kameryn Craig, who scored three goals in a match where the USA centre forwards were stifled, scored USA's third and Steffens pierced the goal on penalty to close the half at 5-4.

Maica Garcia, at the top of the third, and Melissa Seidemann four minutes later were the only scores of the period. The latter goal came off a rebound. Pareja had a fifth goal rejected but no fear, Garcia and Laura Lopez for a second goal each and Roser Tarrago on extra had the game sewn up by 0:39.

Craig scored vented her frustration with a great centre-forward goal inside the final half-minute for 9-6.

Spain was medal bound and USA will play in the round 5-8 for the second time in two years, finishing sixth to Australia in Shanghai.

The extra-man statistics belie the fact Spain actually converted one from seven and USA none from eight. That was some of the tightest defensive play of the championship and both sides have the scars to prove it.

Match 36: 21:45, Quarterfinal, SPAIN 9 UNITED STATES OF AMERICA 6

Quarters: 4-2, 1-2, 1-1, 3-1

Referees: Radoslaw Koryzna (POL), Mario Bianchi (ITA).

Extra Man: ESP: ½. USA: 0/0.

Pens: ESP: 1/1. USA: 1/1

Teams:

SPAIN:

Laura Ester, Marta Bach, Anna Espar, Roser Tarrago (1), Matilda Ortiz, Jennifer Pareja (4), Lorena Miranda, Pilar Pena, Andrea Blas, Ona Meseguer, Maica Garcia (2), Laura Lopez (2), Patricia Herrera. Head Coach: Miguel Oca.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA: Elizabeth Armstrong, Lauren Silver, Melissa Seidemann (1), Rachel Fattal (1), Caroline Clark, Margaret Steffens (1), Courtney Mathewson, Kiley Neushal, Jillian Kraus, Kelly Rulon, Annika Dries, Kameryn Craig (3), Tumuaialii Anae.
Head Coach: Adam Krikorian.

FLASH QUOTES:

Maica Garcia (ESP):

“We’ve got our revenge. Our head coach told us to enjoy the game and get out there and fight. Now we need to prepare for the next match against Hungary. They are just as strong as the USA. The public was amazing, we are so excited.”

Matilde Ortiz (ESP):

“It was a very intensive match today, they didn’t give us time to breathe. We started defending 100 percent from the very beginning so we could stop their attacks. We learned from the game against Russia. We know that the next match will be really difficult against Hungary. They have good centre hole set and shooters.”

Jennifer Pareja (ESP):

“We knew that we had to do a perfect game; it was a very important match. We gave 100 percent from the start of the game, which was the key to success. We have all done a great job, there is always a player who scores more goals but all in all it’s a team effort. We played spectacular defence. I think we have a great team who deserves being where we are. We have to thank our supporters the way they have been encouraging us during all the game, it was amazing.

Miki Oca (ESP Head Coach):

"We played strong defence, stopping the attack. With 5-4, it was key that they didn’t score. They were so close. They are a great team with a marvelous offensive potential. This winter, I’ve seen the video of the Olympic Games final several times to prepare for today’s match. Now Hungary, which is a strong team, and they are in a great moment. All the teams that arrive at quarters are strong and if they make it to the semifinals even more. The public was spectacular; they made us fly."

Courtney Mathewson (USA):

“It’s been a brutal game, very physical and Spain was playing on home turf and I believe they were looking for revenge after London’s final. We have new players who are very young while the Spaniards have been playing together for over a year. We need to keep building the team back home.”

Kelly Rulon (USA):

“We have been together for only two months, progressing every game. It was different than in London as we had been playing together for almost three years. It’s tough to feel what it means to lose after the gold-medal joy in London.”

Adam Krikorian (USA Head Coach):

“I’m not disappointed about the game, we played good enough to win, but we couldn’t finish; the ball did not get into the net. They made very nice blocks. It was a very hard game, and for the future we need to improve the fitness. We can’t forget that Spain is one of the best teams of the world. I am very proud of the team. We have to continue fighting all the time, not thinking about losing. At some stages of the game we were very good. It has been an awesome environment and despite losing this game it’s been great for the sport. Hopefully this shows the greatness of our sport and there will be 12 teams allowed in the next Olympic tournament, as it is not fair that important teams as China and Italy are not here.”
