

Olympic silver medallist Spain now crowned World Champion

FINA Communication Department

Spain completed the business it did not quite finish last year at the London Olympic Games by defeating Australia 8-6 in the gold-medal final of the FINA Women's Water Polo World Championships at the Bernat Picornell Pool. It was silver behind United States of America in London while Australia claimed bronze. Tonight it was a well-deserved gold as the best team at these championships and now the top nation on the planet for women's water polo.

It was victory for head coach Miki Oca and his resolve and faith in his players, led by the indefatigable Jennifer Pareja, voted the championship's Most Valuable Player.

Throw is a startling 11-save effort by goalkeeper Laura Ester and she was undoubtedly the best in her class in Barcelona.

Spain was confident from the start and managed to out-defend the Aussie Stingers who looked nervous and times and never got into high-scoring mode.

Australia lost star Rowena Webster on three majors before the third break and others followed in a match where both teams received 15 major fouls apiece. Australia had a penalty blocked by Ester and an unexpected unforced error by Stingers goalkeeper Kelsey Wakefield — who was pushing Ester for the best in Barcelona — proved critical when just one behind. Roser Tarrago shot from near halfway and Wakefield tried unsuccessfully to collect with one hand.

Never mind, the Spanish defence proved the winner, disrupting Australia at every stage of the match.

In the bronze-medal clash, played as the second match of the first session, Hungary won the first medal for its country (the men will play Montenegro in the men's final on Saturday) with a 10-8 margin over Russia, who led 3-1 during the first quarter.

Hungary started shooting go-ahead goals late in the second period, meaning Russia had to play catch-up water polo. Hungary kept 19-goal Ekaterina Prokofyeva scoreless and Russia kept 18-goal Barbara Bujka off the scoresheet. Her back-up centre forward, though, Ildiko Toth, struck three times.

In the play-off for fifth and sixth, scheduled as the curtain-raiser for the gold-medal final, Olympic and World Cup champion United States of America beat outgoing world champion Greece 15-12 in a penalty shootout after the match was tied at 10-10 by fulltime and 11-11 after two extra periods.

USA sent in all four shots in the shootout while Greece missed two. The pair played in the same group and USA won that encounter 12-8. USA stretched its lead over Greece in World Championship play to seven and the win was one place better than Shanghai 2011 when it lost by five goals to Australia.

In the play-off for seventh and eighth, Netherlands turned a 5-1 opening quarter into a 12-9 victory with

Lieke Klaassen scoring three penalty goals to become the championship's highest goal-scorer with 25. It was a rematch of the 7-8 classification match at Shanghai 2011, which the Dutch also won.

Immediately after the match, Dutch gold medallists from the Beijing Olympics — Iefke van Belkum and Biurakn Hakhverdian — announced their retirements. This leaves just goalkeeper Ilse van de Meijden and Smit as the remaining gold medallists.

The Media All Star team was named with the championship's Most Valuable Player, Jennifer Pareja (ESP), leading the group. She was joined by the best goalkeeper, Spain's Laura Ester, centre forward Barbara Bujka (HUN) and field players Rita Keszthelyi (HUN), Lieke Klaassen (NED), Jennifer Pareja (ESP), Ekaterina Prokofyeva (RUS) and Rowena Webster (AUS).

Final classifications:

1. Spain
2. Australia
3. Hungary
4. Russia
5. United States of America
6. Greece
7. Netherlands
8. Canada
9. China
10. Italy
11. Kazakhstan
12. New Zealand
13. Great Britain
14. Brazil
15. South Africa
16. Uzbekistan

Awards (as selected by media representatives):

Most Valuable Player: Jennifer Pareja (ESP).

Best Goalkeeper: Laura Ester (ESP).

Highest goal-scorer: Lieke Klaassen (NED) 25

Media All Star Team:

Goalkeeper: Laura Ester (ESP)

Centre Forward: Barbara Bujka (HUN)

Field Players: Rita Keszthelyi (HUN)
Lieke Klaassen (NED)
Jennifer Pareja (ESP)
Ekaterina Prokofyeva (RUS)
Rowena Webster (AUS)
