

USA, Greece march on, Netherlands, Italy: hard-fought tie

Gergely Csurka, FINA Media Committee Member (HUN)

Another 8-8 draw, this time produced by Netherlands and Italy, makes it impossible to predict the final ranks in Group B. On the other side the picture is clear: the top spot will be decided in the game between USA and Greece. The Americans managed to beat Spain in a tough encounter while the Greeks finished off the Canadians.

Game 1 – 12.40, Group A: Canada v Greece 4-11 (0-4, 0-2, 2-1, 2-4)

Referees: Adrian Alexandrescu (ROU), Daniel Flahive (AUS)

CANADA: Jessica Gaudreault, Krystina Alogbo 1, Katrina Monton, Emma Wright, Monika Eggens 1, Kelly McKee, Joelle Bekhazi, Axelle Crevier, Carmen Eggens 1, Christine Robinson, Hanna Yelizarova 1, Dominique Perreault, Nicola Colterjohn. Head coach: David Paradelo

GREECE: Eleni Kouvdou, Christina Tsoukala 2, Nikoleta Eleftheriadou, Vasiliki Diamantopoulou, Margarita Plevritou, Alkisi Avramidou 1, Alexandra Asimaki, Antigoni Roumpesi 5, Christina Kotsia, Triantafyllia Manolioudaki 1, Eleftheria Plevritou 1, Eleni Xenaki 1, Chrysoula Diamantopoulou. Head coach: Athanasios Kechagias

Extramen

CAN: 1 for 14

GRE: 4 for 13

Penalties

CAN: none

GRE: 0 for 1



Krystina Alogbo (CAN, blue cap) couldn't get through the Greek defence, here Alkisi Avramidou presses her – Credit, all photos: P. Masiano / Deepbluemedias

The first four minutes were dedicated to cooling of the nerves, the Greeks even missed a penalty in this phase but ultimately they managed to arrive to the game first. And once they did – through a fine distance shot from Chrstitina Tsoukala after 4:21 minutes – they started to roll. They added three more in 2:21 minutes while doing a tremendous job in defence. We couldn't say the Canadians lost control – they didn't find it, in fact. The Greek led 0-4 while the North Americans stood 0 for 4 in extramen. From their point it got worse – Greek went 0-6 ahead in the second while the Canadians were still struggling, at halftime their man-up ratio was simply disastrous, 0 for 7.

Later, in the third it sank to 0 for 9, but at least they were on target from action, first Carmen Eggens's ball found the back of the net after 17:33 minutes. Though the Greeks were less sharper, they still sat comfortable in the driving seat before the final quarter (2-7). The fourth saw a brighter spell from Canada, they scored twice in a span of 53 seconds, including the first one from a 6 on 5 (though Alogbo's ball just crossed the line) and at 4-7 even a tense finish was in the cards. But it never happened, thanks to Antigoni Roumpesi: the Greek captain stepped up and netted three connecting goals in as many man-ups. It was an outstanding effort from an outstanding player – she scored 5 altogether – and enough to secure another fine win for the Greeks.

Comments

David Paradelo, head coach, Canada:

“We need a more disciplined game.”

Athanasios Kechagias, head coach, Greece:

“Another day when we could show that the team has a great character. We played really well in defence, let's say, for most of the time.”

Game 2 – 14.00, Group A: Spain v United States 6-8 (2-2, 1-2, 1-2, 2-2)

Referees: Alessandro Severo (ITA), Svetlana Dreval (RUS)

SPAIN: Laura Ester, Marta Bach 1, Anna Espar, Beatriz Ortiz 2, Matilde Ortiz, Jennifer Pareja, Paula Leiton, Pilar Pena 1, Judith Forca, Roser Tarrago, Maica Garcia 1, Laura Lopez 1, Patricia Herrera. Head

coach: Miguel Oca

USA: Samantha Hill, Madeline Musselman, Melissa Seidemann 1, Rachel Fattal 2, Caroline Clark, Margaret Steffens 1, Courtney Mathewson, Kiley Neushul, Aria Fischer, Kaleigh Gilchrist, Makenzie Fischer 4, Kameryn Craig, Ashleigh Johnson. Head coach: Adam Krikorian

Extramens

ESP: 2 for 11

USA: 2 for 8

Penalties

none



Happy players at the US bench: the world champion team came up with another great performance

Respective winners of the last two editions of the FINA World Championships, Spain (2013) and the USA (2015) – the eventual champion knocked out the other in the quarters en route –, also contestants of the 2012 Olympic final in London – it all promised a brilliant battle. And the fans weren't disappointed, it was a great fight in all aspects.

The Americans quickly jumped to a 0-2 lead with fine action goals while Spain wasted two extras but the US side couldn't capitalise on it: next came an 11:33 minute-long silence – quite rare for the Olympic champs –, enough for the Spaniards to equalise (2-2). Rachel Fattal broke the deadlock with only 1:10 left from the second with a fine shot from the wing and the Americans' advantage was quickly doubled as Melissa Seidemann put away the ball in a 6 on 5. Maica Garcia pulled one back 18 seconds from time but after the break the Americans got the upper hand again. After minutes of grand physical fight and swimming contest sometime a little space is needed – Makenzie Fischer found that and scored a crucial goal for 3-5. And in 55 seconds the gap widened to three after Maggie Steffens netted a great goal from a 6 on 5.

Spain seemed to be done, missed two extras but turning into the last minute Pilar Pena's smart bouncing shot from the right wing gave her team a slim hope for the last period (4-6) – which could have been even stronger if they were able to finish another man-up in the last seconds. Still, they came close after Laura Lopez scored from a counter for 5-6. Spain had possessions to go even but failed to set up any better chance and with 4:21 to go Fischer buried an extra. She was on fire, 34 seconds later she finished a counter as well – it was her 4th goal in the afternoon –, and virtually decided the match as the US led 5-8. Beatriz Ortiz's shot was just a consolation as Ashleigh Johnson made one save after the other, denying the Spaniards on a number of occasions.

With this outcome it's become clear that the top spot will be decided in the game between USA and Greece on Thursday and the winner will face a lower-ranked opponent (most probably France or Germany), thus the Rio spot is coming within easy reach. On the contrary, the losers' journey will promise less joy...

Comments

Miguel Oca, head coach, Spain:

"The US team is a really strong one, we all know that. We played well in defence, but our attack didn't work properly. I'm satisfied with the playing level of my team but we have to work on our man-ups."

Adam Krikorian, head coach, USA

"We got stronger as the game went on, we felt good about the direction of the game. Defensively we played well, the goaltending was great, our offence sometimes comes and goes, but as long as you play a good team defence, you have a good chance to win. It requires a lot of stuff to keep Spain on six goals. We always play great games with them, it's good to have another one under our belt."

Ashleigh Johnson, goalkeeper, USA

"I feel great. Our team's focus was on defence and I think we executed that well, we had good communication and it just clicked."

Game 3 – 15.20, Group A: South Africa v Japan 6-15 (3-4, 1-4, 1-5, 1-2)

Referees: John Waldow (NZL), Benjamin Mercier (FRA)

SOUTH AFRICA: Rebecca Thomas, Amber Penny 1, Kieren Paley 2, Emma Hardham, Cary Wessels, Christine Abrahamse, Amy Keevy, Alex van der Valt, Megan Parkes, Amica Hallendorf, Kelsey White 3, Lauren Nixon. Head coach: Samuel Gareth

JAPAN: Mivra Rikako, Sakanoue Chiaki, Ianab Akari 1, Maganiyama Shino 1, Nakata Moe 1, Takahashi Oyaka 1, Nakano Yumi 4, Hashigochi Mitsuki 1, Hosoya Kana, Mori Tsuchasa 3, Jokumoto Marina 1, Suzuki Kotori 2, Aoki Miyun. Head coach: Kato Hideo

Extramen

RSA: 2 for 5

JPN: 3 for 6

Penalties

RSA: 1 for 1

JPN: 1 for 3



Takahashi Oyaka (JPN, right) let the ball fly, Alex van der Valt tries to block her

The South Africans could hold on for a while but the Japanese were more organised and the difference between the swimming speed was quite visible throughout the match. The Asians set up their opportunities mostly from quick counters and earned a well-deserved win. The only consolation for the South Africans that Lauren Nixon managed to stop two penalties, a great feat for any goalie in today's water polo.

Comments

Samuel Gareth, head coach, South Africa:

"It could have been a better game, I think we could have even won if we play the right way. You know, we don't have any opportunity to play with a team with the style of the Japanese. It took time we could adapt that, still, we didn't do the right things that's why I'm a bit disappointed."

Kato Hideo, head coach, Japan:

"We played well especially in defence. To improve further, we have to work on the shooting skills as the Japanese players' technique is not that good today."

Game 4 – 16.40, Group B: Russia v Germany 18-4 (8-1, 2-0, 4-0, 4-2)

Referees: Michael Baty (RSA), Yosuke Kajiwara (JPN)

RUSSIA: Anna Ustyukhina, Tatiana Zubkova 3, Ekaterina Prokofyeva, Elvina Karimova 3, Maria Borisova 2, Olga Gorbunova 3, Svetlana Kuzina 1, Anastasia Simanovich 1, Anna Timofeeva, Evgeniia Soboleva, Evgeniya Ivanova 4, Anna Grineva 1, Anna Karnaukh. Head coach: Alexander Gaidukov

GERMANY: Felicitas Saurusajtis, Belen Vosseberg, Nadja Kreis, Bianca Seyfert 1, Claudia Blumenkamp 2, Sina van der Bosch, Anja Seyfert, Jamie Verebelyi, Jenifer Stiefel 1, Nadine Hartwig, Carmen Gelse, Anika Ebell, Liselotte Hurrelmann. Head coach: Milos Sekulic

Extramen

RUS: 4 for 4

GER: 0 for 4

Penalties

RUS: 1 for 1

GER: 1 for 1



The Russians were ahead in every situation, like Evgeniya Ivanova (RUS, right) against Jenifer Stiefel

The two teams weren't in the same weight-category. The Russians saved some speed and power from their fourth period miracle against the Netherlands on the previous day when they produced a 4-0 rush – here, in the opening period they netted eight goals against the Germans. Then switched gears, backwards, scored only twice in the second period and added four in the third – an easy warm-up for the Friday clash against Italy.

Comment

Milos Sekulic, head coach, Germany:

“The second, third and fourth periods were good, we played well what we could against a good team. In the first we didn’t know, where we were, didn’t do anything right. But the following ones were fine, we can build on this.”

Game 5 – 18.30, Group B: Italy v Netherlands 8-8 (1-3, 3-2, 2-1, 2-2)

Referees: Nikolaos Boudramis (GRE), Gabriella Varkonyi (HUN)

ITALY: Gulia Gorlero, Chiara Tabani, Arianna Garibotti, Elisa Queirolo 3, Federica Radicchi, Rosaria Aiello, Tania di Mario 3, Roberta Bianconi, Giulia Emmolo 1, Francesca Pomeri, Aleksandra Cotti 1, Teresa Frassinetti, Laura Teani. Head coach: Fabio Conti

NETHERLANDS: Laura Aarts, Miloushka Smit 2, Dagmar Genee 1, Catharina van der Sloot 3, Amarens Genee, Nomi Stomphorst 1, Marloes Nijhuis, Vivian Sevenich, Maud Megens, Isabella van Toorn, Lieke Klaassen 1, Leonie van der Molen, Debby Willemsz. Head coach: Arno Havenga

Extramen

ITA: 5 for 15

NED: 4 for 7

Penalties

none



Actions and reactions... The joy of Netherlands’ Catharina van der Sloot who scored 3 goals...

Four years ago, in Trieste... These two met there for the Olympic spot in the quarters and the Italians managed to overcome the then-title-holder Dutch team in an extremely hot battle, decided by a single goal.

Though this current match was played only in the prelims, a lot were at stake as the top spot in this group also promises a relatively easier quarter-final. However, the decision has been postponed: this game also ended in an 8-8 tie, just the encounter between Holland and Russia a day ago. This one lacked those big 4-6 goals rushes but wasn't less dramatic, offering a series of twists and turns.



...and the joy of the other player wearing cup No. 4: Elisa Queirolo, who also netted 3 goals

The Netherlands had the better start, with three fine action goals they jumped to a 1-3 lead after eight minutes. The Italians struggled in 6 on 5 in this early stage but in the second they found their rhythm pretty much. Elisa Queirolo led the charge with two brilliant shots, Giulia Emmolo netted a man-up between the two, while the hosts missed two extras at the other end. With three connecting goals Italy went 4-3 up while tensions were high, the referees called the third double exclusion in little more than 12 minutes.



The referees faced a tough challenge while whistling this fight, but Nikolaos Boudramis (pictured) and Gabriella Varkonyi were up to the task

Even though Italy seemed to settle for the right pace, the Dutch managed to stage a minor comeback. First Catharina van der Sloot scored a fine goal from a counter, then they denied an Italian extra and van der Sloot added another one so the Netherlands led 4-5 at halftime.

Van de Sloot went on scoring, this time she converted a man-up and all of a sudden the Dutch seemed to gain control (4-6). But in this match nothing could be taken granted: soon the crowd was stunned as Italy levelled the score, thanks to Aleksandra Cotti and Elisa Queirolo. And the fourth began with Tania di Mario's trademark shot-like lob, so after being 4-6 down, now Italy was ahead once more at 7-6. A magnificent shot from Nomi Stomphorst put the Dutch back in track after a longer scoreless period, lasting 7:36 minutes. Di Mario finished off a 6 on 5, then the Setterosa had a matchball but the block denied them in extra, while the hosts made theirs as Dagmar Genee sent the ball in from close range. It was 2:23 to go but neither side could score any more. Italy missed two more extras, the Dutch defence did a great job in the final phase, though their attacked seemed to be weakened a bit towards the end of the game, just like a day earlier against the Russians.

Comments

Fabio Conti, head coach, Italy:

“It doesn't matter how many point we got this game. Here our task was to understand how this team should approach this event, to show that we are here in this tournament. And I can tell you, we are here in this tournament.”

Arno Havenga, head coach, Netherlands:

“The glass is half full, definitely. It was a good fight, we showed great strength against Italy, and this is what counts here. We can't tell too much on the result, we'll learn only Friday afternoon whom we have to play in the quarters.”

Game 6 – 20.00, Group B: New Zealand v France 9-11 (1-4, 2-4, 4-2, 2-1)

Referees: Natacha Florestano (BRA), Marie-Claude Deslières (CAN)

NEW ZEALAND: Jessica Mihcich, Nicole Lewis, Kelly Mason 2, Ricci Ferigo, Simone Lewis 1, Annabel Harman, Alexander Boyd, Caitlyn Lopes Da Silva 2, Emma Stoneman 2, Ema Carevic, Casie Bowry, Liana Dance 2, Antouki Youna. Head coach: Angie Winstanley-Smith

FRANCE: Lorene Derenty, Estelle Milot, Lea Bachelier 4, Aurore Sacre 2, Louise Guillet 2, Geraldine Mahieu 1, Marie Barbieux, Marion Tardy 2, Adeline Sacre, Audrey Daule, Lucie Cesca, Michaela Jaskova, Morgane Chabrier. Head coach: Filippou Sakellis

Extramen

NZL: 1 for 8

FRA: 4 for 9

Penalties

NZL: 1 for 1

FRA: none



It was a neck-to-neck battle... Ema Carevic (NZL, left) and Lea Bachelier in action – the French saved the day for her team by scoring 4 goals

When the New Zealanders came back to 9-10 with still 49 seconds on the clock, even an upset was in the cards but the French finally overcame this late scare and Lea Bachelier netted a fine goal – her 4th of the night – and secured their win. It could – regarding the skills and experiences, rather: should – have been a much easier match for the European side and for a while it looked like one.

France was 2-7 up in the second and even though the team from down under started to rise, after 5-8 the French went 6-10 up late in the third. Still, they couldn't keep up in attack, and connecting goals from the New Zealanders set up a tight finish but at the end the Gaul girls prevailed. Still, all credits go to the young

opponents who showed great mental strength and fighting spirit.

Comments

Angie Winstanley-Smith, head coach, New Zealand:

“We only had seven weeks preparation, the girls didn’t train since Kazan, played only two domestic games. This is the start for our four years cycle to Tokyo we all made commitment to make it better for the girls, they deserve it so much. It took them time to believe in themselves at international level as well. I’m really proud of how they are kept going, how they reacted, we gave them a fright at the end... The girls left everything in the pool. We came here to play European teams, to build and to learn.”

Filippos Sakellis, head coach, France

“It was OK, it was our game, we started well, normally the difference should have been bigger but things happened I don’t want to talk about, still, we won and we are going on.”

Classification

Group A

1. USA 6, 2. Greece 6, 3. Spain 2, 4. Canada 2, 5. Japan 2, 6. South Africa 0

Group B

1. Russia 5, 2. Italy 5, 3. Netherlands 4, 4. France 2, 5. Germany 2, 6. New Zealand 0
