

Stage is set for Surgut 2018

Olga Kamardina, FINA correspondent in Russia

FINA Women's Water Polo Cup 2018 is on the starting line the day after tomorrow in Surgut, Russia, with 8 teams of 5 continents spiking for the trophy.

Throughout the next week competitors will be busy chasing wins and luck, and testing a set of innovative rules proposed by FINA TWPC for the discussion. Format of the competition remained unchanged. There are two pools for the round robin stage, and a standard play-off chart for the finals. Draw arranged it in such a way, that group "A" composed of Spain, China, Australia and host Russia looks a little bit better balanced than group "B", which at the same time boasts the major World Cup scoring guns, powers and attractions - teams USA and Canada, accompanied by rising squads of New Zealand and South Africa.

Let's look ahead into the tournament and learn the must-know facts and features of the upcoming clashes.

Those mysterious Chinese

Group A's member water polo team China got rising in 2008, right before the home Olympics, where they finished on a high 5th spot. Since then, they always look competitive and strongly rely on 2 pillars – international expertise and physical loads. Some sources say, they do swim a lot in practice before each of the key championships, and provided by a good chance, will be fast and tireless, and exhaust their opponents "flying". Chinese are thirsty for wins though, they are well-drilled and disciplined. International group of coaches, including Juan Andujar, Zoran Kacic, Jane Giralt Juan and Li Wenhua, is headed by Dali Gong of China. It reflects their style and character, often called "Asian water polo" or "A water polo of their own".



Home prodigies Russia

Explicit favorites of the FINA World Cup-2018 is the team Russia, part of the strong Group “A”. Hosts and masters of the swimming pool, they will be trying hard to jump over their minds to climb up the podium. Happily survived is the backbone of the bronze winning Olympic and 2017 World Championships roster, much owing to the coaches Aleksandr Gaydukov and Andrey Belofastov, quite famous Olympic medalists on the male part. However, current season is of a diverse character. June-2018 has booked them bronze of the FINA World League Super Final, followed by July’s low 5th placement of the 33rd LEN European Championships (where they were placed behind Netherlands, Greece, Hungary and host Spain). However, don’t be misled by the facts and features, hosts were just warming up before the FINA World Cup in Russia.

Spanish character in action

Miguel Oca’s team returns to Surgut to defend merits. They are a bronze-holder of 2014 FINA World Cup in Khanty-Mansiysk, which is some 240 km from Surgut, and their next trip to Russia sees roster well fit for the task implied. But a month ago, they did exceedingly well at home, finishing third at the 33rd LEN European Championships in Barcelona. Attacker Bea Ortiz received prestigious “Top scorer award” on 25 goals. That rare occasion marked Spain for the first time, and her impressive overall turned out to be the best for women since ECH-1997. Besides Bea, Surgut will see 4 more Olympic vice-champions in the Spanish roster, plus 3 more Olympians of Rio-2016, where they placed as far as 5th.



Aussie stingers are hot ready for action

Australia, the last but not the least of the group “A” members, has always been a strong water polo squad. Landing silver at the previous edition of the FINA Women’s Water Polo World Cup in Khanty-Mansiysk, Aussie stingers are again in Russia to regain control. Changing a lot the team and the coaches, they were lucky enough to secure the Olympic core of 6: Isobel Bishop, Bronwen Knox, Zoe Arancini, Keesja Gofers, Hannah Buckling with Rowena Webster at the head. The Aussie’s captain will definitely be the star to watch and the challenger to keep an eye for the opponents. Her previous appearance at the FINA World Cup in Khanty Mansiysk booked her prestigious MVP title alongside the all-start team visiting card.

Only ladies in the coaching

For New Zealand, unlike their Australian neighbors, FINA World Cup-2018 will be another good chance to

study. The team of the group “B” boasts a good history and respect traditions. Kiwis were a participant of the first ever World Cup in 1979, but since then have never been among awardees. Composition of the squad-2018 reflects the best water polo weapons in place at their country. Together for fully 2 years New Zealand ladies are well-built and hot ready to implement water polo ideas of Angela Winstanley Smith, their head coach on 2012 Olympic Games background, which by the way, has only “only women” staff in Surgut.

RSA’s turn to study

South African ladies are newcomers at the FINA World Cups, and they are also drawn into the group “B”. Irrelevant of the result they produce here, the trip to Russia will be very fruitful. Another FINA umbrella events have never sought them luck and merits, and they were seen just 15th in their best performed FINA World Championships-2013. After the recent Olympic cycle, rotation was vast in the roster, and the new team is expected to showcase in Surgut. It’s made up of 8 freshmen and 5 players on international experience. The core figure in the squad is its captain Kelsey White, who has been doing much to promote water polo in her country.



Maple leaves: strong and sound

Canada shall be the one to beat in the group B. They are in possession of a rare virtue, as their strong line-up is able to stand opposition of the USA. There are 9 ladies, who played bronze game against Russia in Budapest last year, 11 out of 13 ranked 4th at the FINA World League Super Final-2018 in Kunshan. Canadians were silver at the previous edition of the meet in Shanghai, seeing Jessica Gaudreault received “Best goalkeeper award” and earned Media All-Star team ticket for the first time in her career. Although in her absence, FINA World Cup-2018 will be another good challenge for the Maple leaves to exhibit. They are very hungry for wins and are looking to back up their ancestors’ glory, featuring one gold in 1981 and 3 bronze in 1980, 1988 and 2002. One more must-know fact about Canadians. They know Russia better than most. There is Krystina Alogbo in their roster, who has been a part of "Ugra" team for several years to go, including the one just concluded, and her ex-club's headquarters is just 400km away from Surgut.

The USA: a dream team challenge

Major attraction, reigning champion and overwhelming favorite. USA is the first champion of the FINA Women’s Water Polo World Cup in 1979, and since then managed to improve their record by 2 wins – in 2014 and 2010. USA is a defending champion wherever they go, they are a dream team! There is hardly an athlete there without a medal in her beauty bag, including 6 (!) reigning Olympic winners and Maggie

Steffens collecting the crown twice. There are four 2-time FINA World champions and four FINA World cup holders. Maggie Steffens collected 8 World League gold medals, Kiley Neushul and Rachel Fattal – 5, Kalleigh Gilchrist - 4, and Ashleigh Johnson and Aria Fisher – 3. Ashlei Johnson was named the best goalkeeper of the FINA World League Super Final-2018, and Mac Fisher was simply another MVP of the team USA in 2017.



Footnote. FINA Women's Water Polo World Cup was founded in 1979 and kicked off in Merced, USA. Although staged on a regular basis, it missed accuracy in its schedule, which was brought in order in 2002. Since then the trophy is played every four years between 8 teams, which represent all continents of the globe.

In course of its 40 year-long history, the Cup travelled to 8 countries, including USA, Netherlands, Canada, New Zealand, Italy, France, China, and Russia. Australia had a little larger share than the rest, serving centerstage 4 times. 5 nation were seen on top, whereas 4 more registered their podium presences. The Netherlands have been dominating in the all-time medal's chart with 8 gold, 3 silver and 1 bronze medals. USA's and Australian water polo women collected 3 titles apiece along with a good number of minor merits. Hungary and Canada are the other two gold winning nations so far, with one medal each.

FINA Women's Water Polo World Cup 2018

Group A: ESP, AUS, CHN, RUS

Group B: RSA, NZL, USA, CAN



Competition schedule

Day 1: 4 September, 2018

Match #1. 14:30 NZL – USA

Match #2. 16:00 AUS – CHN

Match #3. 17:30 RSA – CAN

Match #4. 19:00 ESP – RUS

21:00 Opening Ceremony

Day 2: 5 September, 2018

Match #5. 15:00 ESP – CHN

Match #6. 16:30 NZL – CAN

Match #8. 18:00 RSA – USA

Match #7. 19:30 AUS – RUS

Day 3: 6 September, 2018

Match #9. 15:00 NZL – RSA

Match #10. 16:30 AUS – ESP

Match #11. 18:00 USA – CAN

Match #12. 19:30 CHN – RUS

Day 4: 7 September, 2018, Quarter-finals

Match #13. 15:00 2A – 3B

Match #14. 16:30 3A – 2B

Match #15. 18:00 1A – 4B

Match #16. 19:30 4A – 1B

Day 5: 8 September, 2018, Semi-finals

Match #17. 15:00 L13 – L16

Match #18. 16:30 L14 – L15

Match #19. 18:00 W13 – W16

Match #20. 19:30 W14 – W15

Day 6: 9 September, 2018, Finals

Match #21. 15:00 L17 – L18 (7 – 8 places)

Match #22. 16:30 W17 – W18 (5 – 6 places)

Match #23. 18:00 L19 – L20 (3 – 4 places)

Match #24. 19:30 W19 – W20 (1 – 2 places)
