

Greece chasing back-to-back junior men's world water polo crowns

Russell McKinnon, FINA Media Committee

Greece will be chasing back-to-back FINA World Men's Junior Water Polo crowns when action gets underway at the new Al-Nasar Sport Club Kuwait on Thursday.

Who could forget the scintillating final with Croatia in Belgrade, Serbia two years ago when a penalty shootout was required for the gold medal?

Greece secured the shootout with a centre-forward goal in the last second of regular play for 7-7 and proceeded to a perfect record from five metres for the 12-10 victory.

Serbia collected bronze and Hungary — minus head coach and a player with red cards — was fourth after the 12-11 encounter.

There are 20 teams gathered again for the 20th version of this event, which started in Milan, Italy back in 1981 when the Soviet Union was victor.

Greece is a two-time winner, claiming gold in Istanbul, Turkey in 2001 when it again bested Croatia. Greece returns with three 2017 champions — Alexandros Papanastasiou, big centre forward Dimitrios Nikolaidis and Konstaninos Gkiouvetsis.

Greece might call itself lucky with the draw; the only two teams from 2017 finishing in 11th (Australia) and 18th (New Zealand). Greece has retained the services of winning coach Theodoros Lorantos, a long-time Greek international.

Croatia has Serbia in its group and Hungary tops Group B with Russia and Canada its main foils.

Montenegro, fifth in Belgrade, tops Group C with Italy (7th) and United States of America (8th) on 2017 form.

There was some classic play in 2017, especially from the senior players who contested the Budapest FINA World Championships a few months earlier. Much could be said about those players from Gwangju who will double up in Kuwait City — the host city of the 1999 version, won by Italy over Australia.

Italy is the leading team at these championships, having won five titles and taken home two silvers and two bronzes. Only Hungary has more medals — three golds, four silvers and six bronzes.

In opening-day play, Spain-Hungary, Japan-China and Greece-Australia could be standout matches.

The medal finals of the nine-day event will be played on December 20.
