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Water Polo Men, Day 4: CRO 21 NZL 4

FINA Communication Department

Olympic champion Croatia scored a comfortable 21-4 victory over New Zealand to breeze into the quarterfinals. Playing the quarterfinal qualification round, Croatia opened a 6-0 lead to set up the victory in a match where Sandro Sukno and Petar Muslim led all scorers with five each. Sukno is the son of 1984 Yugoslavian Olympic gold medallist Goran Sukno. Three of Sandro's goals came in the first quarter and it should have been four except his penalty attempt was blocked.

Another son of dual Olympic champion from that era, Luka Bukic, scored in the match. Father Perica Bukic is a legend of the game and won his gold medals in 1984 and 1988. Muslim converted three penalty goals, scored on counter and extra-man attack.

New Zealand was fully aware of the World Championship record score against it, by Croatia at Rome in 1994 — 35-1. The Kiwis did not want a repeat and played a physical game as attested by the foul count. Two players did not see out the match, three others were on two majors and three others had one. Croatia had one out two on one major.

Croatia looked disinterested in the match in the final quarter with bench players standing away from the bench. However, the younger, less experienced Kiwis strove to do their best and finished the final period 3-1 down, not a bad result for them. Skipper Lachie Tijssen, a long-term member of the team and captain, scored New Zealand's final goal of these championships off a cross pass on extra.

Match 27: 12:10, Quarterfinal Qualification, CROATIA 21 NEW ZEALAND 4

Quarters: 6-1, 4-2, 8-0, 3-1
Referees: Amber Drury (USA), Ian Melliari (RSA).
Extra Man: CRO: 5/8. NZL: 2/4.
Pens: CRO: 3/3. NZL: 1/1.

Teams:

CROATIA: Josip Pavic, Luke Loncar, Ivan Milakovic, Fran Paskuvalin (2), Maro Jokovic (2), Luka Bukic (1), Petar Muslim (5), Andro Butuje, Sandro Sukno (5), Niksa Dobud (2), Anđelo Setka (1), Paul Obradovic (3), Marko Bijac. Head Coach: Ivica Tucak.

NEW ZEALAND: Thomas Kingsmill, Matthew Lewis (1), Stefan Curry, Finn Lowery, Jonathan Ross (1), Andrew Sieprath, Daniel Jackson, Matthew Small, Eamon Lui-Fakaotimanaua, Matthew Bryant (1), Lachlan Tijssen (1), Adam Pye, Dylan Smith. Head Coach: Jozsef Sike.

FLASH QUOTES:

Petar Muslim (CRO):

“It was just a practice for us, we played very well. In my opinion this is the beginning of this competition for us.”

Sandro Sukno (CRO):

“We were better than our opponents in this game, the next game is going to be far more serious for us. We will fight till the end of the tournament.”

Luka Bukic (CRO):

“This was my second goal of my first World Championship, and though they were relatively easy opponents it is still an important win. We will now go in strong for the quarterfinals.”

Ivica Tucak (CRO Head Coach):

“We did a good job.”

Finn Lowery (NZL):

“I am quite happy and satisfied, despite the result, considering we aren't professional players; we have our day jobs or studies and don't have enough time to train properly. It's difficult to commit ourselves to this sport. With some luck I hope we can play again in the next World Championships”

Stefan Curry (NZL):

“We are happy because we are an amateur team and we have played against the top four teams (Spain, Greece, Montenegro and Croatia). To play this championship has been a great experience but we have to learn still.”

Matthew Small (NZL):

“I think we played well against such a high-level team. I feel proud of my team. We have to learn to work together and we have to communicate more. This championship was good because we were able to learn from the other teams.”
