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Water Polo Women, Day 6: AUS 9 RUS 6

FINA Communication Department

Aussie Stingers head coach Greg McFadden must have had Melbourne 2007 in his mind in playing and beating Russia 9-6 in the first women's semifinal at Bernat Picornell Pool. He coached the team to victory over Russia on that semifinal occasion — also a three-goal margin at 12-9 — and went on to lose the final by a goal to the United States of America (6-5). Tonight he won again but will face a different opponent in Friday's gold-medal match.

It was the last occasion that Australia met Russia at a World Championship and is now the fifth time Australia has won while drawing two for a clean sheet.

The match was not one of the greatest as both teams appeared nervous and feeling for chinks in the other's armour. Russia pressured hard in the closing stages but the Stingers struck through three backhand shots outside the normal two-metre zone.

Firstly, Rowena Webster sent one in from four metres for 5-4, then Nicola Zagame, with her third, impossibly squeezing it in from one metre out on the deep left and Holly Lincoln-Smith from four metres at 8-4 (5:13) in the last quarter.

Russia controlled the opening quarter through Evgeniya Ivanova and Ekaterina Prokofyeva goals, split by a Zagame centre-forward shot. Prokofyeva's contribution came off a 5m free-throw shot from about 7m, lobbing Kelsey Wakefield on the buzzer.

Australia controlled the second quarter with a goal on counter (Zoe Arancini), on extra (Zagame) and on counter attack (Hannah Buckling).

Olga Beliaeva countered and was found free on the cross pass from four metres for 4-4 early in the third period. Two Aussie backhands had the game at 6-4 by the final break.

Russian skipper Evgeniya Ivanova converted extra for 6-5 and the match was still tightly in the balance.

Webster went on counter and lobbed Anna Kanaukh for 7-5; Lincoln-Smith chimed in with her backhand and Olga Belova finished off what should have been an extra-man goal for 8-6 at 2:58.

The killer punch came when heavily pressed, Australia sent Webster down the middle. She received the pass and only she seemed to see Ashleigh Southern slip across the two-metre line from the right. She popped her the ball and Southern took it on her left hand, drew the goalkeeper and fired in the winner at 1:58 for 9-6.

It was interesting to note that the first major foul was not until three minutes into the second quarter, a rare feat indeed.

Both teams took timeouts but Australia was through and looking to add to its 1986 world crown, the silver from Melbourne

and the bronze from Perth in 1998.

Russia is left to regroup for the bronze-medal match and the hope that it can secure a fifth to go with those from Rome 1994, Barcelona 2003, Melbourne 2007 and Shanghai 2011.

{youtube}-TDCUYNqkIE{/youtube}

Match 39: 20:15, Semifinal Round 1-4, RUSSIA 6 AUSTRALIA 9

Quarters: 2-1, 1-3, 1-2, 2-3

Referees: Boris Margeta (SLO), Mario Bianchi (ITA).

Extra Man: RUS: 1/3 (1/7). AUS: 1/1 (1/4).

Pens: Nil

Teams:

RUSSIA:

Anna Ustyukhina, Diana Antonova, Ekaterina Prokofyeva (1), Elvina Karimova, Alexandra Antonova, Olga Belova (1), Ekaterina Tankeeva, Anna Grineva, Anna Timofeeva, Olga Beliaeva (1), Evgeniya Ivanova (2), Ekaterina Zelentsova (1), Anna Karnaukh. Head Coach: Mikhail Nakoryakov.

AUSTRALIA:

Lea Barta, Jayde Appel, Hannah Buckling (1), Holly Lincoln-Smith (1), Isobel Bishop, Bronwen Knox, Rowena Webster (2), Glencora McGhie, Zoe Arancini (1), Ashleigh Southern (1), Keesja Gofers, Nicola Zagame (3), Kelsey Wakefield. Head Coach: Greg McFadden.

Match Report:

FLASH QUOTES:

Isabel Bishop (AUS):

“It’s really exciting to be in the final. We are a new team who started playing together recently and it’s great to be competing at this level. We knew it was going to be tough; we focused on their counter attack to have them under control.”

Ashleigh Southern (AUS):

“We tried to stop their counter attack, taking player by player — it was very hard. Scoring a few more goals has been really good. It’s an amazing feeling being in the final, because we lost in the semifinals last year in the Olympics, so we really wanted to come out here and play for the World Championship.”

Greg McFadden (AUS Head Coach):

“We knew that Russia plays really fast and we had to stop their counter attacks, so we did. Russia played excellent water polo, but we did what we do best and it worked. We talked about concentrating on quick movements on the attack and that let us score those three backhand goals. We decided to play hard against their weakest players. Russia has played a great tournament.”

Olga Beliaeva (RUS):

“It was a really difficult game for us. Australia was stronger and faster, so we couldn’t win the match. Now, we will concentrate to get the medal and not going home with empty hands.”
