Hosts upset Germany, Greece survives Georgian challenge, Russia edges out France

Game 1, Group A, 13.00 – Georgia v Greece 10-11

**Quarters:** 2-3, 3-5, 5-2, 0-1

**Referees:** Michiel Zwart (NED), Frank Ohme (GER)
GEORGIA

RAZMADZE Irakli 7 saves/18 shots, SHUBLADZE Nikoloz (GK, not entered) – KAVTARADZE Beka 0 goals/0 shots, DADVANI Valiko 1/1, IMNAISHVILI Revaz 0/0, BITADZE Andria 0/1, JELACA Marko 0/2, JAKHAIA Khvicha 0/2, SHUSHIASHVILI Nika 1/8, ELEZ Marko 4/7, MAGRAKVELIDZE Giorgi 0/1, BARALDI Fabio 2/3, VAPENSKI Boris 2/6

Coach: Dejan Stanojevic

GREECE

ZERDEVAS Emmanouil 6/11, GALANIDIS Konstantinos 7/12 – GENIDOUNIAS Konstantinos 0/4, SKOUMPAKIS Dimitrios 1/2, KAPOTSIS Marios 0/0, FOUNTOLIS Ioannis 5/11, PAPANASTASIOU Alexandros 1/1, DERVISIS Georgios 0/0, ARGYROPOULOS Stylianos 1/2, MOURIKIS Konstantinos 1/1, KOLOMVOS Christodoulos 1/2, GKIIOUVETSIS Konstantinos 0/1, VLACHOPOULOS Angelos 1/3

Coach: Theodoros Vlachos

Shots:

GEO: 10/31 (32.3%)

GRE: 11/27 (40.7%)

Extramen:
GEO: 4 for 13
GRE: 3 for 13

Penalties:
GEO: 1 for 1
GRE: 1 for 1

Saves:
GEO: 7/18 (38.9%)
GRE: 13/23 (56.5%)

Report

It was already visible in the first period that the Georgians would not give this game for free as they held on for 2-3 in the opening period. However, in the second the favourites started gaining control, with some fine plays the Greeks jumped to a 4-8 lead and were three up by halftime.

All looked comfortable at that stage – perhaps the leading side’s players laid back too soon and weren’t ready for the Georgians’ next challenge. But it was there, with two fast goals the underdogs came back for 7-8 and from that point it was a balanced match again. The Greeks missed their man-ups in succession and despite the VAR helped them twice and Konstantinos Mourikis netted a fine goal from the centre, the Georgians managed to equalise by the end of the third while the Greeks were unable to score in the last 5:12 minutes of this quarter.

What’s more, Georgia had a man-up to take the lead early in the fourth but the finish was far from perfect and Ioannis Fountoulis broke the Greeks’ silence which lasted 8:03 minutes. It was his 5th hit in this afternoon, and it turned out to the game winner. With 2:40 remaining, Georgia had another 6 on 5 to go even but the ball was blocked. The same happened at the other end when Greek had the chance to close down the match – however, the Georgians were running out of gas as they could not score in the entire fourth period so the Greeks managed to bag three points but the Georgians also deserve credit for their spirited performance.

Quotes
Theodoros Vlachos, coach, Greece:

“It was a good game for Georgia and it was really hard at the end. There is no easy game here, you cannot win without playing well. We have to start thinking differently for the rest of the tournament. It will be a very difficult event, we have to go step by step, even we are considered favourites. We will try to find our rhythm during the tournament since we didn’t play any game for twenty days.”

Dejan Stanojevic, coach, Georgia:

“We can observe this match in two ways. First of all, we have to be honest: we know the difference in quality
this game. At the end we made some mistakes and the experienced Greek team made us pay for those. Still, we
are really satisfied and we have to keep the discipline we showed today for at least 90 per cent in the game for
our following matches against Canada and Brazil as Montenegro stands out in this group. But it’s a long way to

go until we may reach the third place in the group.”

Quarters: 4-3, 1-1, 3-2, 3-1
Referees: Arkady Voevodin (RUS), Sebastian Dervieux (FRA)

CANADA

RAĐENOVIC Milan, REIHER Sam (GK, n. e.) – PATTERSON Gaelen Geddes 1/2, DJERKOVIĆ Bogdan 0/2, CONSTANTIN-BICARI Nicolas 2/4, SPOONER Mark 0/0, TORAKIS George 2/4, COTE Jeremie 2/5, SPOONER Sean 2/3, GARDIJAŊ Alekša 2/3, SOLEIMANIPAK Aria 0/0, ŚCIAPOWAL Max 0/0, D’SOUZA Reuel Mark 0/1

Coach: Pino Porzio

BRAZIL

Soro Slabodan, FERNANDES João Pedro (GK, n. e.) – PEDRÓSO Marcos Paulo 0/0, DA SILVA Gabriel 0/0, COUTINHO Gustavo 0/0, FREITAS Roberto 1/1, GOMES Bernardo 1/5, REAL Rafael 2/6, GOMES Guilherme 1/4, ROCHA Bernardo 0/1, FRANÇO Ruda 1/3, GUIMARAES Gustavo 1/6, GUIMARAES Ricardo 0/0

Coach: Andre Avallone

Shots:

CAN: 11/24 (45.8%)

BRA: 7/26 (26.9%)
Extramen:

CAN: 5 for 14
BRA: 3 for 8

Penalties:

None

Saves:

CAN: 9/16 (56.2%)
BRA: 5/16 (26.9%)

Report

Canada took a flying start as they netted three straight goals in a span of 73 seconds – but as fast as it happened, the 3-0 lead disappeared right inside the first period as the Brazilians fought themselves back to 3-3. And only the post saved the Canadians from going one down, so it was a booster when Jeremie Cote put away a man-up one second before the buzzer. A 6m shot, also in the last second of the opening possession, brought the Brazilians back to even but it turned out that was the last time they were in that position. Aleksa Gardijan gave back the lead to Canada from the next attack – though for a while the score was frozen at 5-4. Canada missed three man-ups towards the end of the second but its best player Nicolas Constantin-Bicari halted the scoreless run after 9:34 minutes with a fine goal from the centre for 6-4. Cote reset the three-goal cushion from a counter but Brazil wasn’t done and even though the Latin Americans had a drought lasting 11:32 minutes, they netted two in 56 seconds for 7-6. However, the equaliser did not come this time, and George Torakis 6m shot gave Canada some comfort before the final quarter.

And there two fast goals decided the game: in 41 seconds it stood 10-6, Torakis’ shot from the distance was a beauty and sealed the Canadians’ win as a late goal exchange didn’t have any effect on the final outcome.
Pino Pozio, coach, Canada:

“This a young team where sometimes the emotions run high but at the end we did a good job, took a four-goal lead and controlled the game. It was an important match for both teams but now we have the better chances on our side. Greece and Montenegro are stronger than the other teams in this group, our important match is against Georgia but we could see that they have a good team too.”
Quarter: 5-2, 3-2, 2-2, 1-4

Referees: Xavi Buch (ESP), Michael Goldenberg (USA)

NETHERLANDS

WAGENAAR Eelco 12/22, DE KOFF Milan (GK, n. e.) – VEENHUIS Kjeld 3/5, WINKELHORST Jorn 1/2, WOLSWINKEL Guus 0/0, VAN IJPEREN Guus 0/0, LINDHOUT Robin 0/1, GBADAMASSI Bilal 0/0, NISPELING Jesse 1/2, MULLER Jorn 4/6, JANSSEN Pascal 0/2, KOOPMAN Jesse 0/4, LUCAS Thomas 2/2

Coach: Harry van der Meer

GERMANY

SCHENKEL Moritz 5/16, THOM Florian (GK, n. e.) – BOZIC Zoran 0/2, VAN DER BOSCH Timo 0/1, REAL Julian 3/5, SCHULZ Hannes 0/2, JUNGLING Maurice 0/3, STRELEZKIJ Denis 2/4, GIELEN Luuk 1/5, STAMM Marko 2/5, CUK Mateo 0/0, RESTOVIC Marin 0/3, SCHUETZE Fynn 2/3

Coach: Hagen Stamm
Shots:

NED: 11/24 (45.8%)
GER: 10/33 (30.3%)

Extramen:

NED: 5 for 7
GER: 2 for 10

Penalties:

NED: none
GER: 0 for 1

Saves:

NED: 12/22 (54.5%)
GER: 5/16 (31.2%)
Based on recent performances and ranks earned at majors, the Germans were the favourites of the match – but a stormy start from the hosts quickly blew all the expectations away. The Germans were struggling spectacularly, something one could not wonder as the strict lockdown measures in their country meant that their domestic league could not even begin this season.

The Dutch netted three in a row after 1-1, while Luuk Gielen missed a penalty for the Germans – perhaps in that very moment he had some second thoughts on changing of his nationality from Dutch to German... That phase proved to be decisive as the Dutch gained confidence and soon they found themselves 8-2 up late in the second – a real shock, and perhaps not only for the Germans... Still, the favourite side is pretty well-known for never giving up at any moment anything (in any sport) and after a painfully long scoreless period of 8:48 minutes they netted two in 23 seconds before the middle break.

They missed a man-up in the third which could have brought them closer and Kjeld Veenhuis’ shot from the distance seemed to kill the Germans’ momentum. So nothing changed in the course of the game in this quarter, Eelco Wagenaar posted more important saves, Jorn Muller netted his 4th goal and the Dutch enjoyed a 10-6 lead turning into the fourth period. The hosts looked to get a bit tired, though, and rather went for safety while the Germans started to gain some rhythm, scored three action goals and with 3:47 remaining they came back to 10-9. The Dutch got a 6 on 5, called a time-out and Thomas Lucas stayed calm enough to send the ball home for 11-9. Fynn Shuetze replied immediately with a great left-handed shot from the perimeter so the Germans had 2:51 minutes to avoid an embarrassing defeat. But three possessions were not enough to save the game, though Marko Stamm’s disallowed goal from the centre was a bitter pill to swallow... In fact, they outshot the Dutch 33-24 – but could not outscore them, partly because the difference in goaltending was more than significant (Eelco Wagenaar posted 12 saves on 22 shots for 54.5% while Moritz Schenkel had only 5 saves on 16 shots for 31.2%) and the same applies to the man-ups (5/7 v 2/10).

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**Quotes**

*Harry van der Meer, coach, Netherlands*

“It was a great win for us and I am really satisfied with that though we did not play at all in the last period which almost put us into trouble. I told the players that the first game of every tournament is special and can take our chances and we have to work for four periods. After this game we have to see that this stands, even we are 4-
“to win matches.”

Hagen Stamm, coach, Germany

“We missed too many clear chances at the beginning and our shots turned their goalkeeper to hot. The Dutch deserved the victory, they were more greedy to win the game. The game tomorrow against France is our final one to stay in the race for the fourth qualifying place [in the prelims].”

Game 4, Group B: 19.00 – Croatia v Romania 16-6

Results & Teams
**Quarters:** 5-1, 3-1, 4-2, 4-2

**Referees:** Dion Willis (RSA), Fabio Toffoli (BRA)

**CROATIA**

BIJAC Marko 9/15, POPADIC Toni (GK) – MACAN Marko 2/3, FATOVIC Loren 2/3, LONCAR Luka 2/3, JOKOVIC Maro 2/4, BUKIC Luka 1/5, VUKICEVIC Ante 1/2, BUSLJE Andro 0/0, MILOS Lovre 2/4, VRLIC Josip 0/0, BURIC Rino 3/3, GARCIA Javier 1/2

Coach: Ivica Tucak

**ROMANIA**

TIC Marius-Florin 6/22, ABRUDAN Serban-Natanael (GK, n. e.) – RADU Cosmin-Alexandru 1/1, VATRAI Albert-Alexandru 0/2, FULEA Tudor-Andrei 2/3, ANTIPA Victor-Andrei 1/1, PRIOTEASA Andrei 0/3, DRAGOMIRESCU Vlad-Gabriel 0/2, REMES Bogdan 0/1, GERGEYFI Robert 0/2, GEORGESCU Vlad-Luca 2/7, GHIBAN Alexandru-Andrei 0/0, VANCSIK Levente 0/0

Coach: Anastasios Kechagias
Shots:

CRO: 16/29 (55.2%)
ROU: 6/22 (27.3%)

Extramen:

CRO: 6 for 9
ROU: 2 for 10

Penalties:

CRO: 1 for 2
ROU: none

Saves:

CRO: 9/15 (60.0%)
ROU: 4/20 (20.0%)
The last time Croatia had to face the challenged of an Olympic Qualification Tournament dates back to 2004 – on the following three occasions they had secured their berth during one of the major championships. This time they were one goal away from qualifying twice, first when they lost by a single goal to Serbia in the 2019 World League final, then it happened again in the World Championship semis, losing by one to Spain... At the Europeans they came short so now they had to go for the very last chance.

The 2017 world champions began their quest in style as the downed Romania with ease. The took off a good start, led 3-0 after 4:33 minutes, added two more in the opening period and further expanded the gap in the second to build a solid 8-2 lead by halftime. Unlike the other favourites in the previous matches, they did not lay back. Just an interesting fact: while the winners of the first three matches all netted 11 goals, the Croats scored the 11th in the middle of the third. With further seven matches are in sight for them in as many days, they did not push too hard in the last period, put their focus on defending and cruised to convincing victory.

Quotes

Lovre Milos, MVP of the game, Croatia

“We scored many goals, executed the plan we had agreed before the game and played well after all. Now we are looking forward to meeting the Netherlands. We know every games are going to be tough here but we want to show that we are one of the favourites.”
Sandro Sukno, assistant coach, Croatia

“It was the first game of the tournament which is always difficult so we are satisfied with this win. We still have seven games on the way to Tokyo and we want to get one of those three spots at the Olympics.”

Anastasios Kechagias, coach, Romania:

“It’s difficult to play the first game against one of the top favourites of a tournament. We wanted to have a closer contest but this result is acceptable for our team. We are here to gain experience and go as far as possible. The question is if we could cause some surprise. There are many things which can determine your faith in a
it ends."

Results & Teams

Quarters: 2-3, 2-4, 5-3, 3-3

Referees: Boris Margeta (SLO), Stanko Ivanovski (MNE)

FRANCE

GARSAU Remi 3/10, DUBOIS Clement 2/8 – BOUET Alexandre 0/1, VERNOUX Romain 1/3, MISSY Nicolas 0/1, KHASZ Enzo 1/1, VERNOUX Thomas 2/6, CROUSILLAT Ugo 5/8, BABIC David 0/1, MARZOUKI Mehdi 3/10, CANONNE Charles 0/0, VANPEPERSTRAETE Pierre-Frederic 0/1, CAUMETTE David 0/1

Coach: Nenad Vukanic
RUSSIA

IVANOV Victor 11/23, KOSTROV Evgeny (GK, n. e.) – SUCHKOV Ivan 2/2, KISELEV Konstantin 0/5, DEREVIANKIN Nikita 0/0, ASHAEV Artem 0/0, KHARKOV Konstantin 3/8, MERKULOV Daniil 0/2, NAGAEV Ivan 4/6, PRONIN Daniil 0/0, KHOLOD Dmitrii 1/2, LISUNOV Sergey 1/2, SHEPELEV Roman 2/3

Coach: Sergey Evstigneev

Shots:

FRA: 12/33 (36.4%)
RUS: 13/31 (41.9%)

Extramen:

FRA: 7 for 10
RUS: 7 for 9

Penalties:

FRA: 1 for 1
RUS: none
Saves:

FRA: 5/18 (27.8%)
RUS: 11/23 (47.8%)

Report

It was a game of twists and turns where both teams sat on a rollercoaster though at different periods within this match. At the beginning the sides came up with a mix of fine solutions and bad decisions kind of equally, the game was even till 3-3. Then the Russians managed to ride a great wave to stage a 0-4 rush in a span of 2:19 minutes while the French looked to be lost a bit in the hurricane (3-7).

But that was just a temporary drop on their side: Ugo Crousillat already gave the first sign of life before the middle break and in the third it was the French who came as the whirlwind. They netted three more in 2:05 minutes to level the score at 7-7. To halt this match, Ivan Nagaev stepped up again for the Russians by selling his trademark shot from an impossible angle close to zero degree from the right wing in a 6 on 5. It was his 4th in the game but the battle of the lefties continued as Crousillat scored his 5th for 8-8. A video review confirmed the next Russian goal by Ivan Suchkov – merely millimetres favoured the them –, then Mehdi Marzouki’s distant blast blew up the net in contrast. Suchkov also demonstrated he could score an unquestionable goal, it was a great action shot which gave the Russians a 9-10 lead before the final break.

The rollercoaster effect was in full force in the fourth. The French went up as they netted two in 50 seconds to take the lead for the very first time in the match (11-10) – only to see the Russians hit back with a double in 20 seconds with a steal between the two for 11-12. Thomas Vernoux buried an extra but Konstantin Kharkov was also on target from the next 6 on 5 with 3:05 remaining. Victor Ivanov posted back-to-back saves in the same possession – rarely the goalies managed to put their hands on the ball in these minutes... – at the other end Clement Dubois also had a great catch. A series of missed shots followed, then a blocked one but the French regained the ball with 30 seconds to go. And here came the last attempt but Marzouki’s shot was kind of mirroring the story of this match: he netted 3 before but also had 6 missed or saved shots and his 10th sharply hit the bar but did not bounce in so at the end the Russians came out on top.

Quotes

Ivan Nagaev, MVP of the game, Russia

“Here every team is nearly on the same level. Of course, we wanted to win with a bigger difference but we are
Nenad Vukanic, coach, France

“We were close to the Russian team but we could not use our chances to earn a point at least. I cannot be satisfied since we lost and of course we try to be a team which can hope to win more and more games but it’s not easy to catch rivals like Russia, Greece, Montenegro or Croatia. Still, tomorrow is a new day and we try to claim our first win here.”

Gergely Csurka, FINA Media Committee

Host Netherlands caused the first upset of the men’s Olympic Qualification Tournament in Rotterdam by beating Germany. The Dutch led 8-2 already in the first half before the Germans staged a comeback and almost caught up.
Georgia where surprise was also on the horizon as the Georgians came back from 4-8 to 10-10 but Ioannis Fountoulis’ 5th goal of the game earned three points for the Greeks. Canada outpowered the Brazilians in the American derby to gain a fine win while Romania was no match for 2017 world champion Croatia. The last game was a 25-goal thriller where the Russians managed to edge out France.
Ioannis Fountoulis was instrumental in Greece's opening win

In the opening game, one of the favourite teams Greece found itself in trouble after a fine first half. They already led by four goals in the second period but Georgia came up with a brilliant run in the third and by the time the final period began it was all even at 10-10. But experience and better stamina was on Greece’s side, plus a brilliant shooter Ioannis Fountoulis, who scored five in the game and his last blast decided the outcome as the only goal netted in the fourth.

Former Montenegrin leftie Boris Vapenski and his Georgian team-mates offered a fine performance but could not catch the Greeks at the end - Photos: Marcel tel Bals

In the other match of Group A, Canada kept the game under control for most of the time – Brazil had some better spells when they came back from 0-3 to 3-3 in the first period, then from 4-7 to 6-7 in the third but the North Americans were clearly the better side.
George Torakis scored a couple of brilliant goals for Canada

The third match of this group was cancelled since a handful of Turkish players produced positive tests at the compulsory checks upon their arrival and the FINA Management Committee decided to apply the Covid-19 protocol’s related measures, which requires the team’s withdrawal from the competition in this case.

The first game in Group B offered the first upset of the tournament as the Netherlands outplayed the Germans for most of the game – though at the end they barely survived the late surge of their rivals. The hosts staged a sensational first half, shortly before the middle break they led 8-2 when the Germans started awakening but they still trailed 10-6 before the final period. Still, they fought on and by netting three in a row they were back – but the Dutch could score for 11-9 and even though the Germans replied and had 2:51 minutes to save the game at least to a tie, they could not find the way to equalise.
Benchmark performance for the hosts: the Dutch can dream on!

Next came the top favourite side of the tourney Croatia and the 2017 world champions didn't disappoint their fans. They enjoyed an easy cruise against the Romanians as they offered a very balanced performance at both ends of the pool which gave them a very convincing 16-6 win.

Croatia offered the best defensive effort on the opening day

In the last match Russia and France produced an epic clash with a lot of ups and downs for both sides. After 3-3 the Russians jumped to a 3-7 lead but early in the third the French came back for 7-7. From that point it was even more thrilling, the Russians took the lead three times, then the French went up 11-10 for the first time in the entire game but within 20 seconds Russia hit back with a double. One hit apiece followed soon but after the spread of goals the last 3:05 minutes didn't see any more. Thus Russia managed to claim all three points – a good start for them, while France, the surprise qualifier in 2016, will have a live-or-die match against the Germans on Day 2. In this extremely balanced group two losses might easily mean the end of the quest of the Olympic dream.
It was a great offensive show with 64 shots and 25 goals – and the Russians had the last laugh