Russia stuns Croatia, Montenegro sinks Greece in the clashes for the top spots

Game 16, Group B, 13.00 – Romania v Germany 12-7

Quarters: 1-1, 4-4, 4-1, 3-1

Referees: Dion Willis (RSA), Nikolaos Boudramis (GRE)
ROMANIA

TIC Marius-Florin 13/20, ABRUDAN Serban-Natanael (GK, n. e.) – RADU Cosmin-Alexandru 3/5, VATRAI Albert-Alexandru 1/3, FULEA Tudor-Andrei 0/1, ANTIPA Victor-Andrei 1/2, PRIOTEASA Andrei 2/4, DRAGOMIRESCU Vlad-Gabriel 0/1, REMES Bogdan 0/0, GERGELYFI Robert 0/0, GEORGESCU Vlad-Luca 2/4, GHIBAN Alexandru-Andrei 3/6, VANCSIK Levente 0/1

Coach: Anastasios Kechagias

GERMANY

SCHENKEL Moritz 9/21, THOM Florian (GK, n. e.) – BOZIC Zoran 0/0, VAN DER BOSCH Timo 0/0, REAL Julian 0/2, SCHULZ Hannes 0/0, JUNGLING Maurice 0/3, STRELEZKIJ Denis 1/7, GIELEN Luuk 0/1, STAMM Marko 1/6, CUK Mateo 2/3, RESTOVIC Marin 1/3, SCHUETZE Fynn 2/3

Coach: Hagen Stamm

Shots:

ROU: 12/27 (44.4%)
GER: 7/28 (25.0%)

Extramen:
ROU: 3 for 8
GER: 1 for 8

Penalties:

ROU: 1 for 1
GER: none

Saves:

ROU: 13/20 (65.0%)
GER: 9/21 (42.9%)

Report

The Germans wanted to save some pride after three losses – especially the third one against Russia was embarrassing (5-17) – and for two periods they looked serious. Compared to the first three days when they routinely fell behind by 4-5-6 goals in this phase, holding on for 5-5 already deserved some credit.

Still, the second half brought back the ‘old habits’, this part was gone with 6-2 as the Romanians slowly sailed away why the German offence melted down once more. Just a telling stat: two of their most dangerous shooters Denis Strelezkij and Marko Stamm produced a 2/13 percentage combined – that is something this German team could not compensate. Again, credits should be given Marius-Florian Tic who posted 13 saves and a 65% percentage in the Romanian goal (yesterday he had 19 stops) – he was the key for the Romanians’ first win here. This also sets up a great duel with the French in the final round of the prelims.

Quotes
Hagen Stamm, coach, Germany:

“I’m always disappointed after a match like this as I don’t like to be a loser and here this is the fourth day and our fourth loss, and I remember the days when I could give interviews after victories... Today the beginning was fine, we were leading and showed we could play much better than in the past days. But then came the same thing, we lost control, gave presents to Romania, did not play our agreed tactics. Honestly, I know my body and my abilities at the age of 60 but sometimes I think of taking my suits and jumping in...
Vlad-Luca Georgescu, MVP of the game, Romania:

“We had to go to sleep very early yesterday evening that was the best we could do after playing lately. Today it was a very hard match and we fought till the end. Since we lost to Holland, our chances to go to the Olympics are small but we need to keep on pushing hard till the end.”

Athanasios Kechagias, coach, Romania:

“It was a tough game but here all games are similar and you have to be ready every day. In a tournament like this the best is to have short memories: forget what happened in a given match immediately and be ready to go to
we lost to the Netherlands but we reacted well and won today and that’s really satisfying.”

Game 17, Group B, 14.30 – Croatia v Russia 13-14

Results & Teams

Quarters: 5-3, 4-4, 4-4, 0-3

Referees: Erkkan Turkan (TUR), Irakli Sanadze (GEO)

CROATIA

BIJAC Marko 8/22, POPADIC Toni (GK, n. e.) – MACAN Marko 0/0, FATOVIC Loren 4/8, LONCAR Luka 1/2, JOKOVIC Maro 1/2, BUKIC Luka 1/2, VUKICEVIC Ante 2/3, BUSLJE Andro 1/1, MILOS Lovre 1/3, VRLIC Josip 1/2, BURIC Rino 1/2, GARCIA Javier 0/1

Coach: Ivica Tucak
RUSSIA

KOSTROV Evgeny 8/19, IVANOV Victor 1/3 – SUCHKOV Ivan 0/0, KISELEV Konstantin 1/3, 
DEREVIANKIN Nikita 1/1, ASHAEV Artem 1/3, KHARKOV Konstantin 5/6, MERKULOV Daniil 2/7, 
NAGAEV Ivan 2/4, PRONIN Daniil 1/1, KHOLOD Dmitrii 0/1, LISUNOV Sergey 0/0, SHEPELEV Roman 1/2

Coach: Sergey Evstigneev

Shots:

CRO: 13/26 (50.0%)
RUS: 14/28 (50.0%)

Extramen:

CRO: 4 for 10
RUS: 10 for 14

Penalties:

CRO: none
The clash for the top spot brought a really exciting chasing game – from time to time the Croats managed to build a seemingly calming difference only to see the Russians come back from four goals down, not only once but twice.

Russia was in the lead for a while but after 2-3 the Croats netted three connecting goals for 5-3 in the opening period. Soon they were 9-5 up and that time they seemed to gain control on the game as their defence worked well and scored easy goals in front. Then a nice counter from Roman Shepelev, and in 50 seconds a surprise 10m shot from Konstantin Kharkov halted the Croats’ fine run and at the beginning of the third Ivan Nagaev put away an extra for 9-8. That time the response came immediately, Luka Bukic sent the ball home from a 6 on 5 and soon Croatia was back in business again at 13-9 with 2:12 remaining from the third. But guess what – the same happened again, a double in 45 seconds from the Russians and they were close once more at 13-11.

Soon they were not only close but got back to even, Kharkov buried an extra, then he even managed to score after collecting a bad pass, it was his 5th, so it stood 13-13. The Croats seemed to have lost their composure, missed two man-ups, and then was in real trouble when Daniil Merkulov – playing in Croatia for the club of Jug during the season – finished another 6 on 5 brilliantly from the right wing with 2:25 from time (the Russians were 10 for 14 in man-up, truly outstanding). So Russia was in a 5-0 rush, Kostrov stopped Lovre Milos’ shot with ease, then a turnover foul extended the Croats drought for 9 minutes. The Russians had two chances to double their lead but couldn’t create real danger so Croatia had 39 seconds to save the game to a tie after a time-out. They seemed to have it as Andro Buslje fine outside shot found the back of the net 18 seconds from time – but they found out in horror that the ref called a turnover foul against the centre for a 2m line violation... Though questions may arise regarding – but it’s still a matter of mystery why the Croats could not score in the last 10:12 minutes of the match after leading 13-9...

Konstantin Kharkov, MVP of the game, Russia:

“We are really happy to win such a difficult match against one of the best teams in the world. At the end of the
“Despite everything else, we had the game in our hands, on two occasions held a 4 goals advantage. A team with the experience we have must know how to bring a match like this to an end. We had to use our outside players as defenders because our main defenders were 'burdened' with fouls, and then, those outside players had no longer freshness in attack. We have to gather our heads, it doesn’t matter if we are the first or the second in the group, it doesn’t matter if we go against Georgia or Canada.”

Maro Jokovic, player, Croatia:

“For the first three periods it looked more or less good, but when our opponent 'fired' that 5-0 series... I
insecurity, our blocks weren’t in place and so on. Again, this defeat does not change anything significantly regarding our further path in the tournament.”

Game 18, Group A, 16.00 – Greece v Montenegro 4-8

Results & Teams

Quarters: 1-4, 1-1, 1-1, 1-2

Referees: Xavi Buch (ESP), Sebastien Dervieux (FRA)
GREECE

ZERDEVAS Emmanouil 12/20, GALANIDIS Konstantinos (GK, n. e.) – GENIDOUNIAS Konstantinos 0/5, SKOUMPAKIS Dimitrios 1/4, KAPOTSIS Marios 0/2, FOUNTOULIS Ioannis 1/5, PAPANASTASIOU Alexandros 0/3, DERVISIS Georgios 0/0, ARGYROPOULOS Stylianos 1/1, MOURIKIS Konstantinos 1/2, KOLOMVOS Christodoulos 0/0, GKIouvetsis Konstantinos 0/0, VLACHOPOULOS Angelos 0/2

Coach: Theodoros Vlachos

MONTENEGRO

LAZOVIC Dejan 9/13, KANDIC Slaven (GK, n. e.) – BRGULJAN Drasko 2/3, PERKOVIĆ Miroslav 0/1, PETKOVIĆ Marko 2/3, CUCKOVIC Uros 0/2, POPADIĆ Vlado 0/2, VIDOVIĆ Stefan 0/1, UKROPINA Aleksa 1/2, IVOVIĆ Aleksandar 1/6, SPAIC Vlada 1/2, MATKOVIĆ Dusan 1/6, RADOVIĆ Vasilije 0/0

Coach: Vladimir Gojkovic

Shots:

GRE: 4/24 (16.7%)
MNE: 8/28 (28.6%)

Extramen:
The afternoon was dedicated to the matches deciding the top spot. After the Russia v Croatia match it was showdown time for Greece and Montenegro. In early January these two sides clashed in the final of the World League European Qualifiers and that time the Greeks were on fire and beat the Montenegrins with ease 12-7. The Balkan side learned the lesson from Debrecen – head coach Vladimir Gojkovic mentioned yesterday that they had already watched that game twice – and this time they didn’t give any chance for their rivals.

It was all about their terrific start: two fast goals in 92 seconds early in the first, then two killed man-downs, and towards the end of the quarter another double this time in 88 seconds to take a 0-4 lead. That did the harm – the Greeks tried to climb back but apart from a brighter spell in the second period they could not really put the Montenegrins under pressure.

There they seemed to have a chance as they halved the gap at 2-4 and shut out Montenegro for almost 8 minutes but with 1:10 to go till the middle break Aleksa Ukropine netted another fine action goal (the 4th of his team) for 2-5 and there Greeks’ momentum was gone.

The Montenegrins didn’t take any risk while the Greeks were unable to overplay the opposite defence – they could score only a single goal in each period. Though they had some hope when they scored for 4-6 early in the fourth but Montenegrin veteran Drasko Brugljan scored twice in 52 seconds for 4-8 which put an end to the contest and secured the first place for Montenegro.
Drasko Brguljan, MVP of the game, Montenegro:

“We played great in defence so we deserved this win against a great Greek team. We started the match great, we were aggressive, we were powerful and this important in the case of such a young team as ours. OK, I’m not young but my team mates are, so we did a lot of swimming, had great energy and that brought us this important victory.”

Vladimir Gojkovic, coach, Montenegro:

“We had a very good start but after that we missed some very good chance, though their goalkeeper was at a
scored a lot of extraman goals, now we defended really well in man-downs – four goals against Greece is a really good effort. Still, we have to continue to grow, we are at the halfway on the road, we have four more games, the most important ones.”

Theodoros Vlachos, coach, Greece:

“We started the game in the wrong way, we were not aggressive, not powerful enough and after you go 0-4 down against Montenegro, it’s very difficult to come back. We expected much more from this match, we wanted to build some confidence but now it’s time to get ready for Canada in order to take the second place at least. In this
to be ready for the next one. Now for Canada and then for the crossover game which is the first do-or-die match here.”

Game 19, Group A, 17.30 – Georgia v Brazil 12-8

Results & Teams

Quarters: 3-1, 3-1, 2-1, 4-5

Referees: Michael Goldenberg (USA), Nenad Peris (CRO)

GEORGIA

RAZMADZE Irakli 9/17, SHUBLADZE Nikoloz (GK, n. e.) – KAVTARADZE Beka 0/0, DADVANI Valiko
BRAZIL

FERNANDES Joao Pedro 9/21, SORO Slobodan (GK, n. e.) – PEDROSO Marcos Paulo 0/0, DA SILVA Gabriel 0/0, COUTINHO Gustavo 0/0, FREITAS Roberto 1/1, GOMES Bernardo 2/6, REAL Rafael 2/8, GOMES Guilherme 0/1, ROCHA Bernardo 0/0, FRANCO Ruda 1/3, GUIMARAES Gustavo 2/7, GUIMARAES Ricardo 0/0

Coach: Andre Avallone

Shots:

GEO: 12/28 (42.9%)
BRA: 8/26 (30.8%)

Extramen:

GEO: 7 for 13
BRA: 2 for 9
Penalties:

GEO: 1 for 2
BRA: 2 for 2

Saves:

GEO: 9/17 (52.9%)
BRA: 9/21 (42.9%)

Report

We are entering to the delicate phase of the tournament when teams outside of the elite circles start to feel the impact of playing the fourth match in as many days. This is something these players barely do so the signs of exhaustion and fatigue become visible earlier than usual – they are swimming, they are shooting, they are trying, but the power of the moves, the speed of the shots are not really the same as in the previous matches.

Teams like Brazil are hit by these effects – the numbers are telling the story as in this game against Georgia only six of their eleven field-players attempt to take a shot and three of them took 21 out of the total of 26. The Georgians weren’t too fresh either, still, they had a day off (Brazil’s game against Turkey was due on Day 5, so they had to play four in a row) – and of course, their have more experienced players who played more similar tournaments and got used to the higher demands in the Champions League with Dinamo Tbilisi.

So they were dominating right from the beginning and by the end of the third period they built a decisive gap (8-3). And as it’s also usual, once the game decided, the better side start to ease up a bit so the last period saw nine goals and Brazil could score five times, though the Georgians’ win was never in danger.

Quotes
Andre Avallone, coach, Brazil:

“We tried do our defending with a lot of energy but we had a lot of exclusion so we had to change our concept in

the third period. We had a lot of good moments but also a lot of bad ones we have to learn from these matches.

We finished our participation here and we are looking ahead of the next year and the next competition.”

Dejan Stanojevic, coach, Georgia:

“Today victory was the most important. We try to finish third and then see what we can do. I’m not really

satisfied with our performance today but the most important is that we try to do our best every time – and
our way here that Russia beat Croatia so we may play with Croatia in the quarters and some players started

lamenting if it’s better to lose this game. But I’m not that kind of sportsman, I always want to win, we always

have to give our maximum – and what if Russia loses tomorrow and then we would face Croatia anyway after a

loss here. In sport you must have energy and will!”

Nika Shushiashvili, MVP of the game, Georgia:

“First of all, we played as a team, that was the most important as we could dominate the game from the

beginning. Tomorrow we will give our maximum against Montenegro. And I don’t have any favourites in the
Quarters: 2-3, 0-2, 3-4, 6-2

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

NETHERLANDS

WAGENAAR Eelco 8/19, 0/1, DE KOFF Milan (GK, n. e.) – VEENHUIS Kjeld 1/7, WINKELHORST Jorn 3/4, WOLSWINKEL Guus 0/1, VAN IJPEREN Guus 1/2, LINDHOUT Robin 1/4, GBADAMASSI Bilal 0/0, NISPELING Jesse 0/1, MULLER Jorn 3/5, JANSEN Pascal 1/3, KOOPMAN Jesse 1/3, LUCAS Thomas 0/1

Coach: Harry van der Meer

FRANCE

DUBOIS Clement 5/16, GARSAU Remi (GK, n. e.) – BOUET Alexandre 0/1, VERNOUX Romain 0/2, MISSY Nicolas 2/3, KHASZ Enzo 1/4, VERNOUX Thomas 2/5, CROUSILAT Ugo 1/2, BABIC David 1/5, MARZOUKI Mehdi 3/4, CANONNE Charles 0/2, VANPEPERSTRAETE Pierre-Frederic 1/2, CAUMETTE David 0/0
Coach: Nenad Vukanic

**Shots:**

NED: 11/32 (34.4%)

FRA: 11/31 (35.5%)

**Extramen:**

NED: 5 for 16

FRA: 3 for 8

**Penalties:**

NED: none

FRA: 1 for 1

**Saves:**

NED: 8/19 (42.1%)
Thanks to the women, water polo enjoys fine popularity in the Netherlands as the women’s side is a real powerhouse. The men once were – but a slow decline brought a period of struggle in the past couple of decades. Now it seems to change – and no event and sport would need any better promotion than the Dutch team produces here in Rotterdam.

At previous events they barely won matches – now they have two wins and tonight they added a draw amidst dramatic circumstances once more. A day earlier a goal two seconds from time won the game against Romania. Now a goal two seconds from time saved their match to a tie against France – and indeed it saved the team from being knocked out before the knockout-phase. A loss to France would have meant that a defeat from Russia on the last day (very much in the cards, let’s be honest) and a French loss to Romania (France would still have advanced in that case) would have eliminated the hosts.

Instead, they produced a magnificent comeback and held on for a draw in a thrilling finish.

For most of the time France was in control and before the final period they looked to sit comfortably in the driving seat as they led 9-5. The Dutch seemed to be a bit tired, their game didn’t tick as it did against Germany and Romania while the experienced French managed to get the most out of their plans.

For three periods.

And for three more minutes. Nothing promised we might see a sudden change.

Then... Jesse Koopman managed to find the way to net a 6 on 5 – until then they were 2 for 13, now it was a goal, 9-6. Then came a steal, a counter, Guus van Iperen put it away 9-7. A blocked French shot, a man-up, Jorn Muller scored, 9-8, in a span of 1:27 minutes. The Dutch bench yelled, belief ruled while the French looked a bit lost in the whirlwind. Consequently, they missed their next 6 on 5, on the other Muller’s blast hit the net – four possession, four goals, and it was 9-9 with 2:26 to go.

To make it even more thrilling, the French finally stepped up, Enzo Khasz offered a great goal from the centre but Jorn Winkelhorst netted the Dutch extra for 10-10 (after 2 for 13, they were 3/3 in the last three extramen). Two action shots gone, then we turned into the last minute – the French earned an exclusion and Mehdi Marzouki scored his 3rd with 18 seconds remaining. The Dutch called for a time-out and set up a 7 on 6 attack with the goalie in the second centre position. The clock was ticking down but with 2.8sec to go Muller took the shot and it sneaked in – the bench produced such a roar as if the Rotterdam Zwemhalle had a full house on the tribunes. It was a great escape by the hosts – after netting five in three periods, they scored six in the last and that sent them through to the quarter-finals.

Quotes

Nenad Vukanic, coach, France:

“We had a lot of exclusions for our most important players so after a while it was difficult to keep the same
great today. Unfortunately, at the end we didn’t find a solution to defend 7 on 6. Now we face a hard match against Romania, a very interesting team with a good goalie and a good coach, it’s going to be very tough.”

Jorn Muller, MVP of the game, Netherlands:

“We fought as a team in the last period, this is something we did in the entire tournament and that makes us stronger and stronger. The guys were believing until the last second this how we could come back.”

Harry van der Meer, coach, Netherlands:

“Just like I said yesterday, I believe in my players but I’m also very honest with them. I told them that our man-
were also brave enough to fight back in the last period. It was a kind of now or never situation, and if you have

the spirit and you have the will, you can succeed.”

Gergely Csurka, FINA Media Committee

Montenegro is about to claim the top spot in Group A, while Russia is set to finish first in Group B as both sides won

its respective clash against their strongest rivals. Russia’s effort was especially amazing as they came back from 9-13
down to beat the Croats 14-13 while Montenegro held the Greeks on a single goal in each period. The fourth day also

saw fine wins from Romania (over Germany) and Georgia (against Brazil) and an incredible match between France

and the Netherlands where the hosts were 5-9 down but came back to even in the last period which also saw one goal
Croatia looked to be a sure winner at least twice in the highlighted match of Group B, once when they led 9-5 but then the Russians came back – then the Croats geared up once more and went 13-9 ahead late in the third period. But they fell into the same trap once more – only this time the Russians not only equalised but managed to take over the lead with a 0-5 rush and keep it till the end. Though a controversial call annulled the Croatian equaliser 18 seconds from time – a tie would have been enough for them to stay atop – but instead of lamenting on it the big question to be answered would sound like this: how came that they scored 13 goals in 22 minutes, and none in the last 10?

Well, it was really hard to beleive what happened to the Croats in the last ten minutes - Photos: Marcel tel Bals

In the other big game of the day Montenegro beat Greece with ease, thanks to a terrific start as they jumped to a 0-4 lead right in the first period. The Greeks could never really recover from the shock, the Montenegrin defence worked extremely well and held their rivals on a single goal in each period – also took revenge for their 7-12 defeat in the final at the World League European Qualifiers five weeks ago.
The Greeks could not really handle the big shooters of Montenegro like Aleksandar Ivovic, especially in the first period

Besides the favourites, the other teams were busy to secure their spots in the quarters, at least to have a shot to challenge the ‘big boys’. Romania claimed its first win here by joining the surprisingly wide circle of teams which could beat Germany here, though unlike in the previous matches they downed them in the second half.

Finally, something to celebrate: the Romanians claimed their first win here

Georgia confirmed its rising status by adding a convincing win over Brazil which put them to the third place in the group – though after today’s happenings they may face Croatia in the quarters, not the Russians.
The tattoo shows the desire but the next Olympic water polo tournament will be staged without Brazil...

In the last game France was dominating right from the beginning and seemed to be a sure bet after three periods as they led 9-5 against the Netherlands. Then came the astonishing closing quarter where the Dutch went wild and managed to equalise for 9-9. The French weren't done though, they retook the lead twice, but the hosts had the proper replies – after France scored for 10-11 with 18 seconds remaining, the Dutch went for a 7 on 6 and netted a last-grasp goal once again, 2.8sec from time. Yesterday it earned them two points against Romania, now it meant a precious draw, which already secured them the third place. For the French, the knockout-phase will begin a day earlier as their last match against Romania is a live-or-die encounter.
The Dutch hero: Jorn Muller scored three goals including the last one, just seconds from time

Standings

Group A


Group B