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USA and Italy remain unbeaten, meet in the final

Gergely Csurka, FINA Media Committee Member (HUN)

Players sitting on cloud nine and others utterly disappointed showed up in matches staged for seeding and for possible reserve positions – but it was clear that 24 hours after the crucial and gruelling quarter-finals Easter Sunday will produce more holiday-like matches. Still, the stands were filled again and the capacity crowd witnessed some fine contests and the US and the Italian sides reaching the quarters. They deserved it as the only unbeaten teams in Gouda.

Game 1 – 12.00, For places 5-8: Greece v Canada 12-10 (3-2, 4-3, 4-3, 1-2)

Referees: Svetlana Dreval (RUS), John Waldow (NZL)

GREECE: Eleni Kouvdou, Christina Tsoukala 1, Nikoleta Eleftheriadou 2, Vasiliki Diamantopoulou 1, Margarita Plevritou, Alkisi Avramidou 1, Alexandra Asimaki 2, Antigoni Roumpesi 1, Christina Kotsia, Triantafyllia Manolioudaki 1, Eleftheria Plevritou 2, Eleni Xenaki 1, Chrysoula Diamantopoulou. Head coach: Athanasios Kechagias

CANADA: Jessica Gaudreault, Krystina Alogbo 1, Katrina Monton 1, Emma Wright, Monika Eggens 2, Kelly McKee, Joelle Bekhazi 1, Axelle Crevier 3, Carmen Eggens 1, Christine Robinson, Hanna Yelizarova, Dominique Perreault 1, Nicola Colterjohn. Head coach: David Paradelo

Extramen

GRE: 3 for 13

CAN: 2 for 13

Penalties

GRE: 1 for 1

CAN: none



Despite all disappointments, they fought hard: Canada's Christine Robinson (left) and Alexandra Asimaki – Credit: G.

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Games to be played – though none of the losing sides have any wish to take part in these encounters for places 5-8. This tournament is really special, it has virtually four finals on Day 6, the four quarters, deciding the Olympic spots. The winners go to Rio, the losers face the unchangeable: their dreams have suffered an abrupt end. And it's not about losing an important match in a major tournament: it's about losing the chance to crown your season, a four-year cycle, to play at the most important event – the Olympic Games. Perhaps it's worse than losing a real final of a big tourney. There at least you get the silver medal – here you leave the pool empty-handed. And with emptied minds. What's more cruel in this event: unlike on the following day after a lost final, here you have to come back and play again. Officially we can't say that there is nothing is at stake: in case of a late withdrawal(s), the highest non-qualifying side(s) from this tournament takes on the vacant spot. Even though it's unlikely (who would refuse to take part at the Olympics?)...

Still – we have athletes here, wonderful women water polo players who dedicated their life to this sport. And once the whistle blows, they go. And soon they find out that perhaps this is the best way to cure the pains of their beautiful minds: play water polo. Naturally, the discipline is not that tight, but the moves are the good old ones. The joy of the goals is not the same we saw a day earlier, but the will to win is definitely there. And to save some pride, of course.

The Greek girls, after losing to Russia in a penalty shootout (and letting the match slip out of their hands after being 9-7 up in the fourth period and leading 10-9 with 19 seconds to go), came back and played a fine game, controlling it from the beginning. It was a bit tougher than in the prelims, when Greece won 11-4, though they managed to build a four-goal gap by the fourth period (12-8). Canada staged a late surge but the Greek win was never in danger.

Game 2 – 13.45, For places 5-8: France v Netherlands 1-16 (0-2, 0-2, 0-4, 1-8)

Referees: Marcela Mauss (GER), Michael Baty (RSA)

FRANCE: Lorene Derenty, Estelle Milot, Lea Bachelier, Aurore Sacre, Louise Guillet 1, Geraldine Mahieu, Marie Barbieux, Marion Tardy, Adeline Sacre, Audrey Daule, Lucie Cesca, Michaela Jaskova, Morgane Chabrier. Head coach: Filippos Sakellis

NETHERLANDS: Laura Aarts, Miloushka Smit 3, Dagmar Genee 3, Catharina van der Sloot 4, Amarens Genee 1, Nomi Stomphorst 1, Marloes Nijhuis, Vivian Sevenich 1, Maud Megens 1, Isabella van Toorn 1, Lieke Klaassen, Leonie van der Molen 1, Debby Willemsz. Head coach: Arno Havenga

Extramen

FRA: 0 for 3

NED: 6 for 12

Penalties

FRA: none

NED: 1 for 1



The hosts didn't leave too much room for the French: Isabella van Toorn (NED, blue caps) and Lucie Cesca

All credits go the local fans: despite of the shattered dreams on the Olympics, they filled the stands for this match as well to demonstrate they stand by their great team which broke down so agonisingly – after reaching three major finals in the last three years they failed to survive the crucial quarters at home soil.

The sides already met here, back on the opening day when the Dutch won 14-5. The gap dividing the teams was widening slower than a week ago, mirroring the hosts' speed both in the water and in thinking which was understandable after all, but in the last period they scored as many goals as in the previous three. On the other end, the French seemed to run out from the necessary fuel to score at least: after a shutout against the US on the previous day, they weren't able to find the net until the middle of the fourth period. It was their first goal since Friday, or, in playing time, the first after 59:35 minutes – though this was also understandable, they are not used to play seven games in seven days and the last two were due against the two finalists of the 2015 FINA World Championships.

Game 3 – 16.00, Semi-finals: United States v Spain 13-7 (5-3, 2-1, 2-1, 4-2)

Referees: Nikolaos Boudramis (GRE), Erwin Schaapers (NED)

USA: Samantha Hill, Madeline Musselman 2, Melissa Seidemann 3, Rachel Fattal, Caroline Clark, Margaret Steffens 1, Courtney Mathewson, Kiley Neushul 3, Aria Fischer, Kaleigh Gilchrist, Makenzie Fischer 3, Kameryn Craig 1, Ashleigh Johnson. Head coach: Adam Krikorian

SPAIN: Laura Ester, Marta Bach, Anna Espar, Beatriz Ortiz, Matilde Ortiz, Jennifer Pareja, Paula Leiton, Pilar Pena 1, Judith Forca, Roser Tarrago 3, Maica Garcia 3, Laura Lopez 1, Patricia Herrera. Head coach: Miguel Oca

Extramén

USA: 8 for 13

ESP: 5 for 15



A not synchro-like duet of Pilar Pena (ESP, left) and Makenzie Fischer

After winning the big matches on Saturday, the games on the last two days among the teams belonging to the 'happy circle' mattered only for the seeding of the Olympic draw. Again, officially – otherwise it's also about pride and to exchange 'messages for the long term' between arch-rivals as, for example, the US and the Spanish team: a great win, a couple of good shots could leave long-lasting memories in the opponents.

They met in the prelims, that 8-6 win was the US's tightest match here in Gouda. This one was close only for a while. Contrary to the first clash staged here, which was a low-scoring match with great defending, now alone the first period saw eight goals. The US led 5-3, then, during the middle two periods things got back to normal. It even turned into a real battle: though the Americans jumped to a 7-3 lead deep into the second, a goal in the dying seconds of that period and another one from the first attack in the third brought the Spaniards pretty close at 7-5. Both sides missed a series of man-ups at this stage but finally team US hit first. Melissa Seidemann ended what was perhaps the longest scoring drought for her team in this tournament (10:46 seconds without a goal) – and within 40 seconds another one arrived from Kiley Neushul, virtually ending the contest (9-5). The last period opened up the 'goal-sack', and again the US players did a better job, they clinched another easy victory, going for 7/7 in Gouda.

Comments

Adam Krikorian, head coach, USA:

“It was a meaningless game, still, we showed a good performance. The first quarter the intensity was there, not the defences. Both teams can play so much better.”

Miguel Oca, head coach, Spain:

“I didn’t expect any special from my team in this game. And the US team played much better. Indeed they were amazing, swept us away.”

Game 4 – 17.45, Semi-final: Russia v Italy 7-9 (1-2, 3-3, 0-3, 3-1)

Referees: Steve Rotsart (USA), Benjamin Mercier (FRA)

RUSSIA: Anna Ustyukhina, Tatiana Zubkova 1, Ekaterina Prokofyeva, Elvina Karimova 2, Maria Borisova, Olga Gorbunova 1, Svetlana Kuzina 1, Anastasia Simanovich 1, Anna Timofeeva, Evgeniia Soboleva, Evgeniya Ivanova 1, Anna Grineva, Anna Karnaukh. Head coach: Alexander Gaidukov

ITALY: Gulia Gorlero, Chiara Tabani 1, Arianna Garibotti 1, Elisa Queirolo 1, Federica Radicchi 1, Rosaria Aiello, Tania di Mario 1, Roberta Bianconi 2, Giulia Emmolo, Francesca Pomeri 1, Aleksandra Cotti 1, Teresa Frassinetti, Laura Teani. Head coach: Fabio Conti

Extramen

RUS: 2 for 9

ITA: 0 for 2

Penalties

none



It was a fine and fair match: Giulia Emmolo (ITA, left) and Anastasia Simanovich

This encounter also demonstrated the difference between the game in the prelims where the top spot was at stake and the semi-final which didn't have real weight in this event. Two days ago Italy won the lowest-scoring battle of the tournament, with fantastic defending, though the Russians also did a fine job in the back. The Setterosa won 6-2, then both sides passed a really tough test and now met again. More goals arrived this time, though it would be an exaggeration to label this match a scoring festival.

After an even first half Italy was superior in the third, deep into that period they were 4-8 up after a 0-4 rush (they scored only action goals, not even went for extras: heaven can only recall the last occasion when they had two 6 on 5s in the entire match). It was telling that their head coach Fabio Conti sat back to the bench and watched the game in the utmost calmness as his team held the comfortable lead, only a Russian time-out forced him to return to his usual place, the poolside. The Russians climbed back a bit towards the end but could never come closer than two goals.

Comments

Andrei Belofastov, coach, Russia:

“The test was passed yesterday, and even if this match was important we couldn’t concentrate that much. Italy was better,

our extraman didn’t work today as we made 2 from 9.”

Fabio Conti, head coach, Italy:

“Though the girls had party-time in their minds yesterday evening, today we had to get our focus back to the pool. The

Olympics are coming and every minute we spend together is really valuable. I asked the girls to appreciate that, play as a

team even today and we will try to do our best against the USA tomorrow as well.”

Schedule, Monday

12.00, Places 7-8: France v Canada

13.45, Places 5-6: Netherlands v Greece

16.00, Bronze medal: Spain v Russia

17.45, Final: USA v Italy
