Business as usual: USA finish atop
Gergely Csurka, FINA Media Committee Member (HUN)

Just like on all but two occasions since the 2012 Olympic Games, the extremely powerful and talented team of the United States won the title in the given major tournament. The reigning world and Olympic champion also clinched the last two editions of the World Cup (2010, 2014) and 6 of last 7 World League Super Final golds (2013 excepted). Here they finished with a perfect 8/8, in the final they beat Italy with an almost perfect second half. Russia claimed the bronze medal with a fine win over Spain – these four sides join Australia, Hungary, China and Brazil to play for the Olympic crown. The seven qualifying teams are same as in London, only the host team has changed.

Final: United States v Italy 11-6 (3-4, 2-1, 3-0, 3-1)

Referees: Daniel Flahive (AUS), Erwin Schaapers (NED)

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

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

USA: 5 for 9
ITA: 3 for 8

Penalties

USA: none
ITA: 1 for 1

The lethal weapon in work... The Italian wall – here made by goalie Gulia Gorlero, Federica Radicchi and Elisa Queirolo –
It was a big kick into the white buoy at poolside, a spectacular move from Adam Krikorian, well worth a direct red card, his very first in eight years as the US head coach. Soon it turned out it was a real kick – for his magnificent team. The US girls were off pace and off focus until that moment, especially in defence. The Italians led for most of the time in the first half, the Americans only chased them. In fact, the head coach got really tense watching this performance – and on the occasion of an allegedly unnoticed foul he cleaned up the poolside (first gone the white buoy, then, after the red card, came the red).

Until his forced leave, it stood 5-5. The second half went to the US by 6-1. Their defence started to click and shut out Italy for 14:49 minutes – the Setterosa could score with 1:11 remaining, by then the Americans led 10-5. Again, they were better in every aspect of the game and did the harm in the third netting three unanswered goals. The last period was a kind of addendum and a confirmation of their supremacy. Indeed, they are so good that it’s all the same whether they have their coach at the bench or not…

At the end, before the victory ceremony, the Dutch organisers presented a brilliant show involving a Brazilian drum band and dancers wearing costumes similar to the ones usually worn at the Rio Carnival. Despite the bitter disappointment because of the Dutch side missing the qualification, the locals committed everything to make this tournament a memorable one. Capacity crowds cheered at the matches on the last two days as well, creating a great atmosphere even for the final two games and validating the summary for the event: Gouda was a worthy host of this tournament.

Comments

Adam Krikorian, head coach, USA:

“Two notes, first of all: it was a red card. Second: the girls are much better without me. I watched the game from the video room and even the guys there making the streaming noted that the team played way better without me… (smiles) We were much better defensively in the second half and that was the difference. We gave up four goals in the first quarter and one in
two games as part of the tournament, players, coaches are tired after eight games, we are happy that we played the first half

of the tournament well and we accomplished our goal. Now it’s time for the next one.”

Fabio Conti, head coach, Italy:
“The team played this game with the focus I asked for. The first part was really good, in the second half it became visible that this is the eighth game on the eighth day and we had only three weeks prior to the tournament for conditioning. What I liked the most in this event was the team’s mentality. That’s something we can build on in the future. But today we also saw how good the US team was, so we see the level we have to reach for Rio.”

Bronze medal game: Spain v Russia 4-10 (1-5, 2-2, 0-0, 1-3)

Referees: Adrian Alexandrescu (ROU), Alessandro Severo (ITA)

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

RUSSIA: Anna Ustyukhina, Tatiana Zubkova 1, Ekaterina Prokofyeva 2, Elvina Karimova 1, Maria Borisova 1, Olga Gorbunova 1, Svetlana Kuzina, Anastasia Simonovich, Anna Timofeeva, Evgeniia Soboleva, Evgeniya Ivanova 3, Anna Grineva 1, Anna Karnaukh. Head coach: Alexander Gaidukov
Extramen

ESP: 0 for 13
RUS: 4 for 11

Penalties

ESP: 1 for 1
RUS: none

The last clashes of a gruelling tourney: Anna Grineva (RUS, front) is held by Beatriz Ortiz

Spain launched its big marching four years ago in the same tournament. The new generation of their brilliant, junior world champion players made a huge splash in Trieste, first of all by beating then-world champion Greece in the crucial quarters and they went on winning the tourney. Soon they clinched the silver at the Olympics, the following year they became world champions and a year later added the European title. They are still a formidable side, but the young ones’ burning speed and
dash is no longer there. They are four years older and more experienced – and in a game like the one against Russia with virtually nothing at stake a bad opening was enough to calm themselves down and not speeding up too much (their man-up ratio tells a lot about their focus: 0 for 13). Russia caught the start better: though Spain took the lead, five unanswered goals came from the rival in the first period and that did the damage. Since the Spaniards didn’t come much closer till halftime (3-7), the second half lacked not only the excitement but the goals as well. Spain even missed a penalty while Russia did a good job in defence, and clinched the bronze, just like four years ago.

Comments

Miguel Oca, head coach, Spain:

“Well, once we beat the Netherlands, the tournament almost finished for us. We couldn’t reach the same level once more, yesterday the US team was simply too good, and today we couldn’t get on even terms with the Russians. But at least the girls see how much work we have to do until the Olympics.”
Andrei Belofastov, coach, Russia:

“Today we had a really good game, our 6 on 5 worked more or less but especially our defence in man-down was excellent.

We are satisfied with the team’s performance, we achieved our goal, to book the Olympic spot and what we showed today promises a lot for the future.”

For places 5-6: Netherlands v Greece 9-7 (2-3, 3-2, 4-2, 0-0)

Referees: Marie-Claude Deslières (CAN), Steve Rotsart (USA)

NETHERLANDS: Laura Aarts, Miloushka Smit 3, Dagmar Genee, Catharina van der Sloot 2, Amarens Genee, Nomi Stomphorst, Marloes Nijhuis 2, Vivian Sevenich 2, Maud Megens, Isabella van Toorn, Lieke Klaassen, Leonie van der Molen, Debby Willemsz. Head coach: Arno Havenga

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

NED: 4 for 5
GRE: 1 for 13

Penalties
NED: 1 for 1
GRE: none

Last leg… Greece’s great centre-forward, Alexandra Asimaki faces an unusual challenge

It was a balanced match with a couple of nice moves and goals – at least for three periods. Naturally, the speed, the sharpness were not the same as in the last week, eight games in eight days (plus the disappointment) left their marks on the teams’ performances. The Greeks led after eight minutes, then came a “frozen” period, without anything to recall for five minutes, but things heated up before the middle break, five goals were netted in less than three minutes and it stood 5-5 at halftime.

In the third the Dutch had a better run, while the Greeks slowly faded. After being 4-5 down late in the second, the hosts scored three more in the third for an 8-5 lead while Greece missed most of its chances. Their 6 on 5 stopped working, they failed to deliver in three consecutive man-ups, though two late action goals kept them close. However, they couldn’t narrow the gap in the fourth either, missing four more extras (finished the day with a disastrous 1 for 13). The Dutch were weakened too much by losing three key players (Klaassen, Nijhuis, Megens) through three major fouls so we saw a rare, hard-fought but scoreless final period.

The local supporters celebrated their team for the fine farewell – in fact, the Netherlands lost only one game out of eight here in Gouda (to Spain, which recorded four defeats altogether), but that cost them the Olympics…
Comments

Arno Havenga, head coach, Netherlands:

“I’m satisfied with our overall performance and especially with the attitude we showed in this last match, the way we finished this tournament. We lost only once, the most important game – exactly like four years ago. I think our team is good enough to play at the Olympics but we couldn’t prove that as we had some weaker moments in the last week.”

Athanasios Kechagias, head coach, Greece:

“I’m really satisfied how we played in this tournament. We played like a team, we showed we could show very good water polo, everybody could agree with that. But little things didn’t go in our way in the most important moments. This is how life
works. You drive for years without any problem, than you have just one accident which might change everything in a minute. But life also teaches us to move on, bring all positive things from here with us for the following years.”

For places 7-8: France v Canada 6-11 (1-3, 1-2, 3-4, 1-2)

Referees: Marcela Mauss (GER), Jaume Teixido (ESP)

FRANCE: Lorene Derenty, Estelle Milot, Lea Bachelier 1, Aurore Sacre 1, Louise Guillet 2, Geraldine Mahieu, Marie Barbieux, Marion Tardy, Adeline Sacre, Audrey Daule, Lucie Cesca, Michaela Jaskova 2, Morgane Chabrier. Head coach: Filippos Sakellis

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

Extramen

FRA: 1 for 6

CAN: 4 for 8
Penalties

FRA: none

CAN: 1 for 1

Sometimes the woodwork works instead of the goalie: Nicola Colterjohn (CAN) made a fine job by dealing with the more precise shots

Canada finished the tourney on a high, beating the French with a convincing performance. France also left behind the miserable moments they had in the games against the US and the Netherlands in which they could score only once altogether. They netted some fine goals, though Canada was superior throughout the match, went three goals up early in the second and never looked back. Christine Robinson’s pinpoint shots were the real highlights of this encounter, she was on target three times this afternoon.
Filippos Sakellis, head coach, France:

“For us, playing eight matches in eight days it’s really hard. Our tournament was like this match: we had very good moments and we had worse ones. I think, we have to go step by step, we showed progression in the past week, we have to keep that for the future.”

David Paradelo, head coach, Canada:

“I think we can be satisfied with the team’s whole process, sticking together, togetherness, about pride. We came here and...”
for in their life, in the last four years, to get this quality of water polo. Now it’s important what comes next. To make sure

that every single game we’ll play with the same emotion, the same intensity, the same willingness. With that, in the future

with every resources we have in the country, that’s how we’ll do that.”

Final rankings
The first four teams qualified for the 2016 Olympic Games.

Seeding for the draw:

Line 1: Hungary, Australia
Line 2: United States, Italy
Line 3: Russia, China
Line 4: Spain, Brazil

The draw will be held in Trieste (ITA), after the conclusion of the men’s Olympic Qualification Tournament on 10 April.