

Thrilling and spectacular: Greece and Russia shine on SF day

PLACES 11/12: NEW ZEALAND 11 SERBIA 4

Results & Teams

Game 39, 10.00 – For places 11/12: New Zealand v Serbia 11-4

Quarters: 4-2, 4-1, 2-1, 1-0

Referees: Danielle Dabbaghian (USA), Yang Pang (CHN)

NEW ZEALAND

CONROY Chantelle, MCDOWAL Morgan, BERNADETTE Doyle 2, HOUGHTON Brogan, DAWSON Kaitlyn 1, PARKER-ALLEN Caitlin Mary 3, GAULT Elizabeth, NICHOLSON Emily 1, SNELGAR Kelsey 1, MACDONALD Gabriella 1, HOUGHTON Emmerson 2, CARRINGTON Shinae, HARFORD Ella. Head coach: CHAMBERS Timothy

SERBIA

PETROVIC Andjela, SVEC Anja, AVDIC Lolita, RUDIC Teodora 1, MILISVIC Ana, MANDIC Nada, LUKA Lara 2, NOVAKOVIC Natza 1, KAPLAREVIC Janja, DAMNJANOVIC Isidora, MILADINOVIC Kristina, GASIC Andrea, TRAVAR Nikolina. Head coach: BAIKOVIC Vladimir

Extramen: 3/8 and 0/5

Penalties: 0/2 and 1/2

Report

The Serbs could keep up with their rivals until the middle of the second period. New Zealand's players looked fresher, only a penalty miss prevented them from going three goals up after eight minutes. But the inevitable came in the last minutes of the second period when the NZ girls netted three in 95 seconds and gained an 8-3 lead by halftime. The Serbs pulled one back at the beginning of the third but that was their last hit here in Volos, they could add any more in the remaining 14:19 minutes. The New Zealanders had three more goals to score but the signs of the drying tanks were more and more visible on both ends (also in the form of more missed penalties, one apiece). Since the girls played six matches in as many days, it was very much understandable, it's a challenging task even for seniors.

PLACES 9/10: CHINA 12 AUSTRALIA 11

Results & Teams

Game 40, 11.20 – For places 9/10: China v Australia 12-11

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

Referees: Adil Aimbetov (KAZ), Michiel Zwart (NED)

CHINA

XIAOCUI Yang, YANAN Bi 2, JIAWEN Lu 2, XIAO Chen 3, XIAOQIAN Wu, WEN Su, SANFENG Nong 3, YAXIAN Chen, XINYAN Meng, ZEWEEN Deng 2, CHEN He, HUAN Wang, YUTING Xie. Head coach: WEN HUA Li

AUSTRALIA

PALM Gabriella, WILLOWS Mia 1, HOLDEN Kiara 2, MORRISSEY Danielle 3, LEESON SMITH Bridget, O'LEARY Dayna, KEARNS Matilda, ROBERTS Ashleigh 1, WILLIAMS Mollie, WILLIAMS Alice 3, CORBETT Alexandra 1, PONTRE Sofie, HOSKING Tess. Head coach: OSADCHUK Alekdandr

Extramen: 5/8 and 7/7

Penalties: 1/1 and 1/1

Report

It was the first rematch of the tournament, the sides already met in the prelims where the Aussies earned a well-deserved 9-8 win, though let the Chinese back to that game after leading 9-5.

This time the running (swimming) order was different. Though Australia took control early in the match and went 5-3 up after eight minutes, this time the Chinese kept up with them and within a minute they managed to equalise in the second. From this point neither side could take a two-goal lead, Australia went ahead twice before the big break but the Chinese levelled the score on both occasions within a minute. What's more, for the first time in the match the Asians stood better at 8-7 but two finely carved 6 on 5s gave the lead back to the Aussies (8-9, the same as the result was on Day 2, but now there were one and a half periods to go). Extramen play worked really well in this phase, the Chinese also put away theirs, then came a brilliant goal from the centre by Xiao but Morrissey equalised with a blast from 7m (10-10). Still, China turned to the last period with advantage as Zewen, despite being marked heavily, could take a shot from 6m which ended up in the net with 5.6sec to go.

The Chinese had a man-up to double their lead but couldn't make it, on the contrary, the Aussies converted their 6 on 5 with 2:46 to go – they were perfect in those situations (7 for 7), something you can win water polo games with. However, the Chinese had the last laugh as they earned two more man-ups, the first was missed, Zewen scored from the second when 1:44 minutes were remaining on the clock. The Aussies had two more possessions but the Chinese defended well around the centre-forward, forcing their rivals to shoot from outside and neither of the shots were on target. The last one hit the post, thus China, after missing the last two editions, finished 9th upon its return.

PLACES 5/8: CANADA 9 UNITED STATES 11

Results & Teams

Game 41, 12.40 – For places 5/8: Canada v United States 9-11

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

Referees: Maria Daskolopoulou (GRE), Svetlana Dreval (RUS)

CANADA

VULPISI Clara, ALLIN Peggy Jean, CREVIER Axelle 1, LIZOTTE Myriam, CEKLIC Nina 1, AIKEMA Emily, MIMIDES Maria 1, CHRISTMAS Kyra 2, MCDOWELL Blaire 1, FRASER Emma, NACOUZI Joelle 2, UTAS Brianna 1, JAFFE Rachel. Head coach: ROBINSON Andrew

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

LONGAN Amanda, LIEBOWITZ Alexis 2, KLASS Sarah, HILL Abbi, HAUSCHILD Page 2, WEBER Bayley, HARBILAS Chloe, WHITELEGGE Rachel 1, MAMMOLITO Denise 2, NEUSHUL Ryann 3, AYALA Val, JONSHON Ava 1, KAPANA Carlee. Head coach: SIMMONS Coralia

Extramen: 6/10 and 4/10

Penalties: 1/1 and 1/1

Report

It took a while for the US team to find the right rhythm, as part of the recovery process after their loss to the Greeks. Less than 15 hours after a tremendous battle where both sides had made heroic efforts but the Americans had come up short at the end (3-4 was the final result), they had another challenge to face. On paper the US were the favourite in the North American derby but the Canadians were also up to the task. At halftime it stood 4-all – despite a 2-4 US lead late in the second, the northern neighbours came back to even with two fine action goals in a span of 57 seconds.

The third seemed to have a decisive phase, after an exchange of man-up goals, the US netted three in a row for a 6-9 lead, including an outstanding one, courtesy of the younger of the Neushul sisters. Ryann scored from a counter, with a defender on his neck she managed to trick the goalie before putting the ball to the empty net (soon she might join the elder, Kylie, already world and Olympic champion). 43 seconds on, Liebowitz finished another counter with 1:58 remaining from the third. However, the Canadians weren't done, they stayed focused and made the most of their opportunities, scored two 6 on 5s in succession to minimise the gap by the end of the third (8-9). It somewhat demonstrated how hard to handle the post-effects of such a great battle what the US had had a day earlier: while they conceded a single goal against Serbia and four against Greece, here they already got eight in three periods.

However, they proved their quality in the fourth: after they opened the period with another fine goal from Liebowitz, they tightened their defence once more and shut out the Canadians for 7:31 minutes in the final quarter. Their rivals could only score from a late penalty, by then the US team was already 8-11 up and secured its presence in the game to be played for the 5th place on Saturday.

PLACES 5/8: ITALY 3 HUNGARY 4

Results & Teams

Game 42, 17.20 – Places 5/8: Italy v Hungary 3-4

Quarters: 1-1, 0-2, 0-0, 2-1

Referees: Nicola Johnson (AUS), Joan Colominas (ESP)

ITALY

BANCHELLI Caterina, CITINO Giusy, PRESTA Claudia, AVEGNO Silvia, RANALLI Chiara, MILLO Giulia, PICOZZI Domitilla 1, DI CLAUDIO Luna, COCCHIERE Agnese, FORESTA Chiara 1, ALTAMURA Elena 1, CUZZUPE Giulia, MALARA Carlotta. Head coach: Paolo Zizza

HUNGARY

LEKRINSZKI Gina Petra, BREZOVSKI Gerda, VALYI Vanda 2, HERTZKA Orsolya 1, KONCZ Laura, HUSZTI Dora, FARKAS Tamara, TOTH Csenge, KUNA Szonja, KISS Eszter, VARGA Viktoria, HLENGIWE Mchunu 1, MACZKO Lilla. Head coach: PETROVICS Matyas

Extramen: 2/15 and 2/7

Penalties: none and 0/1

Report

Italy lost another low-scoring encounter: after bowing out in the quarters losing to Russia 5-4, now they sank against Hungary netting three goals. Seven in two matches, rarely enough to win (sometimes not even for one match), despite they conceded only nine goals.

In this contest they had a scoreless period of 23:50 minutes. They took the lead after long wait but then they couldn't find any tools to break the Hungarian defence in the following two quarters. They missed their first 11 man-ups, which also praised the Magyar players who did a tremendous job in front of their goal, and Lekriniszki also came up with some extraordinary saves.

The Hungarians didn't do any spectacular in front but had a couple of counters and at least put away two 6 on 5s, in this match it was crucial. Hungary was 1-3 up at half-time, the third didn't see any goal, while the fourth began with Valyi's man-up goal which extended the margin to three goals at 1-4 with 4:48 to go. Italy could convert its first extra at 2:28, then they needed three more, within one lengthy possession, to come really close but only 37 seconds were left from the match. And the Hungarians didn't give any further chance for their rivals to score, setting up a game against the US for the 5th place on Saturday.

SEMI-FINAL: RUSSIA 9 SPAIN 6

Results & Teams

Game 44, 18.40 – Semi-final: Russia v Spain 9-6

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

Referees: Martina Kunikova (SVK), Fabio Brasiliano (ITA)

RUSSIA

GOLOVINA Evgeniia, GEZANICH Daria 2, ZAPLATINA Elizaveta, BERSNEVA Maria 2, BORISOVA Maria, POPOVA Polina, KEMPF Polina, LAPTEVA Yulia, VAKHTOVA Vezonika, TOLKUNOVA Tatiana 1, KHAMZAEVA Bella 1, SERZHANTOVA Alena 3, STEPAKHINA Svetlana. Head coach: Sergey Markoch

SPAIN

DOMENE Sandra, CRESPI Paula 2, LEITON Paula 1, GUIRAL Mireia, CIUDAO Miriam, GOSET Blanca, BONAMUSA Alba 1, BARINGO Carmen, CORBOBES Marina, MONTOYA Elia, DIAZ Sofia, AZNAR Alejandra 2, BELLO Inmaculada. Head coach: XAVIER Perez

Extramen: 1/7 and 2/10

Penalties: none and 0/1

Report

Russian players got a standing ovation from the crowd gathering for the second semi-final and they fully deserved it: they managed to beat the Spaniards with a magnificent display of water polo, scoring goals good enough for real entertainment.

Spain got the better start, Crespi converted an extra, then Bonamusa added one from action to go 0-2 up. The Russians responded well, outplayed the Spanish zone and Tolkunova lobbed nicely from the wing. Then came Golovina with a couple of huge saves, making one before the break and one right after it, both while in man-down. On the other end Gerzanich's blast did the damage and he repeated that a bit later, but only after Aznar's great back-handed shot from centre. Aznar was on hand once more, this time her left was quite punctual in a 6 on 5, putting Spain ahead once more at 3-4. Since the Spaniards killed the Russian extras effectively, at halftime they seemed to sit comfortably in the driving seat.

The turnover came early in the third. Another great shot from the distance, this time by Serzhantova, put the Russians on even. Then Spain earned a 6 on 4, one of the Russians made an early (thus illegal) return, resulting a penalty. It turned out to be a good deal, instead of playing a 6 on 4, the single 5m shot was stopped by Golovina.

Serzhantova was at his best once again, this time she scored from the centre, among three defenders – male players would be proud of that action. And more were to follow, a trademark counter, finished by Bersneva – Russia was really rolling, they had a 4-0 rush while Spain couldn't create any real opportunities in front. At least they killed a Russian extra then Leiton halted their scoreless struggle after 12:06 minutes, putting away an extra for 6-5.

The Russians were quick to regain the two-goal lead when Khamzaeva scored from a 6 on 5 right on their first possession. Luck didn't make any difference then, first a Spanish extra then a Russian counter saw the ball bouncing from the bar to the back of the goalie but it never crossed the line.

Crespi's fine lob gave hope for Spain, she netted it from a somewhat hopeless situation for 7-6 and there were still a lot of time to play (5:13). Both sides had the chances either to double the lead or to go even, but missed their 6 on 5s in succession (two apiece). With 54sec to go, Aznar attempted to do the same as in the second period but this time her shot was blocked in the centre. Then came one of the best goal of the tourney, Berzneva, while swimming, fed the ball to Serzhantova who tipped it in despite of heavily guarded. With 35 seconds to go, it was virtually over at 8-6 but after an easily neutralised Spanish attack Berzneva lobbed another beautiful goal, just beating the buzzer.

This great win sent the Russians to the final where they can add this crown to their youth world title captured two years ago.

Quotes

Sergei Markoch, head coach, Russia:

“It was the first match when I really liked my team's performance. The first five matches weren't the best, but today we showed our real face. We did a great job both in defence and in offence. Spain has a fantastic team so we had to play like this. Of course, we made mistakes but when you play on a high level those could be easily counterbalanced. And we just did that.”

Xavier Perez, head coach, Spain:

“We began the game well but then we missed too many chances. I wasn’t satisfied with our shots, we couldn’t make them properly. Now we have to be ready for the next game to get a medal at least.”

SEMI-FINAL: NETHERLANDS 6 GREECE 7

Results & Teams

Game 43, 20.00 – Semi-final: Netherlands v Greece 6-7

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

Referees: Maro Savinovic (CRO), Gyorgy Kun (HUN)

NETHERLANDS

KOENDERS Joanne, VOORVELT Rozanne, SLEEKING Brigitte 2, BOSVELD Fleurien, KEUNING Maartje 1, ROZEBOOM Lizette, MULDER Brigit, KOOPMAN Maud 1, JOUSTRA Kitty Lynn, KOOLHAAS Ilse, TEN BROEK Nina, ROGGE Bente 2, BUIS Sarah. Head coach: DOUDESIS Evangelos

GREECE

STAMATOPOULOU Ioanna, PLEVRITOU Eleftheria 1, CHYDIRIOTI Ioanna, ELEFThERIADOU Nikoleta 1, PLEVRITOU Vasiliki, XENAKI Eleni 3, PROTOPAPA Elisavet 2, PATRA Maria, MICHALIDOU Ekaterini, MYRIOKEFALITAKI Maria, SELETOPOULOU Maria Eleni, MAVROTA Ifigenia, DOUREKA Stavroula. Head coach: LEANDROS Stefanos

Extramen: 1/3 and 1/5

Penalties: 2/2 and none

Report

A day before, in the quarter-final against the US, every available spot was occupied – still, this evening there were more people around the pool. The additional group of people found fine viewing platform on the top of the stands of the neighbouring football stadium. It was also great to see how many young kids gathered around the playing field, they were all let to sit in the front row. Or in front of the front row, just under the bars. Not a single step remained empty between the seats, some 2,200 showed up to see the show. And they were not disappointed.

Not only because Greece managed to win a thrilling battle against the Netherlands (also coached by a Greek master) but also because it was a magnificent water polo contest.

The Dutch caught the start better, a goal from the centre after a lucky rebound and a converted penalty gave them a 2-0 lead. Their defence worked perfectly in the first eight minutes, the Greek shots and the centre-feeds all ‘disappeared’ in their zone and their closed and tight man-down defence – with two players standing almost on the goal-line together with the goalie – successfully killed the first Greek man-up. Holland could have gone 3-0 up shortly before the break but the post saved the hosts who were unable to score in the opening quarter.

However, after 9:35 minutes they got on the board, Xenaki finally had some room to create something and she immediately capitalised on the opportunity. Stamatopoulou managed to catch Koolhaas’s backhander at

the other cage while soon Xenaki stroke again, this time she netted her second among three guards, a scene heating up the already hot atmosphere.

Soon booring took over, a turnover during the next Greek 6 on 5, then a penalty against the home side, converted by Rogge – people didn't like that, but the refs seemed to take right decisions. Protopapa scratched these memories quickly from the spectators' mind as she sent an amazing lob from a really sharp angle to the net with 20sec to go, but Sleeking replied with an equally beautiful lob 17sec later to put Holland ahead by halftime (3-4).

The third began with some great scenes: Xenaki blocked a shot on the 2m line, then she arrived in time to the centre-position to score her third, this time tricking two defenders and the goalie.

Rogge was also on target, sending the ball home from an extra, but finally the Greeks also found the hole on the Dutch wall in 6 on 5, Eleftheria Plevritou's shot slipped in under the goalie's arm for 5-5. Within 53 seconds, the people were dancing on their seats as Protopapa delivered another wonder-lob to put the Greeks ahead for the first time in the game (5-6), 1:03 before the last break.

The Dutch began the fourth with a big blast, Sleeking sent a rocket under the bar, leaving seven minutes for the sides to determine the winner. As it turned out, it was a one-ball game. We could watch zone-defending at its best in front of both goals. There was still a slight difference: the last thing the Dutch wanted to see was the ball in Xenaki's hand so they set up a human wall around her on 3m, letting the Greeks take shots from 5-6m. Basically the plan worked but it was somewhat inevitable that at least once a ball would find its way to the net from that distance. It happened 3:44 minutes before the end, Eleftheriadou's shot travelled through the blocks, perhaps getting some deflection as it was not a pinpoint shot but still passed Koenders's hand (6-7).

Netherlands had one last 6 on 5 at 2:46 but the ball somehow stopped on the virtual goal line after touching the block and goalie's arm...

The Greeks didn't risk anything, while the Dutch tried desperately to go even but a fine shot was caught by Stamatopoulou with 34sec remaining. With 0:11 to go, the Greeks earned a 6 on 5, after a time-out the Dutch tried marking everyone by pressing involving their goalie but couldn't force a steal, and another exclusion ended their hunt.

The buzzer sealed the Greeks 7-6 win and sent almost 2,200 people to the seventh heaven: after finals having featured the USA and Spain in the past two editions here in Volos, this time the home side will play for the gold medal on the closing day of the championships. It's going to be a match to watch against the Russians. One bigger challenge remains: where to position those who would additionally come to cheer on Saturday night?

Quotes

Stefanos Leandros, head coach, Greece:

“This is the top level, here one player cannot win matches. Of course, Xenaki is a great player, the team worked hard to create the opportunities for her but she also worked hard for the team. It was a common effort against an extremely good Dutch team. I can't tell what made the real difference. Perhaps it was the girls' enormous will to get to the final here and win a medal. And of course, the fans' support was also a big push for us, we cannot be grateful enough to have them behind us. You can go around the world but you can hardly find such support for a team at a junior event.”

Evangelos Doudesis, head coach, Netherlands

“It was a great game, may I say between the two best teams of this tournament. They were equal but one of them had to win this match.”

Gergely Csurka, FINA Media Committee

Greece will play Russia for the gold medal here in Volos: the host side won a tremendous battle against the Netherlands (7-6) while the Russians scored spectacular goals while upending Spain (9-6).

The semi-final night saw 2,200 people gathering around the pool, inside the complex on the stands or on any neighbouring buildings offering a viewing platform, including the adjacent football stadium. The home fans created fantastic atmosphere, even at the end of the first SF when they warmly applauded the Russian team which came from behind to beat Spain. The decisive goals in the fourth period belonged to the very finest ones scored in this tournament.



One of Russia's eight action goals: a fine lob from Tolkunova - Credit: Apostolos Zacharakis

The battle between the Netherlands and Greece was even more thrilling, the Dutch had the better start but the home side managed to go even thanks to its outstanding player Eleni Xenaki who netted three goals from the centre despite guarded heavily. After sheer excitements the Greeks managed to prevail by a single goal, just like they did against the US in the quarters.



That was the third one... Eleni Xenaki in action and it was impossible to stop her...

The Americans bounced back and won the North American derby against Canada to set up their last match against Hungary to be played for the 5th place. The Magyars overcame Italy thanks to their man-down defence as they killed 13 Italian 6 on 5s on (on 15 attempts). Italy lost its second low-scoring contest in two days, after going down against Russia (5-4 in the QF), this time it ended 4-3 (to Hungary).

Contrary to the game in the prelims, China beat Australia this time and clinched the 9th place, while New Zealand beat Serbia with ease to finish 11th.

Schedule for Saturday

11.00 For places 7/8: Canada v Italy

12.20 For places 5/6: United States v Hungary

18.40 Bronze medal match: Netherlands v Spain

20.00 World Championship final: Greece v Russia
