



FÉDÉRATION
INTERNATIONALE
DE NATATION

Published on *fina.org* - Official FINA website (<https://www.fina.org>)

Best women's worlds squads under starters orders

Olga Kamardina, FINA Correspondent in Budapest

FINA Women's Water Polo World League - Super Final: everything you need to know for the 2019 tournament.

A dress rehearsal before the FINA World Championships-2019, a chance to win the Olympic ticket, drilling new rules. Eight teams, ready for the challenge, are on the line in the Hungarian capital as the 2019 Women's World League Super Final gets underway on Tuesday.

Anticipating the busy water polo week, here is a look at the main characters who will be producing ups and downs, unsung stories and close games.

Russia (Last year: 3, best result: 1 in 2008)

Happily survived is the backbone of the bronze winning Olympic and 2017 World Championships rosters, including 7 Olympic and 11 world medalists, which were competitive enough to claim silver at the home held FINA World Cup Super Final last September. Lead by Aleksandr Gaydukov and Andrey Belofastov, quite famous Olympic medalists on the male part, they had a rocky exhibition at the Europa Cup in Turin, showing good will and still nerves against eventual winners, the Netherlands, 9-11. That said, there are concerns about their defense, although Evgeniya Soboleva and Tatiana Tolkunova are the team's top duo. Olga Gorbunova has just had an impressive regular Russian season, finishing on 120 goals, and together with the MVP of the Europa Cup-2019 Elvina Karimova and best women water polo player 2018 Ekaterina Prokofieva could contribute scoring.

Player to watch: forwards Ekaterina Prokofieva and Elvina Karimova.



Photo: Ekaterina Prokofieva, forward

Hungary (Last year: EL Preliminary rounds, best result: 2 in 2004)

Nothing about this tournament will be easy for Hungary, serving host for the Super Final-2019. The 4th place “curse” has been on going since 2008 Olympics and seems to impact nearly all major international tournaments. In 2017, FINA World League Super Final and home-held FINA World Championships have been scoreless on the medals account, so hopes are laid high on the new challenge and Hungarian torsida will be a good support. The current season looks good as Attila Biro’s team got a bronze at the Europa-Cup this March in Italy, crushing hopes of locals (Italians) on the bronze, 13-11. The Magyar caps took a few days-off before re-launching trainings as the national season was over, and did not hesitate to go to the Balkans, staging a training camp in Montenegro. This year’s squad is keen to pay more attention on their tactics, and the key in their mission shall be top scoring Rita Keszthelyi.

Player to watch: Rita Keszthelyi, captain.

USA (Last year: 1, best result: 1 in 2004, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018)

The Americans have often used this tournament as a way to further develop young prospects or give them a chance to exhibit. This time, however, the powerhouse is going all in. The defense looks very impressive with Melisa Siedemann and Makenzie Fischer in the center, stunning #1 Ashleigh Johnson, MVP of the previous World League Super Final in Kunshan and her shift Amanda Longan. The attack is a real danger, having in store the power guns like Paige Haushild, the major scorer of the FINA Women's Water Polo World Cup-2018, Maddie Mussleman, 2017 World's MVP or Kiley Neushul, lead attacker at the 2017, 2016 and 2014 World League's Super Finals.

There are 9 (!) reigning Olympic champions in the roster for the Budapest-2019, including Maggie Steffens and Melissa Siedemann, who pocketed the historic title twice. There are six 2-time World champions and 13 reigning FINA World cup holders. Maggie Steffens and Melissa Siedemann collected 8 World League gold wins plus one bronze, Makenzie Fischer and Rachel Fattal – 5 a piece, Maddie Mussleman, Kiley Neushul, Kalleigh Gilchrist and Alys Williams – four. This is not a coincidence that the USA is a defending champion wherever they go, but a reflection of the hard labor. Head coach Adam Krikorian is a sure bet (From his arrival in 2009 Team USA has competed in 17 major FINA Championships and come away with Gold in 14), always driving his team forward to the always new and amazing challenges.

Player to watch: Ashleigh Johnson, goalkeeper.



Photo: Ashleigh Johnson, goalkeeper

Canada (Last year: 4, best result: 2 in 2009, 2017)

At full strength, the Maple Leaves are a competitive team, capable of battling for a spot on the podium. Comparing to the previous World League editions, the roster will have a few changes. First and foremost, a new steering. David Paradelo has been promoted to the head coach position replacing Theocharis Pavlides. The new man on the wheel though is no way new, and 6 years with the “next generation team” do really help. He knows the girls well indeed. There are 9 participants of the bronze medal game of the Budapest World’s, 10 out of 15 ranked disappointingly 4th at the FINA World League Super Final-2018 in Kunshan and actually the same caps collected silver in 2017. Hungary was a lucky place for Jessica Gaudreault. On receiving the “Best goalkeeper award”, she procured her “Media All-Star team” ticket, for the first time in her career. Canada-2019 will count on her good fit, backed up by experienced defensive center Kelly McKee. Attacking fire shall come from captain Krystina Alogbo, Monika Eggens and Elyse Lemay Lavoie.

Player to watch: Kelly McKee, defensive center, Monika Eggens, forward.

The Netherlands (Last year: 2, best result: 2 in 2018)

Arguably, the most impressive roster. One of the most decorated European nation, 5-time champion of the continent. Their recent win dates back to the Europa Cup-2019, where they defeated Russia in the gold final, 11-9. 9 out of the present squad have been atop of the European Championships last year, celebrating a significant win over Greece, 6-4. They landed silver of the World League in Kunshan, as their only loss came from the overall champion USA, 6-8. Improving every single year, fueled by the fantastic choice of players in the national championships, which counts an impressive thousand of the local clubs, they will no doubt be vying for the Olympic spot. Glory of the past makes them even more energetic (golden title in 2008).

They have Sabrina van Der Sloot in their roster, MVP of the 2018 European Championships and 2018 World League edition, and best scorer Maud Megens, top scorer of the FINA World League Super Final-2018. The list goes on: experienced Genee Dagmar, superb goaltender Laura Aarts. Netherlands’ overall depth makes this one of the most impressive rosters in the recent tournament’s history. They are one of the main favorites for gold.

Player to watch: forwards Maud Megens and Sabrina van Der Sloot.



China (Last year: 6, best result: 1 in 2013)

On paper, China's roster looks well below average, fully resembling the one, last presented to the world in 2018. Both at the FINA World Cup in Surgut and FINA World League Super Final in Kunshan the team was not competitive enough to claim the podium merits (landing on positions #5 and #6), so now they are hungry for wins and ready to give a fight. Training hard and undergoing a series of friendly matches, they shall be under pressure of loads on the way to the best fit projected on later this July. The strongest of the Asian teams is headed by a famous Chinese specialist Dali Gong, who has been on the wheel since 2016. Their strong side is their unique style, combining Asian pressing and "no fit" approach, leaving opponents in suspense of what to expect in action. Chinese goaltending looks familiar, pillaring on Lin Peng and Shen Yineng. The roster is permanent for fully 2 years, seeing 12 out of 15 players ready to start.

Player to watch: Zhao Zihan, forward (captain)

Australia (last year: 7, best result: 2 in 2007, 2010, 2012, 2015)

The Australian squad is comprised of athletes playing internationally and in the US college system, as well as local players who recently finished the 2019 OVO Australian Waterpolo League season. Lucky enough to secure the Olympic core of 6: Isobel Bishop, Bronwen Knox, Zoe Arancini, Keesja Gofers, Hannah Buckling with Rowena Webster. The Aussie's captain

will definitely be the star to watch and the challenger to keep an eye for the opponents. Their best last season was bronze at the FINA Water Polo world Cup in Surgut, where they beat Spain in the 3rd place final, 9-8. Earlier in the year, Australia pushed the USA to a penalty shoot-out in the gold medal match at the Inter-Continental qualifier in Perth. Olympian and 2019 OVO Australian Waterpolo League MVP Zoe Arancini, said the Aussie women were looking forward to taking on the world's best.

Player to watch: forwards Zoe Arancini and Rowena Webster (captain).



Italy (last year: EL Preliminary rounds, best result: 2 in 2006, 2011 and 2014)

5-time European champion and Olympic winner of 2004, “SetteRosa” haven’t won a medal of the World League since 2011. They haven’t moved past the semies since 2013, though always seeming to do enough to be a contender.

Water polo in Italy is more than a game, it’s a style of life.

The team under Fabio Conti has come to Budapest after 2 weeks of preparations “modo carbonaria” in Ostia and in Rome. The line up has a solid trio of 2015 FINA World Championships bronze medalists Arianna Garibotti, Roberta Bianconi and left-handed Giulia Enrica Emmolo, expected to be important offensive contributors. The team’s defense should be very active to help goaltenders Federica Eugenia Lavi and Giulia Gorlero. However, the Italian “crease” is pretty serviceable. Overall, provided they have obtained a good form, Fabio Conti’s squad should be able to secure wins in the round robin and book a respectable spot in the chart.

Player to watch: forwards Roberta Bianconi and Ariana Garibotti.

Format and schedule

The format and the schedule of the 2019 FINA Women's Water Polo World League Super Final in Budapest is standard, featuring two pools for the round robin stage, and a standard play-off chart for the finals. The draw has arranged it in such a way, that group "B" composed of Russia, Canada, host Hungary and overall reigning champion USA looks a little stronger than group "A", seeing freshly done Europa-cup winners the Netherlands, "Sette Rossa" of Italy, China and Australian "stingers". Part of the tournament's allure is the competitiveness and unpredictable women's nature will add it to the show, undoubtedly pulling off stunning upsets of the likes of favorites.

FINA Women's Water Polo World League - Super Final 2019

Group A: NED, CHIN, AUS, ITA

Group B: RUS, HUN, USA, CAN



Competition schedule

Day 1: 4 June, 2019

Match #1. 14:30 Group B: RUS – CAN
Match #2. 16:15 Group A: NED – CHN
17:45 Opening Ceremony
Match #4. 18:30 Group B: USA – HUN
Match #3. 20:15 Group A: AUS – ITA

Day 2: 5 June, 2019

Match #5. 15:00 Group A: AUS – CHN
Match #6. 16:45 Group B: USA – CAN
Match #7. 18:30 Group A: NED – ITA
Match #8. 20:15 Group B: RUS – HUN

Day 3: 6 June, 2019

Match #9. Group B: 15:00 RUS – USA
Match #10. Group A: 16:45 NED – AUS
Match #12. Group B: 18:30 CAN – HUN
Match #11. Group A: 20:15 CHN – ITA

Day 4: 7 June, 2019

Quarter-finals

Match #13. 15:00 2A – 3B

Match #14. 16:45 3A – 2B

Match #15. 18:30 1A – 4B

Match #16. 20:15 4A – 1B

Day 5: 8 June, 2019

Semi-finals

Match #17. 15:00 L13 – L16

Match #18. 16:45 L14 – L15

Match #19. 18:30 W13 – W16

Match #20. 20:15 W14 – W15

Day 6: 9 June, 2019

Match #21. 15:00 L17 – L18 (7 – 8 places)

Match #22. 16:45 W17 – W18 (5 – 6 places)

Match #23. 18:30 L19 – L20 (3 – 4 places)

Match #24. 20:15 W19 – W20 (1 – 2 places)
