Devastating starts in the semis set up another showdown for Serbia and Croatia

For places 5-8: Hungary v Canada 15-8

Quarters: 4-3, 4-3, 3-1, 4-1
Referees: Daniel Flahive (AUS), Jaume Teixido (ESP)

HUNGARY

David Bisztritsanyi (12/20, 60.0%) – Miklos Gor-Nagy (1/1), Mark Kallay (3/5), Tamas Gyarfas (0/1), Matyas Pasztor (1/5), Toni Nemet (1/1), David Jansik (1/4), Gergo Kovacs (3/3), Balazs Erdelyi (2/4), Bence Batori (3/5), Krisztian Bedo (0/1), Adam Nagy (0/1). Coach: Tamas Marcz

CANADA

Dusan Aleksic (8/23, 34.8%), Milan Radenovic (GK, n. e.) – Gaelan Patterson (0/3), Bogdan Djerkovic (0/1), Nicolas Constantin-Bicari (1/4), Matthew Halajian (2/5), Georgios Torakis (0/1), Mark Spooner (0/1), Jeremie Cote (0/2), Aleksa Gardijan (2/2), Arie Soleimanipak (0/2), Jeremie Blanchard (0/1), Reuel D’Souza (3/8). Coach: Pino Porzio

Shots:

HUN: 15/31, 48.4%

CAN: 8/30, 26.7%

Extramen:

HUN: 8 for 12

CAN: 1 for 9
Penalties:

HUN: 1 for 1
CAN: 2 for 2

MVP of the game:

Mark Kallay (HUN)

On Day 1 Canada caused the biggest upset of the tournament so far by beating the Magyars – and that also contributed to Hungary’s failure to reach the semis (it’s not all the same to meet Australia or Kazakhstan in the quarters).

However, Canadian head coach Pino Porzio already said on Friday evening that this crossover game would be no way similar to the previous encounter. Especially because the Canadians finished their QF against the Serbs around 22.00, and had to come back to play with the Hungarians at 10.00 on Saturday. That would be a demanding schedule even for the strongest teams but the North Americans found it really hard to cope with – while playing the 5th game on the 5th day is also something they barely do in the rest of the season.

The partial results of the quarters show clearly how they were running out of gas as time passed. The first half they could hold on for 8-6. Then they lost the second half 7-2.

The Magyars learnt the lesson from the first day when they fell behind 1-5 and couldn’t climb back in time to turn that contest. They began with a hard pressing game even at the cost of a couple of penalties as Nicolas Constantin Bicari (arriving to Hungary for the next season to play for Champions League winning side Ferencvaros) could beat his defender one-on-one. Still, they were leading all the way in the first half, though only one-two goals at this stage.

Then in the third they switched to zone defence, the tiring Canadians couldn’t shoot as precisely and Hungary’s reserve goalie David Bisztritsanyi was also up to the task. He had to step in after first choice goalie Gergely Kardos was banned for brutality after a video review but Bisztritsanyi produced a brilliant 60% saving percentage, firm backing for his team which opened the third with a double in 47 seconds to expand the gap to four goals (10-6) and there was no way back for the Canadians.
Though the game was decided, it’s still offered one more historical act: Hungary called a time out 37 seconds from time and set up a 7 on 6 attack in its last possession (according to the new rules, the goalkeeper can join the offence – beforehand it was forbidden to cross the halfway line). The Serbs also tried that against Kazakhstan but couldn’t score, now the Magyars had an attempts and Bence Batori scored the first-ever 7 on 6 goal at a major FINA event.

Quotes

Tamas Marcz, coach, Hungary:

“The players delivered the plan quite precisely. We wanted to start with a heavy pressing to tire a bit the Canadians, then switch to the zone defence in the second half and it worked, as the progress of the match mirrors it. We wanted to prove that Day 1 was just a one-off derailing, not more and I think we showed our quality today.”
Pino Porzio, coach, Canada:

“Playing five games in five days is something these players haven’t used to but that’s why we need these big tournaments. They have to go through this, see how they could play against these big teams under these circumstances. Of course, it was tough to come back in less then 12 hours and play again, but this is water polo.

Hungary has a better quality anyway, so it was great to win against them on the first day but we knew that this match would be absolutely different.”
Mark Kallay, player, Hungary:

“At least we proved for the fans and above all for ourselves that whatever happened on the first day, we are the better side, without question. We still feel sorry for not making the semis, but we have to go on and clinch the fifth place at least.”

For places 5-8: Japan v Kazakhstan 13-12
Quarters: 4-2, 4-2, 2-3, 3-5

Referees: Nenad Peris (CRO), Vojin Putnikovic (SRB)

JAPAN
Katsuyuki Tanamura (9/20, 45.0%), Tomoyoshi Fukushima (GK, n. e.) – Kiyomu Date (0/1), Haruki Koppu (0/1), Mitsuaki Shiga (0/2), Takuma Yoshida (2/3), Shogo Kageta (0/0), Yusuke Shimzu (0/3), Mitsuru Takata (0/1), Atsushi Arai (4/7), Yusuke Inaba (5/10), Keigo Okawa (1/3), Kenta Araki (1/1). Coach: Yoji Omoto

KAZAKHSTAN
Madikhan Makhmetov (4/9, 44.4%), Valeriy Shlemov (3/10, 30.0%) – Yevgeniy Medvedev (1/3), Maxim Zharden (1/2), Roman Pilipenko (0/1), Miras Aubakirov (3/4), Alexey Shmider (0/0), Murat Shakenov (4/5), Yegor Berbelyuk (0/1), Stanislav Shvedov (0/1), Ravil Manafov (0/1), Altay Altayev (0/2). Coach: Dejan Stanojevic

Shots:
JPN: 13/32, 40.6%
KAZ: 12/23, 52.2%

Extramen:
JPN: 6 for 13
KAZ: 3 for 9

Penalties:
JPN: 1 for 1
KAZ: 3 for 3

MVP of the game:
Atsushi Arai (JPN)
The first half went as expected, Japan built a massive lead as expected, Atsushi Arai’s 7m backhanded goal was a sheer beauty to watch, perhaps it was the goal of the tourney. Nothing really promised that the game’s progress would take any sharper turn, then, at 8-5 an ill-timed timeout gave a twist to the match. It didn’t seem a good idea to call for it as the Kazakh goalie was excluded but the Japanese coach did it, offering the opponent a free opportunity to bring in the reserve goalie. Who, as it happens usually, made the save in the man-down, then added some more while his team came back to 8-7. What’s more, Ravil Manafov’s shot from the centre passed the goalie but he could catch the ball just before it crossed the line. And the equaliser never came then, instead Yusuke Inaba netted two in 35 seconds to reset the 3-goal lead shortly before the last break.

Yusuke went on in the fourth, converted a penalty from the first possession for 11-7 and the game seemed to return its expected path, especially when the gap grew to five goals at 13-8 with 4:30 to go. However, the Kazakhs weren’t done they launched a last surge while the Japanese tried something which was not really their game: to kill the time. It led to a series of Kazakh goals in succession, with 2:04 to go it was 13-11 but they couldn’t add the next one in time. When Mikhail Ruday scored from the centre only 29 seconds were remaining and the Japanese kept the ball to win the Asian derby.

Quotes

Yoji Omoto, coach, Japan:

“In the last three years we lost only once to Kazakhstan, at the Asian Championships, otherwise we beat them in every game, so we knew we were the better team. We could have decided the match earlier but we missed some shots and this let them back to the game. The Kazakhs tried to slow down the game, that’s their approach, and sometimes it worked in this game as well. For us this win was important as it underlined that we are the number
Dejan Stanojevic, coach, Serbia:

“For us these games offer the chance to play a tight match with a chance, not the games like the ones against Serbia or Croatia, even Australia is above our level. What makes me satisfied that we are growing, improving step by step. We are constructing this team through tournaments like this. Also, because of the Asian events, we perhaps know Japan better, the players know what are the best tools to play an even match with them. We had some chances today, what made the difference was the man-down. We should have not let them shoot from the left side, positions 1 and 2 but we couldn’t apply that really successfully and conceded goals from those
Results & Teams

Game 19, 15.00 – Semi-final: Canada v Serbia 11-16

Quarters: 2-6, 2-3, 3-2, 4-5

Referees: Adrian Alexandrescu (ROU), Arkadiy Voevodin (RUS)

AUSTRALIA

Anthony Hrysanthos (1/7, 14.3%), Joel Dennerley (4/14, 28.6%) – Richard Campbell (2/4), George Ford (0/1), Joseph Kayes (3/7), Nathan Power (0/0), Edwards Lachlan (0/0), Aidan Roach (1/5), Aaron Younger (2/4), Andrew Ford (1/2), Timothy Putt (1/1), Rhys Howden (0/2), Blake Edwards (1/4). Coach: Elvis Fatovic

SERBIA

Branislav Mitrovic (8/15, 53.3%), Gojko Pijetlovic (2/6, 33.3%) – Dusan Mandic (1/3), Strahinja Rasovic (1/2), Sava Randjelovic (0/2), Milos Cuk (0/0), Dusko Pijetlovic (2/3), Nemanja Vico (2/2), Milan Aleksic (0/1), Nikola Jaksic (1/2), Filip Filipovic (5/8), Andrija Prlainovic (3/3), Stefan Mitrovic (1/3). Coach: Dejan Savic
Shots:

AUS: 11/30, 36.7%
SRB: 16/29, 55.2%

Extramen:

AUS: 7 for 10
SRB: 6 for 9

Penalties:

AUS: 1 for 1
SRB: 1 for 1

MVP of the game:

Filip Filipovic (SRB)
Though the T-storms eluded Belgrade in the past two days, an S-Storm hit the Aussie half in the opening period of the first semi-final. The Serbian lightning struck six times in eight minutes, the first three came down in 83 seconds from three consecutive possessions. Filip Filipovic’s gun opened the shooting, followed by fellow leftie Dusan Mandic and Nemanja Vico also netted one from the centre. The Aussies could get on the score-board at 0-4 but two more extraman goals arrived to give Serbia a 1-6 lead still in the first period.

Though the Aussies came back from 1-5 down to beat Hungary a day earlier, here a similar resurrection against the Olympic champions would have required a miracle. The Australians tried to create one though, netted a double to came back to 4-7 deep into the second, but the Serbs responded painfully, again with two from 6 on 5s to go 4-9 by halftime.

Soon the hosts went 6-11 up and even a miracle seemed to be unsubstantial to recover from here for the Sharks. Still, they tried hard and managed to put away two man-ups, kill one in between to trail 7-11 before the last period.

Richard Campbell hit one from a man-up to open the fourth but Dusko Pijetlovic was on target from their next 6 on 5 and something similar came when Roach’s penalty was immediately followed by Filipovic’s blast for 9-13.

The Serbs were a bit off-pace in the following minutes while the Aussies managed to set up Joseph Kayes in front of the goal in back-to-back man-ups and his muscle-mass prevailed in both occasions to heat up the battle at 11-13 with 3:22 to go.

Before the hosts got into trouble, the Filipovic Rocket Plant delivered another award-winning product and that was the perfect cooler in the afternoon heat. The Serbs destroyed the next Aussie man-up, Nikola Jaksic’s distant shot sneaked in with 1:35 remaining so it was over. At the end Strahinja Rasovic hit one more in the last second to settle the match where it had stood at 1-6, just after the addition of 10 goals apiece.

Also, the game offered a new biological discovery: this time the Dolphins (as the Serbs nickname their side) proved to be stronger than the Sharks.

Quotes

Elvis Fatovic, coach, Australia:

“There was nothing unexpected apart from the fact we saw a totally different approach towards applying the new rules as in the previous four days. This was surprising, but it doesn’t change the other fact that Serbia is a
Dejan Savic, coach, Serbia:

“In the first half we played really well as we planned. Then in the second half we started to do different things, commit mistakes in a row. If we play like in the first half we can win tomorrow. If we play like in the second half, we will lose.”

Aaron Younger, captain, Australia:
“We tried our best but Serbia is a better team. We couldn’t hold them at the beginning and after that it was too hard to chase them.”

Milan Aleksic, player, Serbia:

“In the first half our game was fine, but in the third period our level dropped, especially the communication among us didn’t work properly, though it happens when a team leads by several goals. But we could rebuild everything by the end, so there is one more step to go.”
Game 20, 16.45 – Semi-final: Croatia v Spain 10-8

Quarters: 5-1, 3-2, 2-4, 0-1

Referees: Boris Margeta (SLO), Georgios Stavridis (GRE)

CROATIA

Marko Bijac (16/24, 66.7%), Ivan Marcelic (GK, n. e.) – Hrvoje Benic (1/2), Loren Fatovic (1/2), Luka Loncar (1/1), Maro Jokovic (1/5), Ivan Buljubasic (1/4), Ante Vukicevic (0/1), Andro Buslje (0/0), Lovre Milos (0/0), Josip Vrlic (2/4), Andelo Setka (1/1), Javier Garcia (2/6). Coach: Ivica Tucak

SPAIN

Daniel Lopez (6/16, 37.5%), Eduardo Lorrio (GK, n. e.) – Alberto Munarriz (3/6), Alvaro Granados (1/4), Miguel De Toro (0/2), Sergi Cabanas (0/1), Marc Larumbe (1/3), Alberto Barroso (1/1), Francisco Fernandez (0/3), Roger Tahull (0/1), Felipe Perrone (1/5), Blai Mallarach (1/6), Alejandro Bustos (0/0). Coach: David Martin
Shots:

CRO: 10/26, 38.5%
ESP: 8/32, 25.0%

Extramen:

CRO: 5 for 9
ESP: 4 for 11

Penalties:

CRO: none
ESP: 1 for 1

MVP of the game:

Marko Bijac (CRO)
Croatia just copied their Serbian fellows in the second semi-final as they stormed to a 5-1 lead against the bewildered Spaniards. It was an unusual scene to see the world champions dominating so overwhelmingly over the European silver medallists. Three goals from action, two from man-ups, while Marko Bijac delivered some fine saves to put the game on a nice track from the Croatians’ view.

They could have gone even further but missed their first extra, while the Spaniards started to show some signs of life with two extraman goals, but the Croats kept their high level in offence, and closed the quarter two more goals from the left side to go 8-3 up by halftime.

However, one can never think the Spanish would let it go, what they needed was exactly the way they managed to start the third period: a man-up goal by Alvaro Granados and nice hit from action from Alberto Munarriz just 45 seconds later. With 8-5 flashing on the scoreboard, the excitements were back and even though Ivan Buljubasic netted a man-up for 9-5, the Spaniards went on pushing and Blai Mallarach’s left-handed blast found the back of the net.

Though it seemed crucial when they missed a 6 on 4, especially in the wake of Hrvoje Benic’s action goal which reset the four-goal gap. But Alberto Munarriz netted a tricky free throw for 10-7 and the Spaniards soon had a man-up to come back to two but they couldn’t make it after a time-out. Dani Lopez backed them with another fine save in a man-down but three goals still separated the sides before the last break.

With 5:30 to go it finally got down to two after a fine counter – Lopez’s 26m long pass would even make an NFL quarterback proud – and Munarriz finished the action for 10-8.

Maro Jokovic’s shot just bounced around the goal-line, the referees opted for an immediate review but the technology favoured the Spaniards. They had three possession to halve the gap but couldn’t create any danger while the Croats played with the time to keep the gap as game arrived to the last minute, where two saves from Bijac froze the match (indeed there was a spectacular difference between the goalies: Bijac came up with 16 saves and produced a 66.7% saving percentage, while Dani Lopez had only 6 saves and finished with 37.5% – way too decisive in today’s water polo). Thus the last 5:30 minutes didn’t see any goal which was too good for the Croats who will have another showdown with Serbia for the title – and a place at the Olympics.

Quotes

Ivica Tucak, coach, Croatia:

“We started the game perfectly, we were on top both mentally and physically, did everything as planned and later on still managed to stick to the game plan. We tried to be prepared for the Spanish team’s tactics and I
the Serbs had against Australia. But this is normal in a tournament like this when you have to play in a daily basis.”

David Martin, coach, Spain:

“I don’t understand what happened to my team in the first period. This was not our game, this was not the way you have to start a semi-final. After that we showed something more worthy to the Spanish team but Croatia is an excellent team and it’s almost impossible to get them on level once they had such a big advantage.”
Marko Bijac, goalie, Croatia:

“We played excellently in the first period and in the first half, got a big advantage and after that we could play

with patience and discipline. I think we fully deserved this win.”

Dani Lopez, goalie, Spain:

“When you start a game against Croatia like we did, then there is no way back. To beat teams like them or like

the Serbs, we need to lead, or hold a tie but chasing

Gergely Csurka, FINA Media Committee
Serbia was the first team to reach the gold medal match here at the FINA Men’s Water Polo World League Super Final in Belgrade. The hosts staged a devastating opening period and after going 6-1 up they never really let the Aussies come back in the game though in the fourth the boys from Down Under closed up the gap to two but never got closer. The Croats then copied their neighbours, opened their semi against Spain with a 5-1 rush, held on for 8-3 till half-time and kept two goals till the end with a tactical play. This set up another classical showdown between Serbia and Croatia for the title – and a spot at the 2020 Olympics.

Serbia gunned down the Aussie defence in the first period, Filip Filipovic&Co let one blast after the other to take a 6-1 lead which they held for most of the time even though the Australians fought hard to narrow the gap. Indeed they could climb much closer deep into the fourth period at 13-11 but the Serbian response came immediately, followed by two more to set back the five-goal difference by the end of the game. The encounter served a new biological discovery: the Dolphins (nickname for the Serbs) managed to be better than the Sharks (nick for the Aussies).
Croatia managed to beat Spain once more after the semi-final of the Europa Cup held in Zagreb in April. They did it the other way round: at home they scored the last three goals after 12-9 to advance to the final, here they opened the encounter with a 5-1 rush and didn't let the Spanish really gear up and play their own game. The Spanish had some better spells in the second half but could get as close as two goals only with 5:30 remaining. And even if it's quite long time in this sport, the defences worked well, doors were shut and that was more than enough for Croatia to make the final here. So after the 2015 World Championships and the 2016 Rio Olympics – and just like in the semi-finals of the 2017 World Championships and the 2018 European Championships – it's going to be another chapter of the essential classics, a huge battle between Serbia and Croatia. Three days ago, in the prelims, the Serbs had the upper hand with a late goal, many predict that another outstanding battle is in sight.
The Croats’ took a flying start and stayed above the Spaniards throughout the game.

For the lower ranks, Hungary avenged Canada for its opening day defeat in the first game of the morning session and will play for the 5th place here. They didn’t commit the same mistake they had done on Tuesday when they let the Canadian rally to a 1-5 lead. This time the Magyars used all their experience and physical superiority to sink their rivals who had only 10 hours to recover after their late evening quarter-final against Serbia.

There was no too much room left for the Canadians in front.

The North Americans could keep up the pace until halftime though they were already trailing 8-6 but the Magyars were merciless in the second half, their professionals had much more left in the tanks and they just showed that with a 7-2 run in the second half. The game finished with a historical first-ever goal in a 7 on 6 situation in a major FINA event as Hungary used the new rules and involved the goalkeeper to the attack in their last possession and scored just seconds before the end.

In the Asian derby Japan was in control for most of the time, after the first half they were 8-4 up, scored some spectacular goals and nothing forecasted that the game could turn into a tight battle. But it happened, the Kazakhs came back to 8-7 and they missed only a couple of centimetres to equalise (the ball almost sailed in). Japan hit back immediately and added one more still in the third to regain a three-goal lead before the last break. Soon it grew to 5 goals at 13-8 so everything seemed to have been settled but the Kazakhs staged a late surge, netter four goals in a row, though the last one came a bit late, just 29 seconds from time and they couldn’t steal the ball to force a shootout.
It's a kind of magic: Athusi Arai, MVP of the game, let a backhanded shot go from 7m to score a beauty in the first half

Schedule for Sunday

10.00 For places 7-8th: Canada v Kazakhstan
11.45 For places 5-8th: Hungary v Japan
15.00 Bronze medal match: Australia v Spain
16.45 Gold medal match: Serbia v Croatia