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EXPERT'S EYE 15 - Serbia wraps up men's water polo tournament

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The gold medal match between Croatia, the defending champions, and Serbia, the bronze medalists from London 2012, wrapped up the whole men's tournament.

It was not that wild battle that some had predicted. In fact the Serbian team controlled the match since the start and, in spite of the strong opposition of the Croatians, its victory was never in doubt, and they made it with a final 4-goal difference, 11-7.

For the Serbian team, coached by Dejan Savic, this was the first Olympic gold medal. They have upgraded themselves from the bronze medal of 2012 while Croatia stepped one level down from their London gold, still a great achievement for the side coached by Ivica Tucak.

The water polo lovers were able to appreciate the strength of both sides, as well as their organization in the water.

Serbia took profit of the state of grace of some of its players, notably the 22-year old left hander Dusan Mandic, who scored with great ability four goals, whose beauty manuals could hardly describe. Veterans Filip Filipovic and Dusko Pijetlovic were back on top form at the right moment, and their 4 goals -2 each - also propelled Serbia to victory.

Prior to the gold medal final, the match for the bronze medal was contested between Montenegro and Italy, respectively fourth and second at London2012. was balanced.

Both teams wanted badly to win it, both played brilliantly and the match was balanced.

The 2nd and the 4th quarter were tied 3-3 while Italy won the 1st and the 3rd by one goal .

Eventually the Italians won because they had been slightly better than their opponents, in both the attack and the defense, which could count also on a good day of goalkeeper Tempesti (10 saves out of 20 shots received). With 423 international matches played the 37-year goalie from Italy was the most capped player in this tournament. He was also most happy to close his 5th Olympiad and his long career with this bronze medal.

Italy took an early lead on an opener from Valentino Gallo, followed up by a goal from Nicholas Presciutti on counter attack.

Both teams traded goals until the initial 2-goal lead was confirmed at the end of the game when Italy could celebrate victory on 12 – 10.

Crucial to Italy's win were Gallo and Nora, the two left hander lined up by coach Alessandro Campagna; a change of strategy compared to last year's world championships when in the team there was no left hander, which was the case of Montenegro yesterday.

Gallo (3 goals on 4 attempts) and Nora (one goal from his only shot) scored 4 goals, one third of Italy's total.

Even more crucial were the 6 goals (half of the total) scored by the Presciutti's brothers: 4 by Christian, 2 by Nicholas.

The two remaining goals were scored by Pietro Figlioli (1 from 1 shot) and by center forward Matteo Aicardi, the masked man (he had his nose broken in the opening match of the tournament) whose 5-meter goal at 35 seconds to the end secured bronze to Italy.

Italy played with two injured players, the second one being Bodegas, who had a thumb fractured in the game against Greece, in the quarter finals.

Montenegro's number 7 Mladan Janovic tried to inspire his team, also through his 3 goals.

Montenegro and Italy had already met in the preliminary, with Italy winning narrowly 6-5.

Noteworthy, climbed on the podium in Rio the same teams of London 2012, although in a different order.

Classification

For the 7th place Spain prevailed over Brazil 9-8. The home team won just one quarter, the last, by one goal, not enough to avoid defeat. The Spanish team was 6th four years ago.

For the 5th place the Magyars led all the way through the match, with the Hellenics challenging them the best they could. At half time the score was 6-5 for the Magyars.

Eventually Hungary won, thus retaining their 5th place from 2012. Greece advanced from the 9th to the 6th place.

At 3:21 inside the last period, with the score 10-9 for Hungary, the Hellenic veteran Christos Afroudakis (366 caps) had the opportunity to tie on a nice counterattack but, alone in front of the Hungarian goalie, he missed it.

The match ended 12-10 for Hungary, coincidentally the identical score of the previous bronze medal match. Among the winners was decisive the good performance of the 21-year old Gergo Zalanki, the youngest of the team, left hander, who scored 2 goals.

Results

Classification Matches

For 7th-8th place: Brazil-Spain 8 - 9 (1:3, 2:1, 1:2, 4:3)
For 5th -6th place: Hungary-Greece 12-19 ((2:1, 4:4, 3:3, 3:2)

Medal Matches

For 3rd – 4th place: Montenegro-Italy 10-12 (1:2, 3:3, 3:4, 3:3)
For 1st 2nd place: Croatia-Serbia 7 - 11 (2:3, 1:3, 2:3, 2:2)

DIVING

The men's 10m platform is the least winning event for China at the Olympics. In the event long Olympic history the China won gold only twice: in 1992 with Shuwei Sun, in 2000 with Liang Tian and in 2004 with Jia Hu. In 2008 gold was claimed by Australia's Matthew Mitcham, in 2012 by USA's David Boudia.



Yesterday the Chinese managed to win their fourth gold medal in this event when Aisen Chen, with a perfect performance, won the event defeating the Mexican German Sanchez and Boudia, the defending champion. The French Benjamin Auffret came in 4th place, narrowly missing the appointment with history; Martin Wolfram of Germany, although with an injured shoulder, completed the competition ending in fifth place, ahead of the second Chinese, the disappointing Bo Qiu, world champion in 2015.

There was suspense throughout the race, with some excellent eliminations in the first two stages, frequent changes in the rankings and some surprises on the podium.

The most stunning elimination was that of Britain's Tom Daley, who had topped the rankings the preliminary round, finished 18th and last in the semi-final that took place yesterday, earlier in the day.

After his eliminations the Chinese were predicted to win both gold and silver, the American the bronze medal.

Victory went to Aisen Chen, with 585.30 points. The Chinese was the more regular diver over the latest two days and certainly deserved winning.

His compatriot Bo Qiu had an erratic performance, alternating perfect dives, judged worth of 10's, with blatantly wrong dives: his final was a continuous "ups and downs" that caused him to miss many valuable points before finishing sixth with 488.20 points.

On the contrary Mexican German Sanchez, who here in Rio did not look particularly fit, last night has pulled out the best from his repertoire, and won the medal of life, a very precious silver, with 532.70 points.

Boudia took bronze with 525.25 points, ahead of Auffret, true revelation of these Games, 4th with 507.35. Wolfram was fifth with 492.90 points.

Russia's Viktor Minibaev, who arrived in Rio aiming to the podium, was just eighth, even behind the emerging Puerto Rican Rafael Quintero.

German veteran Sascha Klein paid farewell to competitions on a decent ninth place.
