

## 2022 European Water Polo Championships, Split (CRO) – Day 10

### Hungary misses the semis for the third time in 19 editions

**Hungary, one of the two countries taking part in each edition since the inaugural 1985 championship, lost a 26-goal epic to Spain in the quarters. It's only the third time in 19 editions that the Magyars didn't make the semis, an utter disappointment for world champs silver medallists. In the other camp, Spain could celebrate a fifth consecutive SF appearance at the Europeans – they'll face the Netherlands, while Greece is to meet Italy. These latter three all bagged easy wins, as expected.**

**Quarter-finals:** Hungary v Spain 11-15, Croatia v Italy 8-16, Netherlands v France 22-3, Greece v Israel 14-4. **For places 9-10<sup>th</sup>:** Germany v Serbia 9-12. **For places 11-12<sup>th</sup>:** Romania v Slovakia 9-5  
**Fixtures – semi-finals (Wednesday):** 19.00 Netherlands v Spain, 20.30 Greece v Italy. **For places 5-8<sup>th</sup>:** 16.00 France v Hungary, 17.30: Croatia v Israel

Hungary barely missed the semi-finals at the Europeans – they took part in each of the 18 editions before this one, and made the top four 16 times and stood on the podium on 14 occasions. Now, after 1997 and 2010, they had to play for the 5-8<sup>th</sup> places again (also this was their first QF loss at the majors since the 2017 Worlds). If it can offer them any consolation at all, they lost the chance in an entertaining game against Spain, another epic encounter of the two giants.

The Spanish stormed to a 1-4 lead in eight minutes, but the Magyars bounced back in the second to equalise for 5-5. However, a goal 3 seconds before the break, and another one 30 seconds into the third made the Spaniards going again. And soon, at 6-7, two outstanding centre-shots by Paula Leiton within 48 seconds, followed by a man-up goal did irreparable damage to the Magyars.

They never really recovered from that blow, though got back to 10-12 from the first two possessions in the fourth but Maica Garcia's goal from an extra killed their momentum. The last minutes added more to the scoring feast, Garcia even netted a 7m shot to show something extraordinary. This triumph sent Spain to their fifth straight semi-final at the Europeans, and also healed somewhat their wounds after they had failed to make the semis for the first time since the 2016 Olympics.

The other encounters were only preludes to the excitements of the semis. The Netherlands came up with the most devastating performance of the session to beat France, Croatia and Israel had a lot more spells against Italy and Greece, though the latter two also seemed to focus on their next challenge already.

### Game recaps

#### Hungary v Spain 11-15

Both sides took a nervous start, the first four minutes saw no goals, just missed man-ups (two for the Hungarians, one for the Spaniards), balls hit the woodwork, passes were stolen. Then Spain netted two

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in a span of 34 seconds, Paula Leiton's centre shot and Anni Espar's ball from a counter just sneaked in under Alda Magyari's arms. Then Hungary also found the way to score, Dora Leimeter put away their third man-up but a brilliant shot by Beatriz Ortiz from the perimeter reset the two-goal gap.

Soon it was three, Greta Gurisatti sent the ball wide from their next man-up, and Ortiz this time came up with an awesome lob for 1-4. The Magyars tried to rely on feeding the centres, it brought a fifth man-up for the last possession, but the finishing shot was anything but damaging, offered an easy stop for Martina Terre (a surprise choice for this highlighted match, instead of the decorated goalie Laura Ester).

It could have been 1-5 but Spain's extra didn't work this time, instead, Dora Szilagyi sent the ball home in the dying seconds of their first extra in the second for 2-4. Spain got a 6 on 4 (rarely, the two refs sent out two different players simultaneously), the first shot was saved, the second went in, courtesy of Anni Espar. Rebecca Parkes replied from the centre for 3-5, and soon it was halved – Szilagyi's lob left Terre stranded.

Hungary's defence got really tight in these minutes, their zone completely neutralised the Spanish centre-forwards, they dealt with another man-down, while Gurisatti put away an extra from the left wing to make it even at 5-5. However, Spain had the last laugh in the first half, they got 30 seconds left, earned a man-up 7 seconds from time and set up Paula Prats on the 2m line in four, for 5-6.

Spain carried on their momentum in the second, Elena Ruiz broke the Magyars' zone from a brilliant bouncer from 7m in the 30<sup>th</sup> second. An easy put-away helped the Hungarians, Parkes was alone after an exclusion – Leiton had a much demanding task to do the same with four defenders on her neck, but she made it for 6-8. Just 48 seconds later she hit another one, this time a fantastic backhand – unlike in the second period, the Hungarian defence was in ruins. And after three action goals came one nice from an extra by Ruiz for 6-10. Hungary's man-up goal was disallowed because of fouling the blocking player – the next one went in, but Ortiz also sent the ball home in a 6 on 5. Garda buried a penalty for 8-11, but Nona Perez could shoot through the zone once more with 41 seconds to go in the third – so Spain could enter the final period with a commanding four-goal lead.

Garda hit her third from an extra early in the fourth, then the Magyars denied one, Leimeter's 9m shot surprisingly ended up in the net in the last second of their next possession for 10-12. Spain reacted well, they could put the ball on Maica Garcia's hand in an extra which is usually a goal, it stood 10-13 with 6:01 to go. And they defended even better to burn almost three minutes while keeping the gap – the first real chance for their rivals was a man-up with 3:12 to go, after a time-out, but they overplayed it and not even took a shot. In the following one they did, but it didn't do much damage, the blocks denied it and when Garcia hit the back of the net from the perimeter (quite unusual from her!), with 1:22 on the clock, it was all done. One goal apiece from man-ups closed down the entertaining contest which sent to Spain

### **Netherlands v France 22-3**

While the men's team could cause the biggest upset of recent years by beating the Serbs in the crossover matches, similar miracles were out of question in the women's tournament. The gap between the top

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five teams and the rest of the field is too big to be bridged, even in a single game and the first quarter-final was a proof for that.

The French fought and gave their maximum – but not for a single moment they stood a chance to play a tighter game with the Netherlands. The 3-0 opening lead was a smooth opening from the Dutch, then they started rolling, led 8-2 at halftime and pushed on in the second half too. They didn't seem to switch gears and take a higher pace – rather the French ran out of steam. While the World Championships bronze medallist staged a 12-0 run before the French could score again, late in the game, after more than 14 minutes.

### **Croatia v Italy 8-16**

It was a great effort from the host side – this time they didn't crash in the second half as they had done four days ago against the Hungarians. Back then, the halftime score was the same, 5-9, but that was followed by a 1-13 rout, now the Italians led by only six before the last period.

The Croatian defence worked really well, the Italians were unable to gear up – the hosts played with discipline, did not take risks and did not hurry anything. A couple of precise distant shots put them on the scoreboard in the first period – though they fell 0-4 behind in five minutes – and that gave some confidence for the players.

Of course, getting inside 'visible distance' was a mission impossible for them as the Italians – semi-finalists at the World Champs – always found the way to score, never letting their rivals inside five goals once they built a 2-7 lead midway through the second quarter. Though the partial scores for the first three quarters showed that their game didn't click as one may have expected at this stage (2-5, 2-4, 2-3, 2-4). As a story byline, all three Butic sisters scored for Croatia (four out of the team's eight goals) – and this was one of the losses which the hosts should be still proud of.

### **Greece v Israel 14-4**

Greece stormed to a 6-1 lead early on, then pushed the brakes a bit, scored only four goals in the middle two periods, before gearing up a bit to add four in the last one. Israel brought its well-organised, disciplined game to the pool that also helped them to hold the Greeks way below 20 goals – perhaps their only thing to mind was two missed penalties.

In a nice scene, at the end of the game the coaches offered each other a warm hug on the pool deck – quite understandably, since Israel's team is also led by a Greek, Dimitrios Mavrotas.

### **For places 9-10<sup>th</sup>**

#### **Germany v Serbia 9-12**

Back in January 2020, the two sides battled in the other ranking match, for the 11<sup>th</sup> place and produced a thriller. The Serbs had a substantial lead, after being 4-6 down they came back and at the beginning of the fourth they went 11-7 up – but the Germans staged a 0-4 run, equalised 11 seconds from time and won the penalty shootout.

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This time the Serbs didn't let it go. Quarter by quarter they increased their lead, it was already massive at halftime, 3-7. The Germans never looked like they were capable of producing a similar comeback as in Budapest, at the beginning of the fourth it was still 4-8. In 19 seconds, Hristina Ilic netted an action goal for 4-9, and even though the Germans had a better spell and scored three connecting goals, but Nadja Novakovic killed their momentum with an action goal for 7-10. Two more hits in 31 seconds secured the Serbs' 9<sup>th</sup> place finish (Ilic had a perfect shooting percentage in this game, 4/4).

This is something they can be really proud of, unlike the men's team, which can only be 9<sup>th</sup> after the shocking defeat on the previous day.

### **For 11-12th places**

#### **Romania v Slovakia 9-5**

Romania beat the Slovaks 9-8 in the qualifications, that sealed their historical first-ever berth at the European Championships – however, after Russia was suspended, Slovakia could also join the field, and two sides faced off again.

This time the game didn't produce the same thrills – though the Slovaks' line-up was different, missed a couple of key-players due to injury –, Romania held the game under control right from the beginning. Krisztina Szeghalmi was instrumental in their victory, she netted four of their first five goals which put them 5-2 ahead.

The Slovaks had a 15:00 minutes long 'break', but managed to come back to 6-4 before the last period. In the fourth they missed a crucial extra early on while Anastasia Melnychuk put away one, midway through the final quarter. Monika Sedalkova gave some hope for the Slovaks with 2:17 to go, finishing off a counter, however, Szeghalmi netted her fifth, burying a penalty 19 seconds later for 8-5 and that put an end to the contest.

And a last-grasp goal, just beating the buzzer, by Alina Olteanu was a fine ending for the Romanians' first-ever run at the Europeans – they earned a historical win, which also saved them from being bottom-ranked at the championship.

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