

## 2022 European Water Polo Championships, Split (CRO) – Day 11

### Croatia faces off Italy, Spain and Hungary to repeat the 2020 final

Croatia and Italy won their respective quarter-finals with ease as expected – though Italy had to dig deep against France in the first half –, while Hungary scored eight action goals in a thrilling encounter to get the upper hand against Montenegro. World champion Spain's defence was simply incredible as they held Olympic silver medallist Greece on five goals. As a side-note, Serbia almost suffered another blow but managed to win the penalty shootout against the Netherlands to play for the 9<sup>th</sup> place.

**Quarter-finals:** Hungary v Montenegro 11-8, Spain v Greece 9-5, Croatia v Georgia 15-5, Italy v France 16-8. **For places 9-12<sup>th</sup>:** Netherlands v Serbia 11-12 (6-6, pen: 5-6), Romania v Israel 11-10 (8-8, pen: 3-2). **For places 13-14<sup>th</sup>:** Germany v Malta 14-11. **For places 15-16<sup>th</sup>:** Slovakia v Slovenia 11-5  
**Semi-finals (Thursday):** 18.00 Hungary v Spain, 20.30 Croatia v Italy. **For places 5-8<sup>th</sup>:** 14.00 Montenegro v Greece, 15.30: Georgia v France. **For places 9-10<sup>th</sup>:** 11.30 Romania v Serbia. **For places 11-12<sup>th</sup>:** 10.00 Israel v Netherlands

Hungary and Montenegro staged another classic, which saw incredible efforts in defending, but at the end the Hungarians' individual skills won the game. While the Magyars were always in the lead from the beginning, for three periods the Montenegrins seemed to be capable of turning the game if their time came. It never did, though – at the beginning of the fourth, Gergo Zalanki scored a goal in 11 seconds, as another example for the Hungarians' never-ceasing creativity, and another one in 40 seconds gave them a 9-5 lead. Soon the Montenegrins missed a penalty, still, they battled themselves back to 9-7, when Szilard Jansik came up with a brilliant last-second lob shot and that killed the rivals' momentum. He was the hero of the contest, netted 5, a winning effort in a game ending in 11-8.

In the other highlighted QF, Spain showed some incredible defending to hold the Greeks on five goals in the entire match. At 4-2, with 3 seconds to go in the first period, Unai Aguirre stopped a penalty, then the Spanish defence killed back-to-back man-downs and scored from the ensuing counter – that chain of events was the finest sample how the entire game looked like. When Spain went 7-3 up late in the third, there was no way back for the Greeks. Indeed, after they netted two in the first period, could hit only one per period, way too few to be in the race at this level. The win sent the Spanish to their third straight semi at the Europeans, to set up a showdown with Hungary to repeat the 2020 final.

The other two QFs offered less excitement, though France caused some havoc for one and a half periods against Italy, took a 3-5 lead, while the Italians' tensions ran so high that once they found themselves in a 3 on 6 situation (where the French failed to score). But once the World Champs runners-up regrouped themselves, they started rolling, staged a 7-0 run and after 10-5 turned the game into the expected lopsided contest.

---

Ligue Européenne de Natation  
9 rue de la Morâche - 1260 Nyon - Switzerland  
Phone: +41 22 552 99 99  
Email: [lenoffice@len.eu](mailto:lenoffice@len.eu)  
[www.len.eu](http://www.len.eu)

As it was also foreseen, Croatia booked not only a QF but a semi-final spot when managed to save the last game in the prelims to a tie against Greece – the hosts claimed an easy win over Georgia, much to the joy of the 8000 fans. Next comes Italy, that will be a nailbiter for sure.

As a matter of curiosity – and as another stunning story by-line in Serbia’s history – both matches played for the 9-12<sup>th</sup> places were decided in penalty shootouts. While it was not that surprising that Romania and Israel had a balanced encounter – the Romanians prevailed at the end – Serbia’s another struggle against the Dutch dropped more jaws once more. The Serbs took a 5-2 lead by halftime, so they seemed to find their game, only to score a single goal in the second half while the Dutch climbed back and even had a ball to win the game in the regular time. Then they made one more miss, so the Serbs won the shootout in the 7<sup>th</sup> round and avoided an even bigger embarrassment to play only for the 11<sup>th</sup> place here...

## Game recaps

### Quarter-finals

#### Hungary v Montenegro 11-8

The pressure left its mark on the opening eight minutes – after a quick exchange of goals from man-ups (including a VAR review for the Magyars’ shot) five minutes of enormous battle followed, goalies were busy of stopping shots from the perimeter, while the centre-forwards were barely in play. Then Daniel Angyal could beat Dejan Lazovic from the distance and in 50 seconds Akos Konarik did the same with a smart shot. The Hungarian defence stood firm in the following man-down to keep the 3-1 lead after the first period.

Lazovic came up with a great save in a man-down and the second shot was denied by the blocks – just like at the other end when Montenegro had a 6 on 5. But the ball bounced back to them, Vladan Spaic earned a penalty and Bogdan Durdic converted it to halt his team’s 9:58 minute-long silence. The battle was heating up, it was an enormous body v body battle – the next good chance was for Hungary, a man-up, played in 5 on 4 due to players lagged behind, and Szilard Jansik sent the ball home for 4-2. Montenegro got another penalty after a rebound, Durdic made no mistake – just like Krisztian Manhercz at the other end, this one was called in a man-up. Miroslav Perkovic also had an easy job while alone after an exclusion for 5-4, and that remained the halftime score.

The fight was just intensifying in the third. The Magyars killed a man-down at the beginning though the Montenegrins had three shots – then came a kind of stalemate, with no risks but no real chances either. With 3:03 on the clock, finally Szilard Jansik managed to earn some space in front of the goal and put the incoming assist away. Right after the restart the Magyars made a steal, earned a man-up, but the block denied them, so they missed a golden chance to go +3 up. That hit back as Kanstantin Averka blasted their fifth from their man-up (the time-out helped here), so it was 6-5. Not for long though, after missed shots apiece, Hungary launched a 2 on 1 counter and Jansik scored his third 13 seconds before the last break.

---

Ligue Européenne de Natation  
9 rue de la Morâche - 1260 Nyon - Switzerland  
Phone: +41 22 552 99 99  
Email: [lenoffice@len.eu](mailto:lenoffice@len.eu)  
[www.len.eu](http://www.len.eu)

How the fourth started was something really out of the blue – the Hungarians won the swim-off, but instead of the usual positioning, Gergo Zalanki went on with full gear, that gave him a half-body advantage, got the ball on 3m and put it in from close – it took 11 seconds. The Montenegrins was stunned – and in 40 seconds got another one, Manhercz netted it from 6m for 9-5. This floored them virtually, they got a penalty, but Vogel stopped Averka’s shot – 4:30 was on the clock when Vladimir Gojkovic burnt his second time-out.

It calmed his players somewhat and Vasilije Radovic scored their first action goal from sharp angle, then Spaic netted another from the centre, in 48 seconds they halved the distance and there was still 3:21 on the clock. Here came the time-out from the other bench, and it also helped as Jansik came up with a breath-taking lob in the very last second of their next possession, to kill their rivals’ momentum. Miroslav Perkovic pulled one back for 10-8 with 2:21 to go but the Magyars didn’t let them closer. As the clock was ticking down, the Montenegrins lost their real composure and Jansik crowned his outstanding afternoon by netting a fifth goal from a counter, nine seconds before the end.

It was a great battle where the action goals decided the outcome: Hungary was incredible in that field, netted 8, while Montenegro could score 2 (late in the fourth, after 9-5).

### **Italy v France 16-8**

France carried on where they finished against Serbia: a spirited all-in performance – which earned them a 2-0 lead and a 3-2 advantage after eight minutes. The Italians couldn’t find their rhythm for a while, shot the balls without setting up the better chances and Hugo Fontani could stop a handful of shots even in man-downs.

It seemed they could reach the necessary gear in the heated battle, though they needed back-to-back man-ups, then a VAR review to level the score. Then in a rare if never-seen scene, the French missed a 6 on 3 (Lorenzo Bruni was red carded in the 6 on 4 for roughing an attacker), but after killing a man-down, Romain Marion-Vernoux put away a ‘simple’ extra. 37 seconds later France was leading by two again, Pierre Vanpeperstraete dunked another man-up for 5-3. And the World Champs runner-ups could have got into bigger troubles as they were unable to take a shot before the buzzer while in 6 on 5 and the French got another one to go +3 up, but Giacomo Nicosia could make a save.

That was crucial as Italy hit back with a double, Edoardo di Somma sent the ball home from a nice 6 on 5 play and Giacomo Cannella’s rocket from 6m in 40 seconds for 5-5. Now the Italians were on fire and the French lost ground, missed another extra, while Canella hammered one in with 45 seconds to go, what’s more, 37 seconds later Vincenzo Dolce finished a one-on-one for 7-5.

The action-packed first half saw 21 exclusions and a red card – the refs worked hard to calm the tensions running way too high. This, and the three-minute break had an impact, the Italians came back to the pool with a much cooler head and left the French behind.

Di Fulvio kicked off the third with a brilliant action shot, then the Italians killed another man-down, while Dolce made theirs. It went on the same way, another missed man-up by the French, and a netted

---

Ligue Européenne de Natation  
9 rue de la Morâche - 1260 Nyon - Switzerland  
Phone: +41 22 552 99 99  
Email: [lenoffice@len.eu](mailto:lenoffice@len.eu)  
[www.len.eu](http://www.len.eu)

one at the other end, this time by Jacopo Alesiani, despite it seemed the French could survive it. Italy was in a 7-0 run, their rivals missed their 6<sup>th</sup> extra in a row. Then, after almost 10 minutes, Thomas Vernoux converted a 6 on 5, but it was felt that it came too late – especially after di Fulvio scored his 4<sup>th</sup> for 11-6.

Their 9-3 rush in the middle two periods did the damage – the French may have thought to create another miracle but against the Serbs they enjoyed a substantial lead before the last break, so this was rather a mission impossible. Indeed, the Italians outplayed them in the fourth period as well, the game got rather similar to the past one-sided clashes of these teams – however, for a while, the ‘Serb-beaters’ did a really great job. Still, the Italians ‘battle-field experience’ prevailed.

### **Spain v Greece 9-5**

Spain jumped to a 2-0 lead, scoring twice in 55 seconds within the first two minutes. Greece regained some strength via a converted penalty and after another two minutes of defensive battling Angelos Vlachopoulos put an extra away for 2-2. However, the Spaniards hit back, the goals came in a minute again while the Greeks started a new chapter, missing all the chances in the world. Still in the first, they missed a penalty 3 seconds before the buzzer, then in the second, back-to-back man-ups, soon a 2 on 1... In the meantime, Martin Famera netted a counter for 5-2.

Before it would have turned into a Greek tragedy, Georgios Dervisis halted their scoreless run after 8:06 minutes from a man-up, then the defence killed a man-down. However, their next extra went down into the drain as a pass to the wing found no player there, so Spain led 5-3 at halftime.

Felipe Perrone used all his experience to finish Spain’s first extra in its 20<sup>th</sup> second, while Greeks went on struggling in offence. That hit back when Alberto Munarriz blasted one from 6m – midway through the third the Spanish led 7-3. Konstantinos Kakaris pulled one back, this was finally a great man-up play from the Greeks, and soon Roger Tahull was unable to put the ball away from close range, though after the exclusion the defenders pushed them a bit. Then the Greeks could deny another Spanish man-up (played after a time-out), still, that was only enough to keep the gap on three goals – they were unable to cut it further as they waited for the calls in vain, while their shots from the perimeter weren’t as effective.

And again, the first possession was a killer for the Greeks, Tahull could score from the centre with an incredible move while being held tight by the defenders, in the dying seconds of the possession for 8-4. Vlachopoulos replied immediately with a sharp distant shot but again, they failed to make their 6 on 5, though they had a time-out. Konstantinos Limarakis kept his team in the game with a couple of huge saves, but the gap was still three goals – and in front nothing really worked for them. This was also an appraisal for the Spanish defence, they really closed each incoming road down – and killed the time in offence in an organised way. All in all, the gap in shots on target was much larger than usual at this level: 23-16 – and Unai Aguirre posted an incredible 68.8% in the Spanish goal, making 11 stops on 16 shots (Limarakis was 14 on 23 for 60.9%, in other games a winning margin perhaps). The Greeks almost had as many missed shots (13) as many were directed on the goal – while Spain had only 9 missed attempts out of 32, also a demonstration of the difference in the defences’ efforts.

---

Ligue Européenne de Natation  
9 rue de la Morâche - 1260 Nyon - Switzerland  
Phone: +41 22 552 99 99  
Email: [lenoffice@len.eu](mailto:lenoffice@len.eu)  
[www.len.eu](http://www.len.eu)

All that said, the inevitable came soon in the last minute of the encounter when Alvaro Granados netted a penalty to seal Spain's third straight semi-final appearance at the Europeans – and the sixth overall, including the last two Worlds and the Tokyo Olympics.

## **Croatia v Georgia 15-5**

Georgia was kind of the ideal quarter-final opponent for the Croats, to further get used to playing in front of 8000 fans in the magnificent Spaladium Arena and not being too worried of losing the game as the difference between the teams was obvious.

And they didn't waste much time to storm to a 4-0 lead, this was their best opening during all these evenings. The first two did a quick calming effect as the two penalty goals came in 58 seconds inside the first three minutes, then an action and a man-up goal were added later, while the defence killed two Georgian 6 on 5s

However, the rivals got back to life early in the second, two fine action goals halved the distance, but Rino Buric put one away from a man-up immediately, before any second thoughts would have surfaced. Then the hosts denied another man-up while Konstantin Kharkov put away a second shot in their man-up, and much to the fans' happiness, Boris Vapenski hit the post from a late penalty, so the Croats held their four-goal lead.

Though the second period ended in 2-2, not even the Georgians could have thought that they could have a realistic chance to catch up the Croats. If anyone had, one had to forget it soon – after a quick exchange of goals the Croats netted two more in 44 seconds to go 9-3 up, so the bill for this evening was settled. The rest of the game was devoted to entertainment, and the fans loved Bijac's penalty save and Luka Bukic's hat-trick in 2:18 minutes before the last break.

Bijac enjoyed the evening, posted his 11<sup>th</sup> save while his colleague Nikoloz Shubladze was substituted at the other end after making 1 on 10, to highlight one of the major statistical differences. Not as if Irakli Razmadze, who had made one of the most publicised proposals in water polo history four days ago, could prevent the hosts from going on with their scoring feast. They stopped at 15 – and can get ready for a showdown with Italy. At the same time, Georgia also had a really memorable evening while playing their first-ever quarter-final on the big stage.

## ***For places 9-12<sup>th</sup>***

### **Romania v Israel 11-10 (8-8, pen: 3-2)**

It was a balanced, low-scoring game where the goalies did a great job and the fatigue played an important role as the game progressed, since without the goals the players were forced for a lot of swimming.

Israel jumped to a 2-4 lead early in the second with a double in 49 seconds, but the Romanians fought themselves back, so it stood even at 4-4. Tudor-Andrei Fulea hit his third from a man-up for 5-4 while the Israeli players struggled to put the ball away. Then after 10:31 minutes they finally equalised from

---

Ligue Européenne de Natation  
9 rue de la Morâche - 1260 Nyon - Switzerland  
Phone: +41 22 552 99 99  
Email: [lenoffice@len.eu](mailto:lenoffice@len.eu)  
[www.len.eu](http://www.len.eu)

an extra, after a time-out, it was Ronen Gros' fourth in the game, but Fulea put his team ahead once more by burying a penalty for 6-5. Israel missed the next man-up, but not the following one, Gal Haimovich sent the ball home – the teams produced the third 2-2 quarter in a row, leaving the decision to the final one.

It didn't come, though. The Fulea v Gros scoring contest went on, both netted his 5<sup>th</sup> respectively, then Fulea hit the post in a man-up, but collected the rebound and they could set up Levente Vancsik on the 2m line and he made it with ease for 8-7. Yahav Fire delivered his 13<sup>rd</sup> save in the next man-down which would have given a two-goal lead for the Romanians while turning into the last three minutes.

However, Israel couldn't really penetrate their rivals' defence, not even after a time-out. With one minute remaining, Fire saved them for a last time, stopping a counter – and that was crucial. In a few moments, Francesco Iudean committed a silly mistake, he kept holding his opponent after being excluded (in a neutral position), gifting a penalty for Israel – Ido Goldschmidt converted it 49 seconds from time, saving the game to a penalty shootout (apparently, the fourth period also ended in a 2-2 partial result).

The shootout had everything and even more... Gros had the first miss, followed by two more by his mates, but the Romanians also had two misses, including Fulea's one, who couldn't even shoot the ball as it fell out of his hand... Then Israeli goalie Fire came forward to fire in the equalizer, but then he couldn't stop the last one, and Andrei Neamtu's fine lefthanded shot put an end to the thriller.

#### **Netherlands v Serbia 11-12 (6-6, pen: 5-6)**

The Serbs took the lead with a fine goal from the centre by Strahinja Rasovic in the 29<sup>th</sup> second, but didn't make themselves more comfortable later as they missed a handful of great chances, including a 6 on 4. Some five minutes later Ognjen Stojanovic doubled their lead with an action goal. For a while, Dutch got the closest to score in a man-up, but in fact Thomas Lucas was too close, put the ball away from 1.5m and it was annulled. Then Lucas Gielen made another one 34 seconds before the break to put his team on the scoreboard.

The second started better for the fallen favourites, they managed to widen the gap, led 1-4 while Dimitrije Risticovic delivered a series of outstanding saves. Once he couldn't help in a man-down, but Radomir Drasovic scored a fine action goal 1:16 from time and the Serbs denied another Dutch man-up before the break to lead 2-5 at halftime.

But not even this was enough for them to keep the game under control – and once the Dutch started netting those chances which they had missed in the first half (incoming goalie Lazar Doboanov couldn't deliver the same huge saves as Risticovic), they got closer, and at 5-5 they caught up with the Olympic title-holders. The Serbs could score first when only 59 seconds left from the period, but the Dutch had the answer, Jesse Koopman's action goal 26 seconds before the last break.

And as astonishing it was, the Serbs were unable to put the ball away from any situation in the fourth (scored a single goal in the entire second half). They had two man-ups, but Eelco Wagenaar came up

---

Ligue Européenne de Natation  
9 rue de la Morâche - 1260 Nyon - Switzerland  
Phone: +41 22 552 99 99  
Email: [lenoffice@len.eu](mailto:lenoffice@len.eu)  
[www.len.eu](http://www.len.eu)

with some outstanding saves – on the other end Dobožanov also had two important stops. With 40 seconds remaining, Dejan Savic called a time-out, but the Serbs were unable to create any danger, 20 seconds left when the Dutch could come after a time-out too, but their centre-play didn't work either – this game was also decided by the shootout.

The Serbs finally got it, after seven rounds, Risticovic came back for the last three attempts and could make a stop to save his team from the further embarrassments, like playing for the 11<sup>th</sup> place only...

### ***For places 13-14<sup>th</sup>***

#### **Germany v Malta 14-11**

The two sides produced a thrilling game – Malta played a kind of old-school water polo but very effectively while the renewed German team showed all signs of a transition period, brilliant spells were followed by erroneous plays.

After a balanced first period the Germans took control and managed to take a 6-4 lead – after conceding a goal early on they shut out the Maltese for the remaining 7:18 minutes while netting three straight goals. But the islanders hit back in the third with a double in 42 second while the first German goal came only after three and a half minutes. Then they took the lead two more times, but the Maltese always found the way to equalise – it was the age of Dino (Zammit) who hit his fourth 16 seconds before the last break for 9-9.

And in the fourth, another counter put Malta ahead for the first time since 3-4, that was too much for the Montenegrin boss of the Germans and his comments prompted the refs to show the red card to him – he became the first head coach at the championship to be sent away from the bench. As it happens many times, that just benefitted his team, the Germans started fighting with doubled efforts, killed a man-down, then scored twice in 19 seconds (man-up + steal), and hit a third one 45 seconds later for 10-12. The Maltese couldn't handle the heat, they had three shots in a 6 on 4 (actually three Germans were excluded in a span of 23 seconds) but none did any damage.

They pulled one back from a counter – after the German goal was disallowed for a 2m violation –, but then a defensive mistake left Maurice Juengling unmarked on 3m, and he didn't miss the clean shot for 13-11. Malta had a man-up after a time-out with 1:04 on the lock, but they could hit the bar only, and after that the boiling tensions led to some non-wanted scenes to wind down the encounter. Five players were red carded (two apiece, plus a third German who jumped into the pool to support his buddies), and perhaps further disciplinary actions are due after video reviews as well. Those remaining in the water exchanged handshakes after the buzzer, though, so the game finished in a sporty manner after all.

### ***For places 15-16<sup>th</sup>***

#### **Slovakia v Slovenia 11-5**

Just like in the women's competition, the match played between the two teams with the weakest results here (lost all games so far) kind of justified the rankings established in the qualification tournaments. Among the ladies, Slovakia finished bottom-ranked at the championships, here Slovenia had to settle for

---

Ligue Européenne de Natation  
9 rue de la Morâche - 1260 Nyon - Switzerland  
Phone: +41 22 552 99 99  
Email: [lenoffice@len.eu](mailto:lenoffice@len.eu)  
[www.len.eu](http://www.len.eu)

the last position – these two teams did not make the cut last February and were later invited to these championships to replace Russia.

Slovenia had some better spells in the tournament, but ultimately weren't able to cause any upset and finished their run with five defeats in as many games. Slovakia gradually took control of this clash, scored three connecting goals before the middle break to go 6-3 ahead and never looked back. In the fourth, they doubled the gap while shutting out their tiring rivals for the last eight minutes. Samuel Balaz enjoyed a great morning, hit 6 – one more than the entire Slovenian team.

*6 September 2022*

---

Ligue Européenne de Natation  
9 rue de la Morâche - 1260 Nyon - Switzerland  
Phone: +41 22 552 99 99  
Email: [lenoffice@len.eu](mailto:lenoffice@len.eu)  
[www.len.eu](http://www.len.eu)