

2022 European Water Polo Championships, Split (CRO) – Day 6

Netherlands and Italy secure top spots

The fourth round was devoted to the must-win matches as the favourites faced the lower ranked sides and they all bagged three points with ease. Doing so, the Netherlands and Italy already secured the respective top spots of the groups, irrespectively of the results of the final round in two days' time.

Women, Round 4, Group A: Germany v Greece 3-13, Romania v Netherlands 0-28, Croatia v Hungary 6-22. *Standings:* 1. NED 12, 2. GRE 9, 3. HUN 6, 4. CRO 6, 5. ROU 3, 6. GER 0. **Group B:** Serbia v Italy 7-23, Spain v Israel 20-3, France v Slovakia 28-5. *Standings:* 1. ITA 12, 2. ESP 9, 3. ISR 6, 4. FRA 6, 5. SRB 3, 6. SVK 0

In a silent – and outside rainy – day at the Championships, the favourite sides bagged three points in each game, without any headaches. Among the 'Big Five', only the Greeks missed the 20-goal mark, though they did it by a lot as they had to play the earliest match from 10AM – not a preferred timeframe for Mediterranean people. It also credited the German defence which held the Greeks on 13 goals.

All others netted 20 or more, the Dutch and the French went the furthest with 28, and the Netherlands also shut out the Romanians to produce first 'zero-game' of the championships (in 2020 there was one, none in 2018 and three in 2016). The win secured the first place for them and an easy match-up for the quarters – so it's almost equal to a semi-final berth. Also, Simone van de Kraats bettered the individual scoring record at this meet, she scored 8 goals, one more than Greek Stylianos Argyropoulos had had a day earlier in the men's tournament.

Hungary and Croatia produced two contrasting halves, it stood 5-9 after two periods, then came a 1-13 rush from the Magyars. Spain shut out Israel in the entire second half and allowed them only a penalty goal in the last three periods. Italy offered four balanced periods while downing Serbia and clinching the top spot – and just as for Holland, a semi-final spot appears for them on the horizon.

Game recaps

Group A

Germany v Greece 3-13

Playing at 10.00 in the morning – this is a nightmare for any Mediterranean side and the Greeks just proved that. They were as sleepy as they could be – which left its mark on their concentration level. They had 42 attempts – scoring only 13 tells the story. In fact, this is half of what Hungary had produced two days earlier against the Germans (played the 11.30 match).

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It doesn't mean that the Greek win was anytime in danger, they led 0-6 when the Germans could hit their first, after 12:16 minutes. That period was a kind of best for the Greeks in terms of scoring as they netted 6 – though they also conceded all three goals during these eight minutes. Otherwise, to have some positives, they shut out their rivals in the other three quarters.

At the same time, one has to give credit for the Germans for their great efforts especially in defence, their goalies posted 13 saves combined and the players' determination was also a key factor to keep the Greeks on a low score and letting them to reach double digit only late in the third period.

Romania v Netherlands 0-28

Among the morning session's matches this was the most one-sided contest. The Dutch team pushed hard for all four periods, as one could get used to from them. This no compromise approach was bad news for the championships' newcomers – sometimes the Romanians lost the ball within moments after a restart and conceded two goals within 19 seconds.

After a while the Dutch may have thought of chasing Spain's scoring record from Day 1, who netted 32 goals against Serbia. At halftime their progression stood on 47%, as they scored 15 (the single-game scoring record stands at 37, held by the Dutch since the first edition in 1985, set against Sweden).

At the same time, the Romanians tried desperately to avoid being the first team here without scoring a goal in a match. (Two years ago, Serbia was shut out in a whole game by Hungary, 27-0. There was no 'zero-game' in 2018, while in 2016 there were three matches where the losing side was held on zero goals, Turkey twice, by Russia and the Netherlands, and Portugal once, by Hungary.)

By the end of the third the scoring record seemed to be out of reach as the Dutch missed a couple of fine chances, though goalie Diana Toganel also did her best and posted three great saves – having a hand in the Dutch 'decline' in scoring (0-8, 0-7, 0-6 were the partial results by period). In the fourth she could even save a penalty, though she couldn't do much against the flood of counters the rival launched as the Romanians were running out of power and the ball losses all led to one-on-ones or two-on-ones. At the end, the Netherlands stopped at 28 – but the Romanians couldn't break the Dutch defence and finished with a zero.

One record was bettered, however, as Simone van de Kraats hit 8 to set the new individual scoring record in Split, one more than Greece's Stylianos Argyropoulos' tally had been against Malta a day earlier in the men's tourney.

Croatia v Hungary 6-22

The Hungarians had to go through some initial struggles as the Croats fought bravely and with the necessary aggressivity and for a while this was clearly against the Magyars' palate. Still, their experience and superiority in skills already made a difference in the first period as they took a 3-5 lead.

The Croats opened the second period with a goal and had a man-up to go even but they were denied, while returning centre-forward Rebecca Parkes put away another man-up from the 2m line for 4-6. The

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scheme was repeated in the following possessions, a killed man-down, followed by a 6 on 5 hit, again finished from close range for 4-7. And as Alda Magyari arrived at the match with a series of saves – she stood 0/3 in the opening period – the gap started to grow, in a minute the Hungarians netted two more and neutralised man-down in between for 4-9. The hosts pulled one back via Bruna Barisic, who beat the buzzer ‘and’ the VAR (the goal was confirmed after a review).

However, that was the last momentum the home crowd could be really happy with – the Magyars staged a minor storm in the third, and with a 1-7 run they demonstrated the existing difference between the two sides. All in all, a 5-9 first half was followed by an 1-13 rout, so the Magyars moved to the third place where they would most probably end up in two days’ time, but the Croats don’t need to worry either, they are set to qualify in the fourth place.

Group B

Serbia v Italy 7-23

Italy delivered the compulsory win with a fine performance. They won the first two quarters 5-1 alike and didn’t slow down for the second half either. Though they conceded more, 5, but added 13 goals – indeed, their offence was focused, shot with 65.7%, netted the 23 goals from 35 shots. It also mirrored a good team effort, ten out of eleven players scored in the game.

With this win Italy didn’t only go 4/4 in the prelims, but also secured its top spot in the group, and this well can be equal with a semi-final berth too, based on the well-known power-ranks in women’s water polo.

Spain v Israel 20-3

Israel could stay close for a while, held on for 4-2 late in the first, but then the Spaniards started rolling. They had a 7-0 rush, at one stage in the second they netted three centre goals in 87 seconds from as many possessions.

After the first period, the Israelis found it hard to create scoring opportunities in front, in the second they could score a single goal, from a penalty. The only good part was their defence, they could hold the Olympic silver medallists on three goals in the third period, so it does not look that bad with 14 conceded goals before the final eight minutes. However, in the fourth the Spanish could score a couple of easy goals from the perimeter, while their zone constantly neutralised the centre-forward, stealing one ball after the other (they finished the game with 16 steals).

At the end, they Israelis were shut out for the entire second half, even though they had a 6 on 4 in the last minute but the blocks denied them, so they had to settle for the inevitable: scored a lonely penalty goal in the last three periods and couldn’t prevent the favourites to reach the 20-goal mark.

France v Slovakia 28-5

It didn’t begin well for the Slovaks, the French scored four goals from their first four possessions in three minutes which led to an immediate substitution of their goalie. That didn’t stop the opening

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period's disastrous trends, the French netted eight goals from 10 attacks and after the 7th goal the starting goalie had to return to the pool...

The second was slightly better, at least they could score a goal right at the beginning and their defence looked a bit better. Though not that much – again, the French had 10 possessions and netted 7. And this went on, the improvement was visible even numerically: 8-0, 7-1, 6-2... This broke in the last quarter, but not that much, though the French also stopped at 28, like the Dutch but the Slovaks netted 5 at the end.

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