

## **After winning thrillers, Serbia and Spain are set for the golden bout**

**After two magnificent and extremely exciting semi-finals, Serbia and Spain advanced to the gold medal match at the U19 European Water Polo Championships in Podgorica. Serbia won a thriller against Hungary, the 28-goal epic was decided by the penalties, and the Serbs made it again, just like in the quarters where they had also claimed a shootout win. The other match was just as brilliant, Greece came back from three goals down against Spain, but missed crucial man-ups in the fourth and the Spaniards scored the winner.**

**Semi-finals:** Hungary v Serbia 17-18 (14-14, pen: 3-4), Greece v Spain 11-12. **For places 5-8<sup>th</sup>:** Germany v Italy 6-9, Croatia v Montenegro 14-7.

**Schedule, Saturday – for places 15-16<sup>th</sup>:** 14.30 Czech Republic v Slovakia. **For places 13-14<sup>th</sup>:** 16.00 Romania v Turkiye. **For places 11-12<sup>th</sup>:** 17.30 France v Georgia. **For places 9-10<sup>th</sup>:** 19.00 Netherlands v Malta.

The Serbs did it again – just like in the quarter-finals against Italy, they advanced with a shootout win against Hungary to reach the final. It was a fantastic encounter – till this game the Magyars seemed untouchable in the tournament, their closest contest was a 9-goal win over host Montenegro, but now they found their match in the Serbs and were unable to produce their overwhelming game.

From time to time, their engine looked to get working, after 1-3 they scored four in a row, but the Serbs battled themselves back soon to 5-5. Then again, the Hungarian got it going, late in the second they led 9-6, still, couldn't deliver the killer blow. The Serbs fought bravely, fell two goals behind twice in the third, but kept coming back. At 11-10, Hungary missed a 6 on 4, while the Serbs buried theirs for 11-11 with 28 seconds on the clock. Despite losing their captain Vasilje Martinovic through three fouls – he had netted five before leaving the pool –, they held on firmly in the fourth, which was an absolute thriller.

Marcell Tatrai netted his fourth from a man-up, then the Magyars missed a two on one counter which could have given a two-goal lead once more and Nikola Kojic equalised with an action goal at the other end. Then the Hungarians killed a man-down, and Matyas Meszaros hit the back of the net from the distance, however, after a couple of unsuccessful possessions, Viktor Urosevic scored from action for 13-13 with 2:54 to go. Only 45 seconds were on the clock when Urosevic netted the Serbs' third action goal in this quarter to take back the lead for the first time since 1-3. However, the Magyars earned an extra and Vince Vigvari put it away 7 seconds from time for 14-14.

In the shootout, after two netted shots apiece, Meszaros and Urosevic (both were brilliant in the regular time, scoring 4 and 3 respectively) missed their respective shots, and Petar Pajkovic had another save in the fourth. That was decisive as the Serbs buried their last two to make the final – and it was a sweet revenge too for the lost U18 World Championship final, especially since it happened in Belgrade, where the Hungarians beat them with penalties.

The other semi wasn't any less exciting either. After a balanced opening period and four minutes of intensive battling, the Spaniards scored three unanswered goals in two minutes, but the Greeks didn't let it go and pulled two back till the middle break for 5-6.

The third period offered some extraordinary scenes, Spain rebuilt their two-goal three times, but the Greeks always found the answers. At 9-10 they missed a 6 on 4, though didn't crack and a minute later Nikolaos Gkilles converted a penalty for 10-10, with 1:14 to go till the end – it was the captain's 5<sup>th</sup> hit in the evening. Then after his late exclusion Hugo Castro sent the ball home three seconds from time, so Spain led once more before the final period.

Early on they missed back-to-back 6 on 5s to reset the two-goal gap and Evangelos Poulos made it even from a man-up for 11-11. After a longer scoreless but thrilling phase the Greek earned a man-up, wasted it and Biel Gomila scored from the counter for 11-12 with 2:10 to go. It turned out to be the winner – Greece had desperate attempts, had a man-up 22 seconds from time but couldn't make it either and that cost them the victory.

In the games of the disappointed ones – those having lost the quarters – Italy downed the Germans with a strong second half performance, while the Croats rushed to a 6-1 lead deep into the second period against the host Montenegrins and never looked back.