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Water polo: the Dutch women players have a lot to compensate for

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The Dutch women's team won a gold in Kazan after a long time but still could not make it to Rio. Budapest might welcome a bunch of experienced athletes preparing in China at the World League Super Final and another tournament for the major event in summer.

The Netherlands had to wait 17 years for the women's team to gain a medal in the World Championships again. It happened in Kazan finally, after the WCH in Perth. The Dutch national team (claiming for instance 4 gold and a silver medal at the first 5 European Championships) playing a key role in promoting the discipline played by females experienced a major setback from the late 90s, however, recently the team has been basking in its old glory.

At least to a certain extent.

The team of Arno Havenga has faced three major challenges lately. It all started in Kazan where the team lost the final 5-4 against the US. Truth be told, it definitely was a shame, however in the light of the preceding period of hardships and of the fact that the American team is quite a strong opponent, the Dutch team did a great job.



Photo: waterpolo.hu

Secondly, it was much worse to lose the final in the 2016 European WCH not only because two years earlier the team claimed the silver in Budapest (Spain finishing first) but also because they paid a high price for the defeat by the Hungarian team in the final. During the group match the Dutch defeated Hungary 14-10 resulting in complacency during the final in Beograd where the qualification for Rio was at stake. The Dutch lost both the gold and the opportunity to go on to Rio, therefore they were left with a second Olympic qualification tournament, known to be an extremely strong battle always.

It was a real slap in the face when they were defeated 10-7 in Gouda, the Netherlands by the Spanish team in March, 2016 and missed the opportunity to qualify for the Olympics for the second time after London (they participated in the Games in Beijing, as a matter of fact they won that time).

The Dutch team has been led by Arno Havenga since 2011 meaning that he was their head coach already back in Shanghai when the team finished seventh.

Yasemin Smit (the current captain), Sabrine van der Sloot, Nomi Stomphorst and Lieke Klaassen have been members of the Havenga squad from the beginning but Marloes Nijhuis, Vivian Sevenich and Dagmar Genee have also been part of the team for a long time. The extensive experience of the players mentioned here might come handy in Budapest during the WCH.

The Dutch have collected three silver medals at the last three Championships. In this season they have been preparing for the World Championships by the World League prelims. This

time they had the good fortune and they can go on to the Super Final in June. In the preliminaries they finished second after Russia in the group. Both the Dutch and the Italian teams had 7 points and finished second within their groups. In the end the Dutch could collect more points - by penalties, though- and won the battle.

„After the defeat by Russia in December it seemed second to impossible to make it to the World League finals but then we pulled ourselves together and got back on track. It gives us hope for the upcoming challenges and tasks in summer. We deserved to win as Italy and Greece, two strong opponents of us were in our group, whereas the Italian team played two lighter matches against the French. The Super Final offers an excellent opportunity to prepare for the WCH in Budapest just like another Chinese tournament we are about to enter” - said Arno Havenga, who can count on Maud Megens (playing in the US) in the Chinese tournament.

The Dutch will start to prepare directly for the World League Final and the 17th FINA WCH on 11 May. In Budapest their team will fight in Group C against Hungary, Japan and France.

The Netherlands at FINA World Championships

world champion (1991)

silver medallist (1986, 1994, 1998, 2015)

5th placed (2009)

6th placed (2003)

7th placed (2011, 2013)

9th placed (2001, 2007)

10th placed (2005)