



Serbian players prove class in gold medal match

By TANG YUE
CHINA DAILY

SHENZHEN — Serbia's water polo team came to Shenzhen for one reason: to win gold. And yesterday it achieved its aim.

Serbia downed Russia 11-8 in the men's final to win the title it had planned to take all along.

"Always, in Serbia, when we talk about water polo, we always think of the first place and the gold medal," said head coach Dejan Stanojevic.

"That is how the young boys see things. You must think of the

gold medal. 'I want to be first, I don't want to be second, I don't want to be third.'



WATER POLO Then you might make it."

For Luka Saponjic, the joy was doubled as Serbia's men's basketball team also won gold when it defeated Canada in the final on Monday.

"I'm really happy we could win the gold medal here," said Saponjic.

"This is a big thing for Serbia. Our men's basketball team also won the gold medal. It's really great. Maybe we will go out and celebrate together."

Serbia suffered an unexpected loss in its opener against France but the hot favorite quickly regained its form and proved too strong for opponents in the following five matches.

"The first game is always tough," Stanojevic said.

"We didn't play well in the first



game. The players thought we were too good and we would win. They didn't have much passion and desire.

"But in today's match, everybody wanted to play, everybody wanted to win for Serbia."

"The final was a really tough match. The Russians were older and more experienced. They were physically stronger than us."

"We had to swim faster to beat them. I had already expected something like this and we did it."



PHOTOS BY GAO ERQIANG
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Top: Serbian players celebrate winning the men's water polo final on Tuesday.

Left: The Russian goalkeeper tries to block a shot from a Serbian player.

Right: Depressed Russian players are seen after their final loss to Serbia.

Underdogs turn tables on US to win bronze in polo

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SHENZHEN — Macedonia made a major sporting breakthrough yesterday when its water polo team won the nation's first Universiade medal.

The Macedonian men's water polo team won the country's first medal at a Universiade when it defeated the United States 10-7 in the bronze medal match.

"This is the first time Macedonia has participated in the Universiade and we've won a medal," said excited head coach, Vladimir Latkovikj.

"I don't know how (to express myself), I don't know. This is a

great feeling. Macedonia is a little country and water polo is a little sport," he said.

"This is the first water polo medal for Macedonia. We don't participate in the Olympics. We've been to two European Championships, one World Championship, and we've never won a medal. Now we've won a medal in China. You know, this is like a small Olympics."

Uros Kalinic, Macedonia's top scorer in the match with three goals, expects the breakthrough to encourage his fellow athletes to greater achievements.

"I think the medal will make an impression in my country. It can be

a stimulus for other sports, other athletes to practice, to participate and create new champions," said Kalinic.

"Also, water polo is not very popular in Macedonia and hopefully this medal will change that."

Entering the tournament as an underdog, Macedonia had three losses and three wins before the last match, but crucial victories boosted the players' confidence.

"Six players in the team are experienced; they play with very good clubs in Europe," said Kalinic, 25. "The rest of the team are young boys who still need to watch and learn to play at this level."

"We didn't know what to expect

when we came here because we are a young team. But when we beat Australia and Japan and played good games, we started to dream that we could win a medal and it came true."

Meanwhile, the Americans, who had only lost to eventual finalists Russia and Serbia before yesterday's match, appeared upset about the result.

"I'm disappointed. We should have done a much better job today. But we didn't play good offense; we didn't score many goals," said US coach John Abdou.

"I feel sorry for our guys, we played at a higher level in the tournament before today and we

wanted to end on that same level but we didn't make it"

Abdou said Macedonia deserved the medal and believed his team would benefit from being at the Universiade.

"Macedonia did a very good job today. They were good in their positions and had good scorers, which is crucial," he said.

"And we knew every game would be close. I knew this game would be close. We knew everything would be a challenge. We are a young team and our responsibility is to get better every game and use this trip and the experience to put us in a better position for the future."