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Water polo: Team USA - Are they really unbeatable?

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Defending champion Team USA will arrive to Budapest with a couple of changes in their squad for the women's water polo tournament of the FINA World Championships, but they will still be the top favourites for the gold medal. Many fans think they are simply unbeatable...

Men's water polo has been dominated by Serbia in recent years, but the best women's team is beyond doubt the fantastic Team USA, that has won the last two Olympics, the last FINA World Championships, the last three World League series and the last two World Cup tournaments. Adam Krikorian's team simply shocked the rivals at the Rio Olympic Games by beating all their opponents by at least four goals. Head coach Krikorian, however, does not regard that as a mystery.

"Well, we are certainly not unbeatable. And I'm not sure there any secrets either. To have the success we have had, many elements of our team must be great. It starts with talented athletes who are open to the idea that they can always learn and improve." - said Krikorian to Bp2017 Media.

Krikorian may not agree that his team is unbeatable, but Team USA has won four of the last FINA World Championships, finished second in 2005, and defended its title at the 2016 Olympics despite losing some experienced players after the 2012 Games. At the 2013 FINA WCH they finished fifth, but the team has developed very well since then.

"Losing so many talented and experienced players from 2012 was definitely a concern. With only 4 players returning from 2012, we knew the only chance for us to match that success would be to do our best to develop our younger players. Luckily we had a few young talented players in the pipeline that were hungry to be a part of our national team. Combine that with the welcoming culture we've established within our team, it gave them an opportunity to feel comfortable making mistakes and growing into the great players they are."

There are hardly any weaknesses of this fantastic team, but one player has become a real superstar in the last couple of years: goalkeeper Ashley Johnson has been named Swimming World's Female Water Polo Player of the Year for 2016. This is the third consecutive year Johnson has won the award.

Team USA has had excellent defenders at the big tournament's of the last couple of years as well, like youngster Mackenzie Fischer, Caroline Clark és Melissa Seidemann, great attackers who have been always hungry for goals, like top scorer of the Olympic tournament in Rio, Maggie Steffens or Madeline Musselmann, Courtney Mathewson, Kaleigh Gilchrist and Rachel Fattal. The two centers, Kami Craig and Aria Fischer have also added their best to achieve those amazing results. The question is how many changes will be in the

roster for the world championships.

"There's no question it will be more difficult. We are more than likely going to lose some great players plus the gold medal winning team in each of the first 4 Olympics, has never placed in the top 4 at the next World Championships (2001, 2005, 2009, 2013). It's hard to pinpoint which teams will be the toughest since it's too early to know what the rosters will look like. But you would have to expect Hungary to be one of the favourites, as they will have the energy from being at home." - Adam Krikorian said.

One thing is for sure: the Americans have the most successful team in the history of the FINA World Championships, winning four gold, two silver and one bronze medal. Italy, Hungary, Holland, Australia, Greece and Spain are the only other winners, but none of them have won more than two gold medals.

Team USA at the FINA World Championships

Winner (2003, 2007, 2009, 2015)

Vice-champion (2005)

Bronze medallist (1986, 1991)

Fourth place (1994, 2001)

Last appearance: gold medallist (2015, Kazan)