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The Aussie Stingers start a new era with new coach

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The Australian women's national team won the first women's water polo tournament at the FINA World Championships in 1986, and won the gold medal in front of a fanatic home crowd in Sydney at the 2000 Olympic Games. They have been dangerous for all their rivals since then, so they will be among the favourites at the 2017 FINA World Championships as well. The Stingers have started the new era with a new head coach, Sakis Kechagias.

Women's water polo teams participated at the FINA World Championships in 1986 for the first time, and it was not easy to forecast who would be the favourites in that tournament. Australia, however, won all their matches in the group stage, as well as in the playoff, so they won the gold medal by winning nine out of nine, ahead of the Netherlands and the US. Water polo legend Debbie Watson was member of that team, and she was captain of the Stingers 14 years later at the 2000 Olympics in Sydney, where they finished first again.

The period between 1986 and 2000, however, proved to be really action-packed for the Aussies. After the gold medal at the world championships the team did not manage to win more medals for a while. They finished only in sixth place at the 1994 FINA WCH, but they won the gold medal a year later at the World Cup in Sydney, followed by a bronze in 1997. The 1998 FINA World Championships was held in Perth, and the Stingers finished third in front of their home crowd. They had been unbeatable for 14 months after that, so they were a little bit disappointed by winning only the silver medal at the 1999 World Cup in Winnipeg, where they lost to Holland in the final.

Women's water polo debuted at the Olympic Games in 2000, and it was a double historic moment for the Aussie Stingers, as the Games were held in Sydney. In an incredible Olympic final, the evenly matched US and Australian sides were tied 3-3 with 1.3 seconds remaining on the clock, when Yvette Higgins blasted in a nine-metre shot from a free throw. The ball crossed the goal-line 0.2s from the final hooter to give Australia a 4-3 win, and the gold medal. Watson and Higgins were only two of the many big stars in that team. The Stingers were coached by world and European champion Hungarian István Görgényi.

After the big win at the 2000 Olympics the Aussie team had not been too successful for a couple of years, they failed to win a medal at the world championships and at the 2004 Olympic Games in that period.

In 2005 former water polo player of Aussie Sharks Greg McFadden took over as head coach of the Stingers, and he managed to lead back the team to the top of the world. They won the gold medal at the 2006 World Cup, and finished in third place at the 2007 FINA World Championships in Melbourne, followed by another bronze medal at the 2008 Olympics, where they beat Hungary in the bronze final in the penalty shootout.

McFadden and his team continued to win some medals at the World League and the World Cup, and they finished third again at the 2012 Olympic Games. They beat Hungary for the second time in the match for third place, this time in extra time.

The Stingers reached the final of the 2013 FINA World Championships in Barcelona, but they were beaten by home team Spain. They won the bronze medal at the World League after that, but they failed to finish on the podium at the 2015 FINA WCH in Kazan (4th place) and at the 2016 Olympics in Rio (6th place).

McFadden said goodbye to the Stingers at the end of last year, and Sakis Kechagias was named as new head coach of the team.

“The appointment of Sakis Kechagias as the National Women’s Head Coach is very exciting and I’m confident he will create the required creative, empowering, confident environment for our talented players to thrive. Sakis brings a wealth of international experience with him to Australia and is well regarded overseas which is an important factor to influence positive outcomes for Australian teams.” - Water Polo Australia (WPA) high performance manager Tom Hill said. (waterpolowa.asn.au, 9 February 2017)



One of the most experienced players of the Stingers Rowena Webster admits it will not be

an easy period for the team.

“The upcoming international season will no doubt have its challenges, from discovering how the players and new head coach interact, to new younger generations coming through and marking their territory.” - she said.

Australia will play against Russia, Kazakhstan and Greece in group D of the 2017 FINA World Championships in Budapest.

Australia women's water polo team at the FINA World Championships

Gold medallist (1986)

Silver medallist (2007, 2013)

Bronze medallist (1998)

Semi finalist (2015)