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# Water polo: sweet Spanish memories from Budapest

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*The Spanish women's national water polo team is preparing for their ninth FINA World Championships, definitely wanting to poise the overall statistics. Despite all the shiny successes, the Spanish ladies have only collected one World medal so far (the shiniest one though, from Barcelona 2013), but this tally can easily augment this July on the legendary Margaret Island at the 17th FINA World Championships.*

Head coach Miki Oca's team made a brilliant victory during the spring of 2016, beat the World and European Championships runners-up Netherlands in their own pool, in Gouda, during the quarterfinal game of the Olympic qualification tournament. This win secured the Olympic qualification for the Spanish ladies. It also served as a great example of just how strong actually the international field is and how hard it is to earn the Olympic berth in water polo - at least one strong nation always fails, Netherlands was the unlucky team last time.

The good series continued in through June in 2016, when Spain took the silver medal in the World League Super Final in Shanghai. Only the United States were able to beat the Iberians.

The Olympics in Rio de Janeiro started well for the team. Even though the US was better again, the next two games of the group phase were really successful for the Mediterranean team. Miki Oca's squad concentrated well during the most important game, against Hungary (11-10) and during the third game also (China, 12-8) so the team went to the quarterfinal from the second place of the group.



And then the turning point finally came: the Spanish were blocked and shocked by the Russians, so the dream did not come true, they were only able to earn the fifth place, beating China and Australia (Roser Tarrago scored seven times in this game).

All in all, the Spanish women's national team recorded a good year in 2016. In addition, the best Spanish club, Sabadell won the Euroleague, while Mataro took the trophy of LEN Euro Cup. These two teams are shining in the current season also, both of them qualified for the Final Four of the Euroleague.

The previous FINA World Championships were not so successful for Spain: even though they won their group, on the next round Spaniards had to play against the strong United States (5-8). After this failure, China also beat them, so finally the Spanish ladies finished on the seventh place by winning against home team Russia in Kazan.

They have much sweeter memories from the European Championships, hosted by Budapest in 2014. Spain won the European Championships in the Hungarian capital: in the semi-final they triumphed over the hosts (9-8) and beat the Netherlands in the final to finish on the very top of the podium.



All in all, the results of the last couple of years make Spain a strong podium pretender team for Budapest 2017, too: Olympic silver medal from London 2012, gold medal from the World Championships in 2013, European gold medal and World Cup third place from 2014, seventh place from the World Championships in 2015 and fourth place of the European Championships, World League-silver medal and fifth place from the Olympic Games in 2016.

Laura Ester, Laura Lopez, Anna Espar, Beatriz Ortiz, Judith Forca, Roser Tarrago, Maica Garcia Godoy - they are the experienced leaders of the team, and a lot of young players are tested besides them by the head coach. In Rio Spain had a 2000-born girl in the team - Paula Leitón was already a member of the roster in Kazan a year earlier also - and Miki Oca (who became an Olympic Champion as a player in 1992 Barcelona) keeps his roster working well.



Following the draw of the 17th FINA World Championships' water polo tournament held in February, the Spanish women's team went to Group B, together with the United States (so they will face their greatest rival once again surely), South Africa and New Zealand.

The Women's Water Polo Tournament of the 17<sup>th</sup> FINA World Championships will take place between July 16 and 28 on the legendary Margaret Island in Budapest. The Spanish team will face New Zealand on the opening day.

### **Spain in the FINA World Championships**

World Champion (2013, Barcelona)

7th placed (2007, 2015)

8th placed (2003, 2009)

9th placed (1998)

11th placed (2005, 2011)