

28.01.2017 22:28 Uhr - Weltmeisterschaft - Spiel um Platz 3 - PR France 2017

## **Slovenia secure first-ever World Championship Medal with tremendous catch-up**

**Slovenia come back from an eight-goal deficit to claim the 25th IHF Men's World Championship bronze medal in the last minute of the game. The biggest success for Slovenian handball since winning silver at the European Championships 2004 on home soil. Slovenia claimed their first-ever IHF Men's World Championship medal with an incredible comeback, after trailing through the first 59 minutes of the game and seeing a deficit of eight goals. Veselin Vujovic's team claimed the advantage for the first time in the final 60 seconds, when Borut Mackovsek scored the game-winning goal.**

Three of Croatia's opening four goals were scored on fast breaks, as the 2013 World Championship bronze medallist made the most of goalkeeper Ivan Stevanovic's early saves. The keeper stopped three of Slovenia's first six attempts, recording 50 per cent while his counterpart at the other end of the court also had an impact - though Slovenia's Matevz Skok could not stop Croatia taking a 5:3 lead with Manuel Strlek's third goal after only nine minutes of play.

When Croatia hit 6:4 off what was already their fifth fast break just after the 10-minute mark, Slovenia coach Veselin Vujovic changed his line-up and brought in Jure Dolonec as an attacking specialist. Gasper Marguc joined his direct opponent Strlek on three goals in the 13th, putting the score to 8:6 with a penalty shot, as Slovenia began to have more luck finding the goal past Stevanovic, Croatia's pace slowed.

Midway through the half, the two-goal distance remained before Nik Henigman scored an outside shot that decreased the gap to one at 9:8, but the relief was temporary. By the time the clock passed 20 minutes Croatia were back in command as Marko Mamcic created the first four-goal advantage at 12:8.

With five minutes left in the half, Croatia maintained a four-goal lead, and both goalkeepers were having more trouble stopping the shots coming at them as Stevanovic's rate dropped to 27 per cent and Skok tallied six saves at 29. Still, Croatia were able to increase their lead by one more goal before the half-time whistle sounded, and returned for the second period with a clear advantage that represented a difficult task for Slovenia.

The five-goal score line persisted through the opening seven minutes of the second half, before Strlek took Croatia further in front with his fifth goal of the game and Domagoj Duvnjak scored his third to put the score at 22:15. Vujovic responded with an immediate time-out, but when the last 20 minutes of the match began Croatia seemed to be on their way to claiming the bronze medal as they ran up an eight-goal advantage at 24:16.

Slovenia proved why it pays to keep fighting, however, as they steadily decreased the difference until Blaz Janc converted a penalty that closed the gap to three at 29:26 with six minutes left – plenty of time for Croatia to feel the pressure. One minute later Darko Cingesar scored from a low angle on left wing, and in the next attack, Dolonec found Mackovsek to add a spectacular in-flight goal that put Croatia in a dangerous position with only a narrow lead at 29:28.

While Croatia stood stunned, Cingesar levelled the score as the match entered the last three minutes, and as the final 60 seconds began Slovenia took the lead for the first time in the match thanks to Mackovsek. Croatia took possession but they could not find the goal, and Slovenia held on through the dying seconds to record what must be considered the most remarkable comeback at France 2017.

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