

20.03.2017 12:38 Uhr - Baltic Handball League - PR BHL

## Serviti, Cocks and ZTR join SKA in Final Four of Baltic Handball League

**Baltic Handball League`s quarter-finals produced one truly dramatic tie in the Estonian-derby, but in the end it`s Serviti Põlva, Cocks Riihimäki and ZTR Zaporozhye who join SKA Minsk in the Final Four after the Belarussians secured their place already last week. The Final Four will take place in Põlva on 8th and 9th April.**

Title-holder Cocks took a 12-goal lead on Friday, beating Viljandi HC 38-26 and only confirmed the status as one of the favourites to win the competition by an impressive 41-22 win the day later. ZTR faced a serious resistance on both days from Granitas-Karys Kaunas, taking two victories by 27-24 and 29-22. Curious fact - Cocks, SKA and Serviti have all qualified for the Final Four now for the fifth consecutive season! Only the fourth team changes every year, it has been HC Kehra/Horizon Pulp&Paper twice, HC Meshkov Brest, Granitas-Karys and now ZTR. But it was a hugely dramatic way how Serviti – for the eighth consecutive time - secured their place in the Final Four.

Yermashevich 10 goals in drama were not enough for Kehra

Kehra had a narrow 27-26 win from the opening match, but they had not beaten Serviti in Põlva during last six seasons of BHL. However, it was the visitors, who controlled the match and led most of the time, occasionally by 4 goals. Serviti took the lead for the first time in the 57th minute with Anatoli Cheslov scoring for 24-23.

Unstoppable Mikita Yermashevich equalised and with final minute starting Kehra had the ball and Indrek Lillsoo used a time-out. Serviti`s goalkeeper Denis Lõokene made a crucial save and spurred to be replaced by seventh field player. Long combination attack led for Roman Aizatulloev to put Serviti 25-24 ahead with 8 seconds remaining. Kehra had a little chance to put the ball into an empty net, but Lõokene managed to get back between posts and stop it.

The aggregate score of the quarter-final was thus 51-51 and Serviti qualified to the Final Four due to the greater number of away goals! 'This really hurts, it`s especially painful for the players, who put so much effort in,' admitted Kehra`s coach Lillsoo. 'We controlled the game and looking back to the whole season I believe we deserved to be among finalists. But life goes on.'

Kehra`s Belarussian bomber Yermashevich scored 10 goals, while Henri Sillaste was Serviti`s best with 7. 'We made a lot of technical mistakes, had trouble using our chances and could not stop Yermashevich,' commented winning team`s head coach Kalmer Musting. 'The pressure was high and it affected the self-confidence. Luckily we managed to pull it through and at least the fans saw a very exciting handball battle.'

Savukynas: Very happy with the serious approach of our players

Viljandi HC travelled to Riihimäki to play both quarter-finals away against the current BHL champion. First 15 of the 120 minutes of this tie was equal (10-10), but after that the Estonians could not handle Teemu Tamminen, who in the first half alone scored seven goals. 'I guess we started with too much respect and were not very good in defence,' commented Viljandi`s head coach Marko Koks.

Cocks took a 38-26 win (Tamminen 12 - Kristo Voika and Sten Maasalu 7) and a comfortable advantage for the second match. On Saturday, the Finnish club was ruthless - 22-10 lead at half-time led to a 41-22 win (Nico Rönnerberg 7 - Voika and Maasalu 5).

'Start of the first match was very even, but later we controlled the proceedings and had no problem to achieve our goal of qualifying for the Final Four,' said Gintaras Savukynas, the head coach of Cocks. 'We felt we are stronger than Viljandi and we proved that on the field with some good handball.'

'I was especially happy with the motivation and serious approach our players showed,' added Savukynas. 'I cannot even point out some single players, because the whole team - starters and substitutes alike - did their

job brilliantly. Everyone understood how important these matches were and it reflected in our game in a positive way.'

Granitas put up a good fight, but was eliminated by ZTR

The last Final Four participant was decided on Sunday in Kaunas, where local Granitas-Karys hosted Group A winner ZTR Zaporozhye. In the opening match on Saturday, the Lithuanians were close to a surprise, losing after 10-10 half-time draw 24-27 (Modestas Štarolis 7 - Oleksii Ganchev 7).

It was a match of true ups and downs, where one team would score 4-5 goals in a row, then stop and let the opponent do the same. ZTR was up 5-0 after opening ten minutes and scored only once in the next dozen minutes. The second half was extremely tight until 52nd minute with Granitas leading at that point 23-22. ZTR pulled out a 5-1 finish and took a 3-goal lead for the second leg.

On Sunday, ZTR took a 4-1 lead and seemed to cruise to victory, but the hosts refused to give up and fought back to a draw. Throughout the game ZTR led, but Granitas occasionally came close. In the end it was the strength of the Ukrainians which decided the match in their favour by 29-22 (Andrii Akimenko 11 - Štarolis 6) and booked them the place in the Final Four on their debut season in BHL.

In the semi-finals we will have a clash of last years finalists with Cocks and SKA playing against each other, while hosts Serviti will take on newcomers ZTR. Final Four starts on 8th April in the Mesikäpa Hall of Põlva.

googletag.cmd.push(function() { googletag.display('div-gpt-ad-1380148910362-0'); });