



## ALEKSANDR AXENOV: THE GREEK TEAM PROVED THAT WATER POLO IS NOT A SPORT OF 2-METRE GIANTS

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SPORT



Aleksandr Axenov, a water player of the Kazakhstan national team, received an individual award of the men's water polo tournament at the 16th FINA World Championships in Kazan. Talking to the Press Office of Organising Committee, he said that he is impressed with the delivery of the aquatics tournament and really hopes that these competitions will be a starting point for the aquatics sports development in Russia.

– You've received an individual award. What does this trophy and sports community's recognition mean to you?

– Since I am about to retire from the sport any time soon this award is a wonderful present for me. It took me many years to get it and finally I am a lucky owner. I am very happy; I guess it is the best moment of my life!

– You say you are retiring from the sport, do you? Does it mean we are not going to see you next year at the competitions?

– I have a couple of years ahead of me to play then we'll see (laughs).

– At least two years more you are going to play for not only Russian clubs but also a National team of Kazakhstan, aren't you?

– To tell the truth, I really count on defending Kazakhstan team at Rio 2016, but before that I'll have to get shortlisted first. Only then I might start thinking of retiring.

– The Kazakhstan national team got better and higher results at these Championships than the Russian one despite the fact that the majority of top water polo players competing at the domestic Championships are not from Kazakhstan. Do you have any idea why is it so?

– Frankly speaking Kazakhstan national team had its fingers crossed for Russian water polo players and clearly wanted them to get further and higher results in the medal standings. I feel sorry for such results at home championships. On the other hand they shouldn't be discouraged, Rio 2016 selection is ahead of all us, they are likely to get what they deserve, avenge this kind of defeat.

– Was it a surprise for you that men's water polo gold medal match was definitely at Serbia's national team advantage?

– Their success was rather predictable you know, taking into account that Serbian National team is the FINA Water Polo World League 2013, 2014, 2015 Champions. Serbian tactics was remarkable leaving Croatian water polo players no chance for success. Besides, Croatian National team this time lacked their key forward player Nikša Dobud who was disqualified for doping consumption. It was a true loss for them because literally with him and without him Croatian national team seems to be the opposite.

– How do you personally assess the readiness of all water polo teams competing at Kazan 2015?

– Apart from the Serbian national team which is admittedly the favourites of almost every Championships all the others were almost on the same level. What surprised me most was Greek national team. Although all the water players are not that tall in that team they still could show the outstanding game and amazing teamwork.

– As for the Greeks, can you say they are a breakthrough team of the tournament?

– For me, yes. They have had a long way to the bronze medals, long formed the ideal team, and brought up two premier players. Their mobile play is the best proof that modern water polo is not a sport for 2-metre giants, and people of middle size can play water polo quite successfully.

– Who is the major disappointment of the tournament?

– The major disappointment of the World Championships is the men's team of Hungary. Hungary pinned their hopes on the current world title holders. In Barcelona they won gold deservedly, Kazan turned out to be implacable for them as they slipped out of contention at an early stage, losing to the Italians, though Team Italy had absolutely nothing in armoury to pose any threat.

– I have expected that you would name Russia whose team was drawn into the Group of Death?

– You said it yourself that Team Russia competed in the Group of Death, where their play looked fittingly. If they had beaten the USA in the first encounter, they could have advanced to the next stage. It was light-minded to believe in the breakthrough of the Greeks or Italians.

– Can the domestic 16th FINA World Championships and its water polo tournament give an impulse to popularity and development of water polo in Russia?

– Even the group matches collected a huge number of spectators. I know people come from remote parts of the country to see the games. The fantastic atmosphere reigned in the arena and I would like to think that those parents who have been in two minds before the Championships will definitely send their child to learn water polo now. The organisation of the tournament was the best I have ever seen in my entire sporting career. It is not only me who is of that opinion. This is the opinion of many experienced water polo players. Let alone our sport, you can see how many more aquatic sports, presented at the competitions, urged their development. The athletes had a chance to attend diving, synchronised swimming competitions thanks to the events taking place in one cluster. All these beautiful sports venues, all the swimming pools are the heritage of the city, its citizens will enjoy for many and many years further on. The organisers like the Championships slogan Water is Life, so I think that the viewers of the tournament have finally understood the message and aquatic sports will gain a new wave of popularity in your country.

– What is the most memorable moment of the Championships for you?

– The atmosphere. I played in the country where I was born (*Alexandr Axenov is from Astrakhan, he played for Sintez Kazan WPC for several seasons of his professional sporting career, he was even captain in some matches – V.D.*). I am so elated with the highest standard of the home World Championships preparation and delivery.

Vsevolod Dvorkin, Press Office of Organising Committee for 16th FINA World Championships



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