



SPIKING IN THE HAGUE

The Netherlands' Sanne Keizer spiked a ball at the net during the finals of the European Beach Volleyball Championships.

Photo by Andrew Balcombe

EUROPE BATTLES

FOR GOLD AND AN OLYMPIC BID

Photos and article by Andrew Balcombe



(Clockwise from far left) Norway's Martin "Spinny" Spinnangr and Tarjei Skarlund go up against Dutch player Emiel Boersma; Sanne Keizer spikes against the Czech Republic contender; (from left) The Netherlands' Emiel Boersma and Daan Spijkers earned silver, Germany's Julius Brink and Jonas Reckermann took gold, and Skarlund and Spinnangr from Norway accept bronze; Lower-ranking teams took to the outside courts during the final day.



Europe's best beach volleyball players gathered in The Hague from May 30 to June 3 to compete in the European Beach Volleyball Championships 2012. The Hague Beach Stadium at Scheveningen set the stage for the teams' final chance to qualify for the Olympic Games this summer in London. Overall, 32 men's teams and 32 women's teams competed to earn extra points for the qualifications and some major prize money.

The final weekend of the tournament saw the medal games take place. The conditions were cold and blustery, with regular weather fronts coming in from the North Sea.

On the women's side, the Dutch duo of Sanne Keizer and Marleen van Iersel defeated the Czech Republic's Lenka Hajeckova and Hana Klapalova in the semifinals. A tight first set revealed disciplined and controlled play from the Czechs and numerous mistakes by the Dutch players. Despite the errors, the Dutch managed to hold their ground and claimed the set 21-18. By the end of the second set, the Czechs

began to tire and the height and powerful serves of the Dutch were too much for them. Keizer and Van Iersel won the last point 22-20, advancing to the Grand Final to play Greece for the gold medal.

In the bronze medal game, Spanish pair Elsa Baquerizo and Liliana Fernandez proved to be too strong for the Czechs, defeating them (24-22, 21-12) to claim the bronze medal and a total prize of 10,000 euros.

In the battle for the gold medal, the Dutch duo looked strong and confident from the start and that attitude didn't change through most of the match. On one or two occasions, when the Greek team of Vasiliki Arvaniti and Maria Tsiartsian played winning shots that were nearly impossible to stop, the Dutch players showed a little fatigue. But it wasn't long before they rallied back with their usual accuracy and power to dominate their opponents.

Keizer and Van Iersel's consistent strength, athleticism, and height forced the Greeks to play in a constant state of catch up. Many of the Greek returns were high and slow and easily dealt with by the Dutch, who

claimed the first set 21-17.

During the match point of the second set, the Greeks' persistence and hard work nearly paid off. A powerful Greek spike went through Keizer's block but was miraculously caught by Van Iersel's arm to volley it back over the net. The next Greek pass caught her partner off guard and the spike never made it over. The Dutch claimed the second set and the gold medal 21-11.

When they received their trophy, Keizer and Van Iersel said they hoped it was a good omen for London. For their part in the championships, the Dutch also earned 20,000 euros in prize money. It is the first time that the Netherlands has won the European title.

In the men's semifinal round, Tarjei Skarlund and Martin Spinnangr of Norway defeated Michal Kadziola and Jakub Szalankiewicz of Poland 2-1 (17-21, 21-14, 16-14) for the bronze medal. Even though the Poles had no shortage of power and height, the Norwegians played a more consistent and smarter game, out-performing the Poles in the end.

In the final men's match, the Netherlands team

of Emiel Boersma and Daan Spijkers played the Germans, Julius Brink and Jonas Reckermann, for the gold medal. The Germans looked the more composed of the teams and produced flawless combinations.

Midway through the first set, the Netherlands' Spijkers was cited by the ref for a bad set, awarding the point to Germany. Spijkers contested the decision, but failed to change the referee's mind. In the next point, Spijkers had his revenge, slamming the point-winning spike off a German block and out of play.

Despite their aggression and fighting spirit, the Dutch were outplayed in the first set and lost 17-21. The Germans looked confident all the way through and managed to fight off the Dutch offensive in the second and final set, winning 22-20.

After receiving the gold medal and 20,000 euros, Brink revealed that he felt tired during the game and relied on his partner's blocking at the net for extra assistance.

(Clockwise from far left) Czech Republic's Hana Klapalova; Norway's Tarjei Skarlund and Martin "Spinny" Spinnangr celebrate; The women's winner's podium consisted of Greek's Vasiliki Arvaniti and Maria Tsiartsiani (silver), Dutch team of Sanne Keizer and Marleen van Iersel (gold), and Spain's Liliana Fernandez Steiner and Elsa Baquerizo (bronze); The Netherlands' Emiel Boersma spikes against Germany's Julius Brink; Boersma and Brink watch the aftermath of their play; German fans celebrate the winning point; The Netherlands' Sanne Keizer spiked a set from teammate Marleen van Iersel; The Greek players passed during the final.