

Medals Guaranteed

Contributed by Craig Harkins
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Photo courtesy Serge Timacheff - FencingPhotos.com

The United States will bring home at least 2 medals tonight and are positioned for a possible sweep as the event concludes tonight at the Fencing Hall in Beijing. All 3 US fencers advanced in their quarterfinal matches to reach the semifinals.

Becca Ward (Portland, Ore.) edged Azza Besbes of Tunisia by a 15-14 score and now will face teammate and reigning Olympic gold medalist Mariel Zagunis (Beaverton, Ore.), who defeated Bao Yingying of China 15-9. Sada Jacobson (Dunwoody, Ga.) scored a 15-11 victory over Olena Khomrova of the Ukraine to move to the semifinals, where she will face Sofiya Velikaya of Russia.

Velikaya defeated 2004 Olympic silver medalist Xue Tan in front of a loud hometown crowd. Velikaya let from the outset and commanded an 8-5 lead at the break. During the bout Tan had some problems with her footing and fell, leading to an injury time out. Tan never quite recovered and could not put herself within more than 3 points of Velikaya.

Becca Ward had problems putting down today's giant killer. Azza Besbes of Tunisia became the first African fencer to get as far as the quarterfinals by knocking off Leonore Perrus of France in the round of 32. Besbes seemed to be working her magic again against Ward as Besbes led 8-5 at the break.

Ward fought back and took a 14-12 lead but was not able to put Besbes away until 14-14. At la belle, Ward drew Besbes back and took over the attack as the Tunisian fell short. After a review of the video, Ward was awarded the point to the collective cheers and sighs of the US contingent.

Jacobson and Zagunis did not have much trouble in their quarterfinal matches. Ying Ying Bao (CHN) was unable to gain any traction against Zagunis and fell behind 8-3 at the break. The hometown crowd was split cheering on Bao and Tan on the other piste but it did not make much of a difference. Bao managed a run of 3 touches but was still behind 13-7. The match ended at 15-9. Sada Jacobson also started off strong with an 8-4 lead that got to within 3 touches at 12-9 but never seemed to be in contention as Jacobson easily beat Khormova 15-11.

Jacobson will face off against Velikaya and Zagunis will face off against Ward.