

Zagunis and Jacobson Advance to Gold

Contributed by Craig Harkins
Saturday, 09 August 2008

The four fencers stride up to the piste. Sada Jacobson is smiling and relaxed. Velikaya stands stiff but smiles once introduced. Mariel Zagunis has a bit of nervous energy and Becca Ward looks relaxed. All four fencers sway a little bit - a little bit of warming up and keeping loose. They look ready to go, but first we have to introduce all of the referees.

The semi finals start out with Velikaya vs. Jacobson. Sada is 1-0 vs. Velikaya this year. Attack Velikaya. Riposte Jacobson. 1-1.

Jacobson draws Velikaya 2-1, 3-1 on the attack. Sada attacks, riposte 4-1. A quick attack in prep and it is 5-1 Velikaia.

Sada switches up and falls short, then catches V for 2-5. The next attack is given to Velikaya and Jacobson calls for a replay. 6-2. After some positioning at the middle of the strip, Sada makes the Russian fall short and takes it 3-6. The score is 7-3 on the next touch and then 4-7 as Sada catches V in prep. One more one-light attack in prep and Sada draws within two. Her next attack is short and Velikaya hits the counterattack to the arm to be up 8-5 at the break.

As the second period begins, Sada takes charge with an attack into Velikaya. It's now 6-8. The next Russian attack falls short and Sada takes the point. Velikaya shortens her steps and marches Sada back and finishes this time to lead 9-7 but Sada quickly takes a point back. Sada goes for the attack and scores, tying the match at 9.

Sophia Velikaya takes the attack all the way to the end of the strip to get to 10. On her next attack, Jacobson sticks out a line that catches Velikaya with one light. 10-10. Sada's got her tempo now and is feeling it. She takes the next point 11-10 and Velikaya looks nervous for the first time in the match. Velikaya takes the next point to tie it at 11 and then gets closed out by Sada: 12-11.

Sada uses a push then pull to catch her opponent off guard and is up by 2 points. The next phrase sees another attack by the Russian, this time caught by a quick parry-riposte which puts Sada at 14 and up by three touches. Velikaya stalls for time by readjusting her hair as Sada waits patiently, ready to end the bout. One second later she does just that, launching a quick attack that ends the match.

Arkady Burdan rushes up to the piste and coach and fencer share a hug. A redemption over the semifinal loss of four years ago.

=====

In the second semifinal match, the crowd is much more subdued. Mariel Zagunis takes a 2-0 lead with quick attacks. After a simultaneous action, Becca Ward gets on the board as Zagunis' first attack fails. Another action by Ward and it is 2-2. Both fencers trade phrases and then Zagunis catches the parry and lands the riposte to go up 3-2. The next action is another "premier attack no" with the point awarded to Ward. Both fencers feel each other out, moving back and forth along almost the entire length of the strip before Zagunis lands the attack. Ward catches the next action to tie up the match.

At 4-4 the referee gives the attack to Ward, but it is reversed on the replay so now Zagunis is up 5-4. Another attack by Mariel and it is 6-4. Becca advances and Mariel Becca takes the point 5-6. Mariel counters to stay up 2. The next action is a quick attack by both and the referee awards Ward the attack in preparation. The video replay upholds the call and

now we're at 6-7. Mariel shortens her steps and drives Ward to the end of the strip, finishing the attack and taking a 2 point lead into the break.

Both fencers look tense as they sort out for themselves what they need to do to advance to the gold medal bout.

The second period opens with both fencers poised to attack. Zagunis takes charge with a quick lunge to go up 9-6. Ward takes a quick break to tie her shoes. The following action has the blades locked up, but Mariel's sabre comes free to land her a 4 point lead.

Becca gets the next point and releases some emotion. The point earns her some cheers from the crowd who want a close match, not a runaway. They get their wish as the next point finds Becca with one foot on the strip, leaning back, and making Zagunis fall just short on the premier attack. 8-10 Zagunis.

Mariel takes back the next point, catching Ward between steps. The next action is an attack no by Zagunis and the attack A disputed riposte gets Ward to 10-11. As the fencers close together, Ward yeslls for the touch buyt it goes to Mariel. Mariel makes Becca fall short on the next touch to go up 13-10.

Frustrated, Ward launches a long attack, only to be caught in preparation by the waiting Zagunis. She earns back the next point and stays alive 11=14. Both fencers come together. Both lights go on. Ward screams and Zagunis takes off her mask as both look at the referee. The referee pauses for several seconds before awarding the point to Mariel and then the video replay holds up.

Zagunis will face Jacobson for the gold medal after Ward matches up against Velikaya for the bronze.