

Stanford Routs Santa Barbara for U-20 National Title

By Alex Crook



Photo Robert Johnson

The USA Water Polo Mens 20 and Under National Championship was held at The Soda Aquatic Center at Campolindo High School the weekend of July 11. There were 11 teams going into the completion: The 680 Drivers, Diablo Water Polo Club, the CBU Lancers, Lamorinda Water Polo, San Diego Shores, SET and Shore Aquatics. The tournament also featured four college teams: Princeton, UC Davis, UC Santa Barbara and Stanford.

After two long days of action, it came down to the semi-finals, the consolation games and the championship on Sunday the 13th. Following six straight games of water polo, there remained only two teams and one final game: The Stanford Cardinal vs the UC Santa Barbara Gauchos.

In the final collegiate rankings both teams had been highly ranked, with the Cardinal at #4 and the Gauchos #6.

The game was a rematch of a regular season game between these two teams on October 27 of last year. That time, visiting Santa Barbara, then #9, upset the 4th ranked Cardinal by a score of 9-7.

Early in the first quarter of this championship game, there was no action until Alexander Pulido scored with 1:36 remaining on the clock to give Stanford the 1-0 lead. Pulido turned out to be a key factor, scoring

three times in the game for the Cardinal.

28 seconds later, the Gauchos responded with a goal from Sean Castillo to tie it up at 1.

With just under a minute to go in the 1st, Santa Barbara failed to convert on a play that should have resulted in a goal. The shot deflected off of Cardinal keeper Brian Pingree and the quarter ended with both teams knotted at one.

The second quarter lacked scoring, except for another Stanford goal, this time from Sage Wright, and the Cardinal went into the half up by one, 2-1.

Coming out of the break, Stanford exploded and completely broke the game open by outscoring the Gauchos 4-1, including two back-to-back goals from Pulido.

Following Pulidos two goals, Sage Wright put himself in the spotlight once more by scoring his second goal of the day on a beautiful spin move to put the ball past Santa Barbara goalkeeper Travis Johnson, giving the Cardinal the commanding 5-2 lead.

With 3:31 left in the quarter, Santa Barbara got back on the board with an easy lob over the head of Brian Pingree, courtesy of Sam Evans.

31 seconds later, Stanford missed a chance after Kevin Mays shot deflected off the bar right into Travis Johnson's hands.

Near the end of the third, Johnson made a critical mistake, leaving the net wide open for Ryan Brown who lobbed it easily over the Gaucho keeper's head for a 6-2 Stanford lead going into the 4th quarter.

1:15 into the 4th, Wright recorded his third goal of the day off a breakaway pass from keeper Brian Pingree.

With two minutes left to play and Stanford in control of a comfortable 7-2 lead, Santa Barbara started to wear down. Sam Evans' shot over the crossbar appeared to be the last sign of life for the Gauchos. It was now only a matter of staying in the game and not letting Stanford pour it on in the final minutes.

Santa Barbara did hold up, and Stanford didn't score any more, but the Cardinal were crowned champions in the 7-2 win over the Gauchos.