

# Great Britain v Serbia volleyball

from Final Whistle Media

CEV European League (Ponds Forge, Sheffield): Women: Great Britain 0  
Serbia 3 (15-25 11-25 20-25)

Serbia all but secured a place in the Final Four of the CEV European League by outclassing Great Britain at Ponds Forge, Sheffield. Branko Kovacevic's team controlled the first two sets but GB will take some heart from the fact they pushed their opponents all the way in the final set.

Only an unprecedented sequence of results can deny Serbia's final place but it is only a case of mathematics at this stage. Captain Maja Ognjenovic led the assault by putting GB's service reception under pressure immediately. When she served an ace which Maria Bertelli misjudged to take it to 0-4, GB coach Audrey Cooper called a timeout to try and prompt some resistance. But even when GB gave a chance to their hitters, they found a towering block in the shape of Jovana Brakocevic. It was 0-8 at the first technical timeout with Brizitka Molnar contributing a couple of useful hits from position four. GB's first point came when Ognjenovic served into the net but the home team were made to work for every point. There was a glimmer of hope when GB clawed back from 4-12 to 7-12 under Jen Taylor's serving but consistently putting a run of points together was proving difficult. Molnar pushed the score to 16-9 at the second technical timeout with another power hit which Lizzie Reid managed to get her hand to but could not keep in court. Some outstanding defending from Bertelli and then Lucy Wicks helped GB win the best rally of the set but Serbia kept up the pressure. At 10-18, Cooper called her second timeout but Serbia turned up the heat with Rachel Bragg blocked by Stefana Veljkovic. Brakocevic served tough at the end of the set to extend Serbia's advantage but, after she served into the net, GB enjoyed a mini-revival as they won three points in a row, with Lynne Beattie taking it to 15-23 with a terrific service down the line. It was the jolt Serbia needed. Natasa Krsmanovic gave them set point with a hit from position four and Brakocevic delivered the final point with a backcourt spike off the block, 15-25. Serbia did not let their high-tempo game slip. Molan, on the outside, and Stefana Veljkovic, through the middle, gave them a 4-1 lead but GB competed for everything. Reid produced a great block on Jovana Vesovic to take her team to within two points 4-6 but Brakocevic then took over the serving duties and took her team to 12-4. It was 6-16 at the second technical timeout after a GB passing error and Serbia had a firm grip on the match. Veljkovic was having a lot of success through the middle and put away two successive points to take the score to 19-8 which prompted a GB timeout. On the rare occasions GB found a way past the Serbian block, libero Silvija Popovic was on hand to retrieve the situation. Serbia put together seven unanswered points under some strong serving from Molnar but she served into the net on set point. GB saved three set points before Sara Klisura secured the set 25-11 with a hit from position four. Remarkably, GB hit back to lead 4-0 at the start of the third set -Rachel Laybourne hitting one point when the Serbian block did not materialise but there was to be no dramatic turnaround. Veljkovic halted the slide with another hit through the middle and Serbia led 6-5 after a GB service reception error. But GB led 8-7 at the first technical timeout thanks to a brilliant block by Grace Carter on Vesovic. GB matched Serbia point for point with some superb defensive play and it was 15-16 at the second technical timeout after Laybourne served long. The home team edged in front again 20-19 but Cooper took another timeout at 20-21 after a handling error by Wicks had given Serbian the lead back. But Serbia finished with a flourish. The GB back court could not deal with Molnar's serving as she brought up match point and then duly served the winning point, 25-20. Serbian head coach Kovacevic commented: "GB showed good character after the first two sets. They didn't play badly but we played very well but they continued to fight for every ball. "What is normal for my team is that, after a long period of playing a good match, there is a dip without reason."Our middle blockers played very well today and they are very good players. "Captain Ognjenovic said: "We played a good game and it was very important that we won 3-0 as we want to finish first in our group." GB surprised us a little in the final set but they have good players and can improve more and more." Home coach Audrey Cooper

said: "We did in the third set what we planned to do in the first - play our style of volleyball and be brave and take calculated risks from the service line and offensively. "We did that admirably in the third set. Clearly when you start poorly and the pass isn't there, then the belief and confidence is knocked straight away." GB captain Beattie added: "We're a obviously disappointed with the way we started the match. Serbia served tough and we struggled to get a grip of their middle.

"But we'll take positives from the fact we got into a set-winning position in set three and showed a lot of character."