**TASHKENT GRAND PRIX 2018**

**UZBEKISTAN – DAY 1**

**KOSOVO AT THE DOUBLE ON DAY ONE**

**Kosovo 2 golds, Germany, Mongolia and Slovenia, 1 gold**

It is a fact that Kosovo, in the space of just a few years, has become a major player on the world judo scene, especially thanks to Majlinda Kelmendi, two-time world champion and Olympic champion in Rio, the first in her country's history. However, this happens infrequently enough to be underlined three times: during this first day of competition in Tashkent, it is not one, nor two, but three Kosovar athletes who entered the final, leaving no chance to the contenders.

This overall performance is exceptional and somewhat reminiscent of the success of the Cuban women's team a few years ago, when the group led by Ronaldo Veitia, who entered the IJF Hall of Fame last summer, were winning medals non-stop. There are probably some similarities between Cuba and today's Kosovo: a desire increased by the sometimes difficult living conditions and the desire to offer a better life through sport.

It must be emphasized that Majlinda Kelmendi, despite or thanks to her Olympic title, continues to have the same desire to win. Injured and absent from the IJF circuit for over a year before returning last month in Abu Dhabi, she returned to her best level at the right time while the Olympic qualifying is in full swing. What is even more extraordinary is that, in her absence, she has succeeded in motivating a whole generation of athletes, most of whom living in the same street, and who are now reaching maturity on the world circuit.

This is the case for Distria KRASNIQI, in -48kg and Nora GJAKOVA, in -57kg. If the two young women are, by necessity, still in the impressive shadow of their eldest, they start to shine more and more. Technically at their best, they are above all strong in their head, each match being taken as a vital objective, and whose outcome can only be victory. This mental strength is their asset and they know how to use it wonderfully. Majlinda won today. We could say, again. But watching her big smile at the end of the final clearly shows that she was the happiest woman on the mat at that particular moment. She knows what she already achieved and she knows more than anybody else what she went through. Today's victory had clearly a special taste.

Imitating Kelmendi, KRASNIQI also won the gold and Kosovo was close the the hat trick as GJAKOVA only lost in the final. We have not finished to talk about Kosovo and what has become obvious: its school of judo, this machine to build champions on the tatami, but also in life.

Among the men, the Uzbek public, which came in large numbers in the early hours of the competition, was expecting a lot of their local champions and it was not disappointed. Thus Diyorbek UROZBOEV, who declared during the draw that his team was very strong, proved that he was part of the world judo elite by reaching the final. Unfortunately he couldn't win and let the opportunist GANBAT Boldbaatar won a well deserved gold medal.

UROZBOEV who set the tone for Uzbekistan was imitated by his compatriot Sardor NURILLAEV who also entered the final in the upper category (-66kg) to guarantee a second medal for the host country (they actually won a third medal with Shakhram AKHADOV. But the result was the same as the victory went to Adrian GOMBOC - SLO.

**The Technical Analysis by Alexander Jatskevich**

First of all I must say that I am really pleased with what I saw today. We have seen really dynamic judo, with many scores. Generally speaking the trend is that athletes are less and less trying to win with tactics, I mean to be clear with shidos (penalties). They are trying, at least trying to score and that is very positive for our sport. I am sure that in the future this trend will increase even more. The competitors have understood that to win they need to step on the mat, with the desire to score. Of course, it can happen that you win with penalties, but it's a totally different mindset to go on the tatami wanting to score. During the preliminary rounds we had really a few disqualifications and I think there was only one case of hansoku-make given to an athlete for applying a dangerous technique (standing waki gatame).

Of course, we can and we must underline the overall performance of Kosovo. They are impressive athletes under the leadership of an amazing coach (Driton Kuka), who is capable of motivating the team like nobody else. It is obvious that having a star such as Majlinda Kelmendi in the team helps a lot. She is strong, but not only that. She is the perfect example for her teammates, and should be for other judoka as well. It is clear that she inspires the rest of the team.

In the final block, when we see that we had 15 matches and that all together it took less than two hours, this is a sign that the quality of the judo was at the rendezvous. Of course it was not perfect all through the final block, and we could see that some of the athletes were waiting for the golden score as soon as they were getting closer to the end of the bout. But then, they were taking all risks to score quickly and that is what happened every time. We really had a successful day and I hope people enjoyed the judo as much as I did.

*Alexander Jatskevich of Latvia started judo when he was 12 in 1970. He is a member of the IJF refereeing commission. In 1980 he obtained a bronze medal at the Moscow Olympic Games. He was also a Junior World Champion and three times European Champion. Later he became a successful coach, especially with the Belgium team from 1989 to 2005.*

**AWARDS**

Just before the final block, Jan Snijders, IJF Head Refereeing Director, presented the Honorary Refereeing Certificate to Lev YUGAY (UZB) for his commitment to the development of judo in Uzbekistan and for having refereed more than 40 international judo events.

**DAY 2 Preview**

**-63kg**

In the -63kg category, Andreja LESKI (SLO), is ranked sixth in the world after a rather successful year, having won the Düsseldorf Grand Slam and the Agadir Grand Prix at the beginning of the season, before reaching the Abu Dhabi Grand Slam final just two weeks ago. Her lead position here in Tashkent is therefore not usurped and she could therefore add a medal to her 2018 harvest. By winning the bronze medal in Abu Dhabi, Australian Katharina HAECKER has made an impression and, without any doubt, she wants to repeat her feat in the Uzbek capital. Finally among the most serious contenders, we will follow the course of the two Austrian women Kathrin UNTERWURZACHER and Magdalena KRSSAKOVA (AUT), who will be keen to take the advantage over each other in anticipation of the Olympic qualification.

**-70kg**

It is with the seventh place in the world that Anna BERNHOLM (SWE) will be the top seed in Tashkent, which bodes well for a particularly open category, in which it is difficult to make the slightest prognosis. Nevertheless the young Swede who has already won the Antalya Grand Prix last April, can reasonably hope to climb again on the podium of a Grand Prix. But it may be the turn of the Venezuelan Elvismar RODRIGUEZ, who has not yet climbed on a podium of the World Judo Tour in 2018, after a particularly successful 2017 season, to shine on the second day of competition.

**-73kg**

With 40 competitors registered, the category of -73kg is the most numerous of the competition. Winner of the Antalya Grand Prix in April and that of Cancun, on October 12, Tommy MACIAS (SWE) is the favorite. But he will have a lot to do to repeat a great performance against the Uzbek armada (Giyosjon BOBOEV, Jakhongir ALIMARDONOV, Umidjon ABDULLAYEV and Khikmatillokh URAEV) and travelling Kazakh judoka who will also want to perform in Tashkent. The Emirati, Victor SCVORTOV, world bronze medalist in 2014, and a little bit in trouble in 2018, could gain momentum on the occasion of this Grand Prix, while many other competitors can be elected to the podium at the end of the day.

**-81kg**

The -81kg category also looks complicated in terms of prognosis, while everything seems possible and no name, despite the top seeds, does not seem to stand out. We will know more at the end of the day, which of Aslan LAPPINAGOV (RUS), Anri EGUTIDZE (POR), Didar KHAMZA (KAZ) or NYAMSUREN Dagvasuren (MGL) has been able to pull out of the game, unless it is UNGVARI Attila (HUN), Jonathan ALLARDON (FRA), who is still looking to find his place internationally, Vladimir ZOLOEV (KGZ) or Damian SZWARNOWIECKI (POL), to be at their best. Perhaps none of these names will be on the final list. To be followed.

**-48kg: KRASNIQI opens the Prom for Kosovo**

The first final saw the first Kosovo athlete of the day to enter the final, Distria KRASNIQI, against the former Olympic bronze medallist, CSERNOVICZKI Eva (HUN). After one minute three shidos were already awarded, two for CSERNOVICZKI, one for KRASNIQI. This is the time the pupil of Driton KUKA, decided to score a first waza-ari with a o-uchi-gari. Totally dominating her opponent, KRASNIQI didn't seem in danger at all and kept putting pressure on her opponent, until the Hungarian was penalized with a third shido offering the first gold medal of the day to Kosovo.

The first bronze medal contest opposed Katharina MENZ (GER) and Milica NIKOLIC (SRB). After less than thirty seconds NIKOLIC threw MENZ with a shoulder technique for waza-ari, immediately followed with an immobilisation for ippon. In the second bronze medal contest the right-handed Joana DIOGO (POR) was opposed to the left-handed Amber GERSJES (NED). Half way to the end, the latter was penalized with a first shido for a false gripping but a few seconds later it was DIOGO to be penalized for passivity, just before a second penalty was awarded to both athletes for avoiding gripping. It was time for the golden score and only after a few seconds, DIOGO launched a ippon-ko-uchi-gari for a small waza-ari, but enough to win her first bronze medal in a Grand Prix.

**Final**

KRASNIQI, Distria (KOS) vs. CSERNOVICZKI, Eva (HUN)

**Bronze Medal Contests**

MENZ, Katharina (GER) vs. NIKOLIC, Milica (SRB)

DIOGO, Joana (POR) vs. GERSJES, Amber (NED)

**Final Results**

1. KRASNIQI, Distria (KOS)

2. CSERNOVICZKI, Eva (HUN)

3. DIOGO, Joana (POR)

3. NIKOLIC, Milica (SRB)

5. GERSJES, Amber (NED)

5. MENZ, Katharina (GER)

7. GURBANLI, Aisha (AZE)

7. UNGUREANU, Monica (ROU)

**-60kg: GANBAT ends the hopes of UROZBOEV**

As the heat and the sound level in the venue increased, one could feel that the final opposed the pocket-size Mongol GANBAT Boldbaatar and the local hero Diyorbek UROZBOEV. Warmly supported by his public, UROZBOEV seemed to be in total control of the situation and launched a powerful ko-uchi-gari. But GANBAT perfectly anticipated the action and countered with a simple but effective te-waza (arm technique) to score ippon. Suddenly the venue went totally silent, before congratulating both athletes for their today's performance.

Moritz PLAFKY (GER) and Luka MKHEIDZE (FRA) were opposed in the first male bronze medal contest of the day. Working with the end of the sleeves, the French was bothering his opponent, who couldn't really apply any technique and was penalized for passivity after half of the bout. But while MKHEIDZE was also dangerous with his counterattacks, it was the German who first countered to score a first waza-ari and take the lead. Surprisingly, MKHEIDZE didn't seem too bothered that he was one waza-ari behind. But actually when the final gong echoed in the venue, he realized that the bronze medal just escaped from him.

In the second bronze medal contest, Chinese Taipei judoka, YANG Yung Wei faced Mongol, DASHDAVAA Amartuvshin. The whole match seemed to be quite balanced until the last seconds as YANG Yung Wei launched a drop-seoi-nage for waza-ari.

**Final**

UROZBOEV, Diyorbek (UZB) vs. GANBAT, Boldbaatar (MGL)

**Bronze Medal Contests**

PLAFKY, Moritz (GER) vs. MKHEIDZE, Luka (FRA)

YANG, Yung Wei (TPE) vs. DASHDAVAA, Amartuvshin (MGL)

**Final Results**

1. GANBAT, Boldbaatar (MGL)

2. UROZBOEV, Diyorbek (UZB)

3. PLAFKY, Moritz (GER)

3. YANG, Yung Wei (TPE)

5. DASHDAVAA, Amartuvshin (MGL)

5. MKHEIDZE, Luka (FRA)

7. BESTAEV, Otar (KGZ)

7. LUTFILLAEV, Sharafuddin (UZB)

**-52kg: KELMENDI is Back on Top**

With no real surprise, Olympic champion, Majlinda Kelmendi (KOS) was present in the final for the second event in a row after Abu Dhabi Grand Slam two weeks ago. She was opposed to top seed athlete, Evelyne TSCHOPP (SUI). Obviously, both competitors perfectly know each other as Kelmendi was trying to impose her powerful left arm over TSCHOPP's shoulder, and the Swiss was trying everything to avoid it. But as the Kosovar was not able to pass over the head, she went under the arm... for the same result, a beautiful koshi-waza technique for a beautiful ippon. Kelmendi is back on top of the podium.

In the first bronze medal contest, Betina TEMELKOVA of Israel was opposed to Ana PEREZ BOX of Spain. TEMELKOVA scored a beautiful first waza-ari with an action-reaction technique that she immediately followed on the floor with an immobilization. The match seemed to be done, but Ana PEREZ managed to escape and turn the situation to her advantage to catch the Israeli with an immobilisation of her own and score ippon.

For the second bronze medal, the 2018 Antalya Grand Prix bronze medallist, PUPP Reka (HUN) faced the 2018 Cancun Grand Prix silver medallist, Agata PERENC (POL). PUPP was penalized with a first shido for passivity after one minute and thirty seconds. Entering the last minute, the Polish scored a beautiful first waza-ari to take the lead and gently control the end of the match to take the bronze medal back home.

**Final**

TSCHOPP, Evelyne (SUI) vs. KELMENDI, Majlinda (KOS)

**Bronze Medal Contests**

TEMELKOVA, Betina (ISR) vs. PEREZ BOX, Ana (ESP)

PUPP, Reka (HUN) vs.PERENC, Agata (POL)

**Final Results**

1. KELMENDI, Majlinda (KOS)

2. TSCHOPP, Evelyne (SUI)

3. PERENC, Agata (POL)

3. PEREZ BOX, Ana (ESP)

5. PUPP, Reka (HUN)

5. TEMELKOVA, Betina (ISR)

7. BISHRELT, Khorloodoi (MGL)

7. KORKMAZ, Irem (TUR)

**-66kg: GOMBOC Takes Gold In Tashkent**

Fort the last male category of the day, Uzbekistan had one more chance to win the gold as Sardor NURILLAEV (UZB) was opposed to Adrian GOMBOC (SLO). After a minute of observation, the first strong attack came from NURILLAEV, with a drop-seoi-nage, which made the public immediately react, but for no score. A minute later, the Uzbek again launched a powerful uchi-mata, but for the same result... nothing to be written on the scoreboard, but enough for GOMBOC to be penalized with a first shido for passivity. As the last minute started, with a strong arm technique, the Slovenian scored a waza-ari to win the gold medal.

With the first bronze medal contest, Shakhram AKHADOV was in the position to offer a third medal to the host country on day one of the Grand Prix in Tashkent as he was opposed to Ismail CHASYGOV (RUS). But halfway to the end, he had already been penalized twice for passivity, being condemned to score. But as the match was getting close to an ending, the Russian was also penalized twice for false attacks. The golden score was to decide between the two competitors. Everything was still possible. The public could feel that their competitor needed support and they offered it to him. AKHADOV multiplied the attacks to force CHASYGOV to be logically penalized for the third time.

The second bronze medal contest opposed DOVDON Altansukh (MGL) and Nijat SHIKHALIZADA (AZE). Despite being very close to scoring, DOVDON, was always behind in terms of attacks and therefore was penalized twice as both athletes reached the end of the bout. Once again the golden score would decide the winner and it took only five seconds for SHIKHALIZADA to score a superb ippon to end up with the bronze medal.

**Final**

NURILLAEV, Sardor (UZB) vs. GOMBOC, Adrian (SLO)

**Bronze Medal Contests**

AKHADOV, Shakhram (UZB) vs. CHASYGOV, Ismail (RUS)

DOVDON, Altansukh (MGL) vs. SHIKHALIZADA, Nijat (AZE)

**Final Results**

1. GOMBOC, Adrian (SLO)

2. NURILLAEV, Sardor (UZB)

3. AKHADOV, Shakhram (UZB)

3. SHIKHALIZADA, Nijat (AZE)

5. CHASYGOV, Ismail (RUS)

5. DOVDON, Altansukh (MGL)

7. CRISOSTOMO, Joao (POR)

7. DAVAADORJ, Tumurkhuleg (MGL)

**-57kg: STOLL Turns down Kosovo's Plan**

The last final of the day saw, the winner of the Abu Dhabi Grand Slam, Nora GJAKOVA (KOS) facing Theresa STOLL (GER) for a possible hat-trick for Kosovo on the occasion of this first day of competition in Tashkent. After 50 seconds, both athletes were penalized with a first shido for avoiding to fight. But as the final was going on, and knowing that the power of team Kosovo is one of its strengths, it was clear that the German was not afraid of facing GJAKOVA. And she actually was able to throw GJAKOVA twice, first with a waza-ari on a counter-attack, then for ippon with a o-soto-gari almost at the end of the match.

The first bronze medal contest opposed Amelie STOLL (GER) and Anna BOROWSKA (POL). After almost four minutes of a well balanced contest, the victory went to the German as the Polish was penalized for the third time for keeping the grip too long on the same side.

In the second bronze medal contest, Sanne VERHAGEN (NED) faced Kaja KAJZER (SLO). From the first hajime, the Dutch seemed to be under the pressure of KAJZER, but the latter couldn't find an opportunity to score. This was done, as just before the last minute, the Slovenian countered VERHAGEN for a waza-ari. As she was controlling the rest of the match, she was penalized once, but not enough for VERHAGEN to come back and win bronze. This is the second medal of the day for Slovenia.

**Final**

GJAKOVA, Nora (KOS) vs. STOLL, Theresa (GER)

**Bronze Medal Contests**

STOLL, Amelie (GER) vs. BOROWSKA, Anna (POL)

VERHAGEN, Sanne (NED) vs. KAJZER, Kaja (SLO)

**Final Results**

1. STOLL, Theresa (GER)

2. GJAKOVA, Nora (KOS)

3. KAJZER, Kaja (SLO)

3. STOLL, Amelie (GER)

5. BOROWSKA, Anna (POL)

5. VERHAGEN, Sanne (NED)

7. FILZMOSER, Sabrina (AUT)

7. KOWALCZYK, Julia (POL)