

2017 CEV SNOW VOLLEYBALL EUROPEAN TOUR MALBUN



Liechtenstein triumphs with sensational European gold on snow

One of the very rare occasions when tiny Liechtenstein wins a continental-level gold medal at any sport occurred on Sunday in Malbun, when Manuel Gahr & Maximilian von Deichmann triumphed with the title at the 2017 CEV Snow Volleyball European Tour stop on home snow.

In a scenario, similar to the one from the previous stop in Slovenia, the home pair played the maximum possible number of nine matches in the tournament, heroically passing through all five legs of the losers' bracket, and eventually made the top of the podium. The 14th-seeded Liechtenstein team lost only one of their games in Malbun – the second-round clash with Switzerland's Raphael Zurgilgen & Christian Busin, seeded in #3.

On Sunday morning alone, Gahr & von Deichmann had to win three matches in a row, including a dramatic 2-1 (12-10, 6-11, 12-10) victory over second-seeded Poles Piotr Groszek & Tomasz Cwiertnia that gave them a spot in the semifinals. In the early afternoon, the Liechtensteiners continued their winning streak with a come-from-behind 2-1 (11-13, 11-9, 11-5) victory over another team from Poland – top-seeded Michal Matyja & Piotr Janiak, and qualified for the grand final.

In the big clash for the gold, Gahr & von Deichmann were cheered on by numerous spectators, who filled up the stands around centre court. Inspired by the support of the home crowd, they won the first two sets against Germany's Jens Ellmrich & Maik Winkler. The second set was a true spectacle for the fans and lasted until 24-22, thus becoming **the longest set in the history of the CEV European Tour for both genders**. The 11th-seeded Germans fought back to tie the match and prompt a decisive tie-breaker, but in the fifth set the Liechtensteiners established complete domination on the court and rejoiced with a phenomenal 3-2 (11-6, 24-22, 6-11, 9-11, 11-3) victory.

"It is an awesome feeling! Perfect weekend, perfect weather, despite the forecast! So many people came and cheered for us. It was really good!" said an elated Manuel Gahr after the last rally of the final. "This was the first time I play on snow. The first two matches were horrible – it didn't feel right. With each game we got better and when we increased our level was really cool."

The bronze medals went to Matyja & Janiak, who mastered a speedy 2-0 (11-8, 11-1) win against Zurgilgen & Busin in the third-place match.

Ozolina & Stepanova win historic snow volleyball gold for Latvia

Marta Ozolina & Jekaterina Stepanova made it all the way to the top of the podium at the Malbun stop on the 2017 CEV Snow Volleyball European Tour and delivered a historic first gold for Latvia in the circuit.

With their opponents forfeiting the semifinal match, Ozolina & Stepanova started their competition day on Sunday directly from the final, where they had to face the tournament pre-favorites Anna Dostalova & Michaela Knoblochova from the Czech Republic.

In the first set, the Czechs established control and showed why they are the best-ranked players in Europe. After losing the set, the Latvians started finding their rhythm, while Dostalova & Knoblochova started alternating some spectacular digs and blocks with unforced errors. Ozolina & Stepanova maintained their grip on the game through the end, which came at 3-1 (7-11, 11-5, 11-5, 11-6) in their favor.

“It was hard! It was really hard!” were Marta Ozolina’s first words after the winning point. “But we are getting used to the snow, so it is getting better.”

“For us it was hard, because we did not play semifinals and did not really get to warm up for the final. So we had to really come in strong. We lost the first set, but in the end we won and that is what is important,” Jekaterina Stepanova added.

After their first encounter with snow volleyball, the two Latvians admitted that they are already thinking of coming back as soon as next week in Italy, where the last competition on this year’s European Tour will take place.

The bronze medals in Malbun went to Switzerland’s Nina Crameri & Josiane Schoeni, who lost their semifinal match to Dostalova & Knoblochova by 0-2 (3-11, 5-11).

Further information regarding the tour, the registration, kids activities or press pictures are online on www.snowvolleyball.com or follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) #snowvolleyball!