

Bursa all set to host Group 3 World League Finals this weekend

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In just two days Turkey, Cuba, China and Slovakia will begin their bid for the gold medal at the Group 3 Finals of the 2014 FIVB World League. Turkey's city of Bursa is currently putting in place the final preparations for the Finals scheduled to take place on June 28 and 29, 2014.

The first semifinals on Saturday will see Cuba take on China at 14:00 local time, while hosts Turkey will play Slovakia at 17:00. The finals will be held on Sunday at 17:00 and will be preceded by the match for third place at 14:00 local time.

The competition will be held at the Bursa Cengiz Gollu Volleyball Hall, a first-class sporting venue, which bears the name of the former head coach of Turkey's women's national team.

This is not the first time that volleyball fever has hit the nation or the city of Bursa.

The 2013 FIVB Volleyball Men's U21 World Championship was held in Turkey for ten days, and was the first edition of the tournament that featured 20 teams. Ankara was also the host of the 2011 FIVB Girls Youth Volleyball World Championship in August 2011, which saw the participation of 16 teams in the tournament. While this is the first time it will host a final of the FIVB World League, the city of Bursa has hosted matches of the 2013 CEV Volleyball European League for women.

The four participating teams have arrived at the competition site and conducted their first training sessions on Thursday.

Turkey and Cuba enter the final phase of Group 3 matches as the host country and the winner

of Pool F, respectively. In Pool G, China qualified for the Final Four as the winner of the Pool, while Slovakia booked their slot as the second best team overall in the Group.

Cuba led Pool F with a win-loss ratio of 5-1 followed by organisers Turkey with 4-2 record. China led Pool F with 5-1 ratio followed by Slovakia who had 3-3 record to join the Finals.

"We are trying our best to overcome the time difference and defeat the Cuban team in the semifinal as we don't know much about that team," said China coach Guochen Xie after his first training session in Bursa.

"We are well prepared now and our goal is to win the gold medal here. We are not familiar with the Cuban team as we didn't face them for a long time. We want to see their weak points to beat them," he added.

Slovakia coach Flavio Gulinelli expressed his pride at having qualified for the Finals and was optimistic that Slovakia would continue showing its good form.

"We are really happy and proud to be here in the Final Four tournament of Group 3 in this year's World League. We started this competition having a big goal to qualify for the Finals and show quality volleyball. We played well in the pool stage although we had a long journey and fewer hours to train. I think the four teams are very near in their standards and any team can achieve the gold and we are aiming for that."

Cuba are currently ranked seventh in the world. China ranked 18th did not participate in last year's 18-team event.

The second semifinal will see Slovakia – who are ranked 36th overall and are first timers in the FIVB's premier annual competition for national teams – take on Turkey. The Group 3 Final Four hosts – who have also participated in the tournament for the first time and are the lowest ranked team playing in this year's World League (No 45) – hope that the support of the home crowd in Bursa will carry them to victory.

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