

Award for bright play

Republican Centre of Olympic Tennis Training hosts young tennis players, coaches and parents as Belarus' Minister of Sports and Tourism, Alexander Grigorov, awards Victoria Azarenko the Presidential commendation

By Yuri Karpenko

Belarus' top tennis player was told of the Presidential award in mid-April, after winning an international tennis tournament in Miami. Victoria Azarenko, 19, beat number one seed Serena Williams of the USA — placing herself among the top ten in the world for the first time in her career.

After the ceremony, Victoria took photos with young athletes and gave out autographs. Talking to journalists, she noted her appreciation of attention from the Head of the country, as well as from Belarusian tennis fans. "This support is very important to me," emphasised Victoria. She admitted with regret that she does not

visit Belarus as often as she would like, rarely seeing friends and relatives.

After a couple of days in Belarus, she left for another Grand Slam event — the French Open Championship. Victoria aspires to becoming the top seed (she is now 9th) and hopes to claim Olympic gold in 2012 in London. "All athletes want to win the Olympics," she asserts. She'll be doing her best to achieve this target.

This year, Victoria has won a number of prestigious events organised by the Women's Tennis Association — in Australian Brisbane (singles), and in American Memphis (singles and doubles), Indian Wells (doubles) and Miami (singles).



Victoria Azarenko dreams of topping world tennis ratings

Dozen of medals from Lombardia

Milan hosts European Sambo Championship

Belarus is traditionally considered to be a favourite at such events and, despite Russia leading the standings, lived up to expectations. Belarus was represented in all weight categories (excluding the women's 72 and 80kg) and brought home 12 medals: 4 gold, 3 silver and 5 bronze.

The youngest male athlete in Italy was Anton Mashkovich (57kg) — a promising wrestler who took the European Championship title. Another gold medal went to heavy-weight Yuri Rybak (over 100kg) who — with Belarus' judo team — took part in the past two Olympics. Stepan Popov (74kg) and Yevgeny Semochkin (100kg) earned silver while 38 year old veteran Andrey Kurlypo (52kg) and Alexander Morudov (62kg) captured bronze.

Marina Zharskaya (52kg) and Yekaterina Prokopenko (60kg) took gold. Anzhela Paim (56kg) came home with silver and ten-time world champion Tatiana Moskvina (48kg), 36, earned bronze, as did Anastasia Leshkova (64kg) and Larisa Balan (above 80kg).

The men's team finished second of 23 participating countries — behind Russia — while the women were placed third — behind Russia and Bulgaria.

Three victories on way to Japan

Belarus women's volleyball team successfully performs in 2nd qualification round of 2010 World Championship

By Yuri Kovalev

Quba, Azerbaijan, hosted the battle for the two tickets to the finals, with Azerbaijan, Belarus, Ukraine and Israel competing. The opening match against Ukraine was a challenge for both sides, with Victor Goncharov's trainees making several mistakes. However, Belarus snatched the lead and won the match after three sets.

The easy win over the hosts was the key to the whole event, with revenge taken for the past 0:3 defeat (at the start of the group stage of the 2007 European Championship). This time, the match ended with the same score in Belarus' favour. Israel put up a tough fight, but the Belarusian girls claimed victory — with Israel only taking one set.

So, with three victories in Azerbaijan, Belarus is now placed first in Group D. It will continue against the world's top women's



Intense passion at volleyball arena

volleyball squads in Italy in mid-July. Belarus will play Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, and Italy, with the two best teams going through to the finals — to be hosted by Japan in 2010.

According to experts, the Belarusian girls have a strong chance of reaching the top 16 for the first time in their history. Moreover, they are quite capable of

doing even better. Head coach Victor Goncharov asserts that his squad is showing its best play in years.

Meanwhile, the men's volleyball team brought joy to fans in Alanya, Turkey. The under 21s team won all three matches in the 2nd qualification round of the 2009 World Championship, claiming a place to the next round in India.

Goalkeeper Andrey Mezin to play for Dynamo Minsk

By Kirill Karin

Best goalkeeper of World Championship in Switzerland to spend next season with club from Minsk

According to general manager Sean Simpson, negotiations with the goalkeeper of the Belarusian national ice

hockey team have concluded successfully — with a mutually beneficial one-year agreement.

Andrey Mezin had spent two previous seasons with Metallurg Magnitogorsk, taking the European Champions Cup with them last January. When his contract ended, he was free to look elsewhere,

receiving a huge number of offers. He has twice played on the All Stars team of world championships and chose Dynamo Minsk with the intention of training well before the Olympics in Vancouver. He had a deficiency in practical playing with Ak Bars Kazan, SKA St. Petersburg, Salavat Yulayev Ufa and Metallurg.

Alexander Hleb — Spain's champion

By Kirill Pirogov

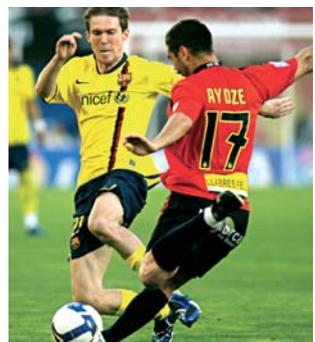
First serious title in career of Barcelona halfback and Belarusian national squad captain

After Madrid Real lost to Villarreal, the Catalan club has taken gold — a full two rounds before the end of the championship. The head coach of Barcelona, Josep Guardiola, pushed forward his second squad starring Alexander Hleb against Malorka (in an away match). The Belarusian played for 90 minutes and scored a goal but still Barcelona lost — 1:2. Guardiola may or may not be satisfied with Hleb's performance but Alexander at least was given a chance to show his worth.

In fact, Hleb took two titles with Barcelona — winning the

Spanish Cup (defeating Athletic Bilbao) and the championship. It was the greatest achievement of the halfback's Spanish career — the target of his move. Leaving England's Arsenal, where he did well but did not win anything, Hleb told the *Daily Mail* that titles are the most important thing for him. "One can play well, or even excellently, but, at the end of your career, you'd ask yourself: 'What have I won?' Time passes and no worthy titles are in my credit box."

Hleb has achieved what he anticipated with Barcelona. His Arsenal days did not bring any grand awards but he is now endowed with titles. In the Spanish Cup, Hleb played eight matches — although only took to the field seven times during the championship.



Alexander Hleb in action

The chances are high that Hleb will begin the new season with another club. In particular, Bavaria is ready to buy out Hleb from Barcelona. The general manager of the German team, Uli Hönes, has confirmed the intent of the club to find a proper substitute for Franck Ribéry (in case the Frenchman leaves the team from Munich). "I know that Diego from Werder is keen to join our team but, if we fail to win him, we are likely to invite Alexander Hleb from Barcelona. As far as I know, we may invite him at any moment," notes Hönes.