

Team with a strong will

Women's basketball team of Belarus is among the top four teams on the continent following the European Championship in Latvia and is through to the next World Championship for the first time in its history

By Yuri Karpenko

In each recent tournament, the Belarusian team's performance has varied; sometimes, they created their own obstacles yet brilliantly overcame them later on. In the Latvian capital, the Belarusian girls outstripped all expectations...

In March, head coach Anatoly Buyalsky noted that the most complex test is 'star-syndrome' — for which his trainees qualified. After taking third place at the last European Championship, Belarus came sixth at the Olympics. They did not lose their heads after this swirl of success, since they had to work hard to keep up their new starry status. Today, the opponents of our national women's basketball team — one of the best in the world — are on top form. Beating us, even in friendly matches, is a feat. Accordingly, Latvia had a difficult challenge in meeting us within the European Championship.

As expected, Belarus needed some time to warm-up; they initially disappointed fans. Defeating Israel proved tough, with the girls losing by more than 10 points at one point. In the match against France, Tatiana Troina scored a late 3-point strike in overtime — which was perceived as symbolic for the team. It could have brought victory if it had come earlier. As a result, they suffered a shameful defeat by one point. In the last match of the first round, Belarus lost to Italy — despite



Belarusian basketball players demonstrate their determination to win European Championship matches

being the anticipated favourite.

Reaching the finals without a single win was a challenge. To come no lower than fourth in their group (which would give them a place) the girls had to win two of their remaining three matches — against Russia, Lithuania and Turkey. It was hard to measure their strength against Russia (bronze holder of the 2007 European Championship) and the victory of our western neighbour was an expected outcome. It was inspiring to see Belarus playing

above their own level, since the girls had to raise their game accordingly. Their second match against Lithuania revealed their real worth, with them unleashing a determination which left their opponent in the dust. Their swift passes helped them seize the day, with Anastasia Veremeenko and Yelena Levchenko regularly scoring. Our defence was smooth and the result was excellent — 61:55.

Having reclaimed the confidence of earlier victories, the team's closing

qualification match against Turkey was brilliant. The squad gathered its will and skills, following their coach's direction to keep their cool. The day before, they fully realised that only a win would take them to the next stage. From the first seconds of the match, they fought hard — with Turkey resisting effectively. The gap in the score widened gradually, until Belarus peaked in the second half to reach a lead of 16 points — 86:70. Belarus won with the exact score to push it

into the play-offs, avoiding a match against formidable Spain.

Slovakia was our next opponent in the ¼ finals. The match saw an intense struggle, with the semi-finalist chosen only in overtime; Buyalsky's team showed their mettle once again, winning in the last seconds — 70:68. As a result, the Belarusian girls have joined the top four European teams for the first time and are through to the next World Championship (without needing to play in a selection round) — hosted by the Czech Republic in September 2010.

In the semi-finals, the Belarusians lost to the French — their tiredness after so many challenging matches finally showed itself. Initially, our girls almost equalled their rivals, just six points behind at half time. However, in the third and at the beginning of the fourth quarter, the French gained focus, leading by a 15+ margin. Before the end of the match, Anatoly Buyalsky's squad began to play more aggressively, managing to reduce the margin to eight points — 56:64. A similar score was registered in the match for bronze — when the Belarusian team played Spain. Our girls lost — 56:63, failing to repeat their success of two years ago (when they came third at the European Championship).

The French team won this year's continental tournament; silver went to Russia and bronze was claimed by Spain. Our Belarusian basketballers were placed fourth.

Gymnastics festival in Kamen

By Kirill Karin

German town hosts traditional gymnastics festival

The event has been running for twenty years, gathering the best athletes from Germany and Belarus for

joint training and competition. As noted by the head of the Belarusian national gymnastics team, Gennady Dedyulya (the founder of the event on the Belarusian side), the idea originated in 1989, when a German gymnastics club established contacts with

a Minsk club. This year, however, the geography expanded — with Kamen inviting athletes from the USA and the UK to join master classes and demonstrate their abilities. The Belarusian team was represented in three nominations: callisthenics, sporting gym-

nastics, and acrobatics. The audience was happy to watch Belarus' leading athletes Denis Savenkov, Dmitry Savitsky, Alexander Demchikhin and Alexander Pugach, acrobats Alina Yushko and Katya Murashko, and artistic gymnast Alexandra Dremyankova.

Roar of engines during muddy motocross

By Kirill Pirogov

Minsk hosts international motocross competition dedicated to the memory of Alexander Tyletsky

Zarya Stadium has hosted the Tyletsky Cup — despite torrential rain; almost 80 motocross athletes from Belarus, Russia and Lithuania took part, with their motorcycles lodging themselves in the mud — which was rather like quicksand. The steep slopes and fences were a real challenge, with riders roaring into action. Some engines failed from time to time, bringing their riders to the verge of defeat.

The racers themselves found it tricky to stay on track during the muddy conditions. In the final free class race (no limit to engine volume) the son of legendary Alexander Tyletsky, Yevgeny, came off at a sharp corner. He went from first to last place as a result and had to battle hard to catch up. How-



Minsk's complex motorway

ever, Yevgeny, 19, is one of the best European racers. He showed extraordinary character in catching up with his group and managed to overtake his opponents to win.

Spectators showed huge interest in the amateur race (also featuring veterans) with victory going to Belarusian Yuri Lopukh — an experienced rider.

Mission is so far impossible

By Yuri Kovalev

Men's handball team of Belarus fails to win place at finals of 2010 European Championship

After an away loss against Slovenia (Georgy Sviridenko's team unexpectedly lost 26:38) Belarus found itself in quite a complicated tournament position. Playing Bulgaria, Belarus was desperate to redeem itself in front of fans and to pave the way to the continental championship. In Minsk, the hosts slashed the fifth sub-group outsider 36:18, with Boris Pukhovskiy scoring six times.

That was an anticipated win though. The team then had to participate in two key matches: the first saw them opposing the

2007 world champion, Germany, in an away match; the second was a home match against Slovenia — their major opponent in the European championship. Without losing a single point, Germany secured its place in the European Championship ahead of time. To take the other place, Belarus had to win at least one point against Germany. Belarus had 8 points after 6 matches — like Slovenia. If Belarus failed, it would have to make up points in its match against Slovenia. The mission set this season seemed impossible but the players and their coach were optimistic.

However, the Belarusian team has failed to earn the necessary number of points in its matches. That against Germany



Belarusian forward Vitaly Kozhenevsky attacks

was to the host's advantage, leading to their incredible score of 38:27. Belarus also failed to play well against Slovenia — in Minsk. They led several times during the match but, eventually, lost 32:36. As a result, Germany and Slovenia are through to the European Championship.

Meanwhile, the Belarusian women's handball squad has

lost its chance to enter the finals of the World Championship (being hosted at the end of the year in China). In the response play-off match, Konstantin Sharovarov's players were defeated in Bucharest by Romania — 32:38. The first match held in Mogilev also brought defeat to our girls; as a result, Romanian handballers are through to the World Championship.