

Win slips away

Vasily Kirienko placed second in two-day Critérium International cycling race

Recently, Kirienko has lacked track practice. However, throughout March, he was working hard to achieve physical fitness. Vasily had every chance of victory, which would have made him the first Belarusian to win a European multi-day race. To date, only Konstantin Sivtsov boasts such an achievement, but not in Europe; rather, his win was at the Tour de Georgia.

This time, the traditional race, held on the French roads of Corsica since 1927, consisted of three rounds. On the first day, participants covered 198km — from Porto-Vecchio to Col de l'Ospedale; on the second day, they competed in a 75km group sprint and, finally, in a separate 7km start.

At the first stage, Vasily Kirienko cycled for Spanish Movistar, finishing second, 16 seconds behind Luxembourg's Frank Schleck, from Leopard. Schleck's victory placed him 20 seconds ahead over all on the first day. After the second round, he maintained his lead but, in the final stage, Kirienko pushed 7 seconds ahead to come in second place (after being placed seventh following the separate 7km start). Estonian Rein Taaramae from French Cofidis claimed bronze. The race gathered 122 athletes, with 101 reaching the finish line.

Awards from Pesaro

At Rhythmic Gymnastics World Cup round, held in Italy, Belarusian athletes capture rich crop of medals

In the group exercises, the national Belarusian calisthenics team (Alina Tumilovich, Ksenia Sankovich, Anastasia Ivankova, Marina Goncharova and Natalia Leshchik) won gold for their two hoops and three ribbons composition, ahead of Russia and Italy. In the exercise with five balls, Belarus took silver, behind Italy and ahead of Israel. In the all-round, the Belarusian team claimed bronze, behind Russia and the hosting squad.

In the individual events, Belarus' Lyubov Cherkashina did exceptionally well, bringing home five medals (1 gold, 2 silver and 2 bronze). She landed on the top of the medals podium for her exercise with the clubs, captured silver for her hoop and ball composition and claimed bronze for her exercise with the ribbon and in the all-round.

2008 Olympic champion Yevgenia Kanaeva of Russia, however, was the most successful at the World Cup in Pesaro, winning the all-round.

Bright victory on Miami courts

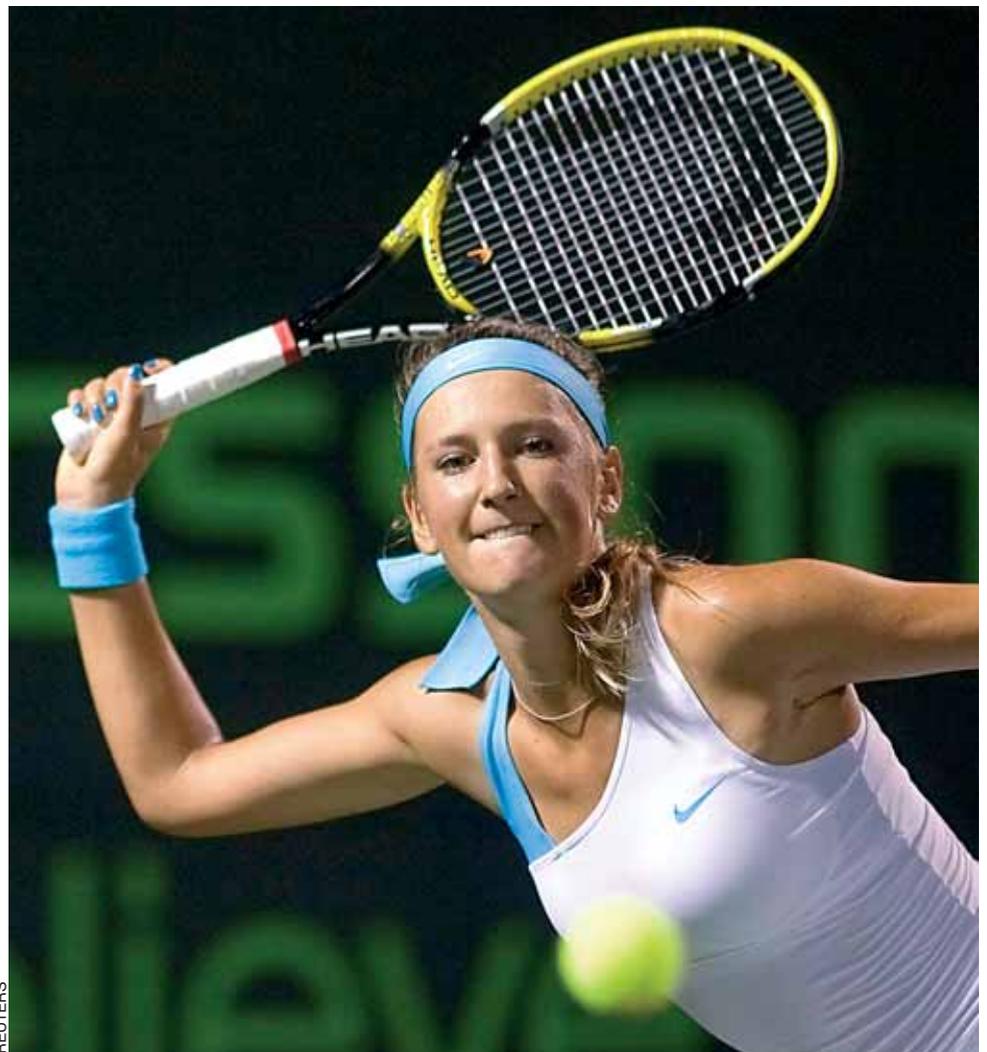
The match was intriguing in many aspects, with both young women performing powerfully and aggressively. Of course, both their careers are on the rise. Maria defeated German Andrea Petkovic in Indian Wells, who had sensationally knocked out first seed Caroline Wozniacki of Denmark, and sixth seed Jelena Jankovic of Serbia. Victoria beat two Russians (Vera Zvonareva and Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova), in addition to the favourite of the tournament — Kim Clijsters of Belgium. Their established equality, having won two matches each to date, allowed the audience to watch a true battle of wills: an uncompromising Russian-Belarusian competition.

The beginning of the match immediately revealed

some nervous tension, with each showing signs of nerves. They managed to break each other's serves, although Sharapova's play was more energetic and feisty. However, several mistakes levelled her advantage.

Azarenko was more sober-minded and cautious, successful in defence and playing a waiting game. Impressively, she also seized the opportunity to attack when it came, lunging forcefully to bewilder her Russian rival, whom she tired during baseline rallies. As a result, Azarenko won the first set: 6:1.

In the second, the match continued to develop in the same direction. Her success in the first set gave Victoria confidence in her strength, with no break-points witnessed. Moreover, luck was



On Miami courts, Victoria Azarenko demonstrates powerful attack skills

also on Victoria's side; she won four games in a row with ease. However, in the fifth game, eighth seeded Victoria lost concentration, allowing Sharapova to close the gap to the minimum. Fortunately, the Belarusian tennis star finally won 6:4.

"I'm very pleased with

my results in the last three-four weeks. I was off form in February, when I pulled out of the tournament in Paris, but am playing successfully now. I went to the American tournament without any hopes, having been unwell for three weeks beforehand. However, I did my best and

I'm very proud of this," noted Ms. Azarenko at her after-match press conference.

The title, won in Miami, is the first for the Belarusian tennis star this season and the sixth of her professional career. In six previous finals, she has yielded to her opponents.

No room for error

By Yuri Karpenko

Belarus' national football team opens new season with qualification matches for 2012 European Championship



Match between Albania and Belarus

In the fifth round of sub-group D, Bernd Stange's trainees lost in Tirana to Albania — 0:1. In fact, the host team demonstrated a great advantage and it was only the skilled efforts of Belarusian goalkeeper Sergey Veremko which saved us from a more crushing defeat. In the 62nd minute, even he failed to compensate for defenseman Alexander Martynovich's mistake, leaving

our statistics spoilt by one goal. Main goalkeeper and captain Yuri Zhevnov was absent due to injury, which may have affected our play.

Certainly, the Belarusian squad's performance

as follows: France — 12 points after 5 matches, Albania and Belarus 8 points each (5 matches), Bosnia and Herzegovina — 7 (4 matches), Romania — 5 (5 matches) and Luxembourg — 1 (6 matches).

Obviously, the French team, coached by Laurent Blanc, is unlikely to lose its top position. Three or four teams are to continue battling for second place within the sub-group, allowing the chance for a place at the 2012 European Championship finals. Belarus is to play its next three matches at home: on June 3rd and 7th against France and Luxembourg respectively, and on September 2nd against Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Belarusian fans should not be too disappointed, although defeat in Albania has complicated our position. We are still second in sub-group D and the coming home matches may open the path to the 2012 European Championship. While training, Belarus for the first time in its history met the Canadian team in Turkish Antalya, losing 0:1. Our squad held its own but failed to take advantage of several opportunities to score.



Alexey Shemarov battles Fatih Cakiroglu

Twice on podium

By Yuri Kovalev

Belarusian team ranked fifth in medal standing at European Wrestling Championship

Our Belarusian wrestlers have won two medals in German Dortmund. Alexey Shemarov claimed silver in the under 120kg category, losing to Fatih Cakiroglu of Turkey in a tough final match; Fatih was only victorious in the third period, which ended in a draw. Beforehand, Alexey had defeated Ioannis Arzoumanidis of Greece, Simas Asaciovos of Lithuania and Jamaladdin Magomedov of Azerbaijan.

Meanwhile, Vladislav Andreev took bronze in the under 55kg weight category, beating Francisco Sánchez Parra of Spain and

Mihran Jaburyan of Armenia, before losing to Djamal Otarsultanov of Russia in the final fight. In the match for the bronze award, the Belarusian athlete defeated Moldovan Ghenadie Tulbea, who was representing Monaco.

Another Belarusian representative, Ali Shabanov (under 66kg category) finished fourth, losing to Russian Adam Batyrov in his fight for bronze.

Over all, the Russian team was ranked first in the medal standings for freestyle wrestlers, earning six medals. They were followed by Azerbaijan and Turkey. Fifth position was shared by Belarus and Bulgaria. In total, wrestlers from 13 countries claimed medals at the European Championship.