

Moving up the rankings

Belarus' top tennis player, Victoria Azarenko, climbs to fifth position in global rankings

Victoria now has 4,630 points, after winning a large tournament in Miami (the USA), defeating Russian Maria Sharapova in the finals, and in Marbella (Spain). Victoria previously occupied eighth place in the WTA rankings, with Danish Caroline Wozniacki in first place, followed by Belgian Kim Clijsters. Russia's Vera Zvonareva is in third place, while two other Belarusians boast places in the top 100: Olga Govortsova is 86th and Anastasia Yekimova is 98th.

Meanwhile, Victoria Azarenko has won the Fed Cup by BNP Paribas Heart Awards-2011 prize — a joint project of the International Tennis Federation and the official sponsor of the Federation Cup, BNP Paribas. The prize aims to recognise and encourage players with unique sporting and personal qualities, who have represented their country at the Federation Cup this year. The Belarusian player won the prize after her successful performance in Euro/Africa Zone Group I, this February, selected as a result of an interactive poll on the official Federation Cup website.

World Championship begins in the spotlight

Belarusian national ice hockey team continues to prepare for World Championship

By Yuri Karpenko

The Belarusian squad has played two matches in Smolensk, against Russia, as part of the new tournament — European Hockey Challenge. In the first match, the host team won 3:2 (in a penalty shootout) while the second match saw Belarus take revenge, with a score of 6:4. This is their first defeat of Russia in the past 11 years (since May 7th, 2000, at the World Championship in St. Petersburg). Both teams' line-ups were experimental, with the matches serving to show how they were performing; the coaches were taking a closer look at each other's squads, adjusting tactics accordingly.

Belarus' next sparring partner was the current world champion, the Czech Republic. Minsk-Arena, the biggest rink in Belarus, hosted the event for the first time, giving local fans a real treat. The match was a success for the hosts, who won 3:2 (after a penalty shootout). Previously, Belarus and the Czech Republic have met eleven times, with all matches won by the Czech squad. The repeat match — held the next day in



Match between Belarus and Czech Republic

Bobruisk — brought victory to the guests, with the same score of 3:2.

The 2011 World Championship is to be hosted by Slovakian Bratislava and Košice from

29th April to 15th May. During the preliminary round, Belarus is to perform in B Group, facing Canada (29th April), Switzerland (1st May) and France (3rd May). If Belarus can finish

no lower than third, it will go through to the second round. Meanwhile, Minsk Yunost hockey players have won the Open Belarusian Hockey Championship for the sixth

time. Yunost defeated Neman in Grodno in the sixth match of the final extra-league series to take gold. The final series ended with the score of 4:2, to Yunost's favour.

Success in selection round

French Aix-les-Bains hosts European Individual Chess Championship

The tournament brought together 400 players, with 85 possessing international ratings of 2,600 and higher. Victory at the serious competition was celebrated by Rus-

sian grandmaster Vladimir Potkin, followed by Radoslaw Wojtaszek of Poland and Judit Polgár of Hungary. Those in the first 23 places have automatically received places at the World Championship, with two Belarusians among them: Sergey Zhigalko and Sergey Azarov.

The pair will attend the 2012 World Cup, after having draws in the final 11th round. Zhigalko is ranked 11th in the final protocol (having won 6 games out of 11, with 4 draws and only one defeat). Azarov is placed 16th (5 victories, 5 draws and 1 defeat).

Medal shower in Dortmund

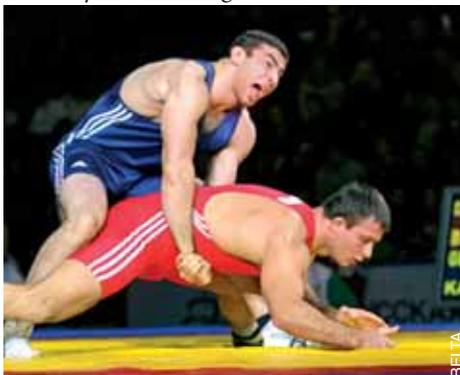
Rich crop of medals collected by Belarusian wrestlers at European Championship, held in Germany

By Kirill Pirogov

Belarus' national freestyle wrestling team occupied fifth-sixth places in the tournament's medal ranking, with silver earned by Alexey Shemarov (under 120kg) and bronze by Vladislav Andreev (55kg). Meanwhile, among the women, Vasilisa Marzalyuk took silver (72kg) and Anna Savenya claimed bronze (67kg). Our Belarusian girls shared fifth-seventh positions with Moldova and Bulgaria.

In Germany, the Greco-Roman wrestlers competed for seven sets of medals,

with Belarusian Timofey Deynichenko defeating Armenia's Artur Aleksanyan in a tough final match



Deynichenko unequalled in Dortmund

(under 96kg). At last year's world and European championships, in Moscow and Baku respectively, Deynichenko won the first silver of his professional career.

In Dortmund, Belarusian Elbek Tazhiyev (55kg) took bronze and, in the Greco-Roman standings, Belarus finished fifth.

Based on the results of the three wrestling styles, Belarus occupies fourth position for its number of medals (6) and in points. Russia is top, with 13 medals, followed by Azerbaijan. The tournament in Germany has been good experience before

the World Championship, to be hosted by Istanbul in September. The results will help our wrestlers gain qualification for the 2012 London Olympics.

All equal at the start?



First matches of championship meet fans' expectations

By Yuri Kovalev

21st Belarusian Football Championship launches, promising to be the most intriguing to date

For five years in a row, BATE Borisov has won the championship and has no intention of relinquishing its title. If BATE wins again, it will set two national records: for number of titles and number of gold medals.

This year, BATE enjoyed a unique break between championships; this is the first time that it has opened its season of official matches so early. In Febru-

ary, Victor Goncharenko's trainees played against Paris Saint-Germain, drawing 2:2 at home and 0:0 away. Clearly, at this time of the year, Belarusian clubs are fit and ready.

Between seasons, the yellow-and-blue Belarusian squad changed its line-up, replacing Sergey Veremko, Sergey Sosnovsky and Mauro Alonso with Filipp Rudik, Andrey Shcherbakov, Alex Porfirio, Yegor Filipenko and Marko Simić. The new-comers have already proved their worth in the matches against Paris Saint-Germain.

Shakhtyor Soligorsk and Dinamo Minsk — BATE's main rivals — have also reinvigorated their teams. Shakhtyor, which celebrates its 50th anniversary this year, has acquired leading Belarusian junior Vladimir Yurchenko, and a number of other skilled players. The head coach of last year's runner-up in the Belarusian championship, Vladimir Zhuravel, seems to be happy with the addition to his squad.

However, Dinamo has demonstrated greater activity on the transfer market. Oleg Vasilenko from Russia, who has headed Dinamo since last year, boasts such new-comers as Vyacheslav Hleb, Leonid Kovel, Alexander Bychenok and Eduard Zhevnerov, alongside some players from the junior team and famous legionaries.

With three obvious bidders for gold, the championship is set to be especially spectacular and intriguing. The remaining nine teams are hoping just to survive amidst such strong competition. This year, the event will have three rounds, with fans anticipating much excitement.