

## BATE springs forward

**Seventh independent Belarusian Football Championship sees bright start**

Early spring saw the first round of the national championship, with matches played over three weeks. BATE Borisov, last year's champion, has advanced from its recent second position in the rankings, by six points. It recently smashed Shakhtyor, which took silver at last year's event. "It is important that we improve our play," noted Victor Goncharenko at BATE's press conference. "We are more reliable in defence and much sharper in attack, with stable results. These are inspiring but we have the potential to do more."

Beyond the Borisov team, the other squads are quite equally matched, leading to much intrigue. BATE's main rivals are Shakhtyor (which has scored only three goals in seven matches so far) and Dinamo Minsk (three defeats, leaving it in tenth position in the national football rankings). There is certainly some room for improvement.

# Bright rehearsal for European Championship

Young graces from 12 countries take part in 10th International Rhythmic Gymnastics Tournament in honour of Olympic champion Marina Lobach, in Minsk

By Yuri Karpenko

Over the past 10 years, the event has helped several gymnasts springboard to fame and success, including Belarusian stars Valeria Kuril'skaya, Svetlana Rudalova, Lyubov Cherkashina and Melita Stanyuta. It is inspiring that the tournament is expanding its geography, with those from Turkey and Azerbaijan joining this year.

Ten sets of medals were up for grabs, in individual and group exercises, divided into two age groups. The host team of Belarus took all but one of the gold medals, when pre-junior Lyaman Khadzhezada of Azerbaijan claimed gold for her routine with the ball (among those born 1999-2000). In the other exercises in this age group

and among the juniors (born 1996-1998) Belarusian representatives starred: Yevgenia Vensko (hoop), Kristina Burachenok (clubs), Yelena Bolotina (hoop and ball), Anna Bozhko (clubs) and Maria Kadobina (ribbon).

Belarus was also unequalled in the all-round and in the group routines. Among the pre-juniors and juniors, Vensko and Kadobina took gold overall. In the group exercises, the host team beat the Latvian and Lithuanian squads to take gold. Seven countries in all climbed the medals podium.

The tournament in Minsk was a dress rehearsal for the European Rhythmic Gymnastics Championship, being hosted by Minsk-Arena in late May.



Tournament in honour of Olympic champion Marina Lobach gathers graces

## Obvious advantage



Belarusian ping pong players perform well

By Kirill Pirogov

**Belarusian women's ping pong team is a success in European Nations League (Challenge Division)**

Our squad performed well in the return home semi-final match against the Czechs, winning 3:0, although the Czech team arrived in Minsk minus some of their stronger members. Victoria Pavlovich was the first to score for the Belarusian squad, beating Hana Matelova, aged 20, 3:0

while her teammate Alexandra Privalova defeated experienced Dana Hadačova 3:2 and Veronika Pavlovich beat skilled Katerina Penkavova 3:1.

In the away match, Belarus also beat the Czech Republic, with a score of 3:1. Owing to its successful performance in the semi-finals, Belarus has secured a place in the finals, to be held this autumn. The team will face Russia, whose team has proven itself stronger than that of Poland.

## Precise landing

**Belarusian athletes earn parachute jumping gold in Azerbaijan**

The team took gold for its precision parachute jumping in Belokan, Azerbaijan, while Ilya Pozdnyakov took a personal gold and Khristina Khlopina grabbed bronze.

Precision parachute

jumps are affected from a height of 1,200m, in groups of 3-5. Once the parachute opens, jumpers must determine wind direction to allow them to hit their target within a radius of 2cm. Mats sized 500x500x40cm are located on the ground with an electric sensor at the centre.

## Returning to high level

By Kirill Karin

**Minsk Horizont's basketball players last won gold in the Belarus Cup in 2000 but are once more on the highest stage of the pedestal**

Horizont's team reached the finals of the competition eight times before disbanding in 2002. Early this season, news of the team's revival intrigued basketball fans, who

wondered whether Anatoly Buyalsky's squad would be able to beat the favourite: Minsk-2006. Their first two matches in the championship were lost by Horizont, which went on to lose another four of its first five matches. However, by the end of the season, the squad had greatly improved, reaching the EuroCup 1/8 finals (the second most important club tournament in Europe).

It even took bronze in the Baltic League. Accordingly, on the eve of the finals for the Belarus Cup, its chances were assessed as 50:50.

The first two final matches saw each club boast one victory each. At the third meeting, in extra-time, Horizont leader Tatiana Likhtarovich scored her three-point goal at the last second. The fourth 'duel' was no less tough, with Minsk-2006

bent on revenge. The teams fought equally throughout the match, but Minsk-2006 grew more exhausted towards the end. Even with a gap of more than 10 points, Sergey Svetnik's team continued to battle but its shots usually failed to find the goal. Horizont deservedly won the spectacular tournament, showing a high level of basketball and a dynamic attitude.

## Second step on medals podium

By Yuri Kovalev

**Belarusian women's handball team returns from Czech Republic's Cheb in high spirits, having competed against four national teams**

Ukraine, the Czech Republic and Portugal were battling Belarus in the international event, which was the Belarusian squad's first serious test since losing to Turkey last December in Portuguese Funchal. Coached by Anatoly Zakladnoy, it was a chance for the team to bounce back from the qualification round of the World Championship four months ago, which left Belarus with a one-year break from official tournaments. The Czech Republic contest was a welcome distraction.

The opening match saw our Belarusian girls lose to the host team (25:34) but they

surprised everyone by beating multi-titled Ukraine. Although the leading Ukrainian players were absent, it does not diminish the significance of the victory. Belarusian core player Alesya Kurchenkova showed her full ability, enthusiastically leading her team to a 31:24 triumph. Portugal was a harder nut to crack, with the teams equally matched in the first half; the second saw Belarus push forward to snatch a 29:27 win. Alas, these two victories were not enough to achieve overall gold, with Ukraine being three points ahead.

Belarus is to face Germany, Hungary and Azerbaijan in the struggle for two places in the 2012 European Championship (settled by the draw held in Holland). Norway (the current European champion) and Holland (the host team) automatically qualify for the final stage of the 2012



Belarusian team's attacks yield results

European Women's Handball Championship. A further 14 squads will join them; 28 teams are to be split into 7 groups, playing two away and home matches, with the top two squads from each group earning a place at the championship.

Belarusian handball team head coach Anatoly Zakladnoy has commented on the draw, saying, "The teams from Hungary and Germany

are almost equally matched and are both more likely to go through than Belarus but time will tell. I believe that we're showing some signs of progress. Last year, we played against Germany. I think it's possible to play them and win. Meanwhile, Azerbaijan is an unusual team, comprising Russian and Ukrainian players. They've played a great deal and are motivated to aim high."