

Again on podium

Series of unlucky results succeeded at last by more successful matches for Belarusian judo wrestlers

Athens Olympic champion Igor Makarov has earned silver at the Grand Prix tournament in Baku in the most prestigious weight category (+100 kg). This not only improves his medal score but his ranking. In the opening match, the Belarusian defeated Remzi Kocaturk of Turkey. He then crushed Martin Padar of Estonia within less than three minutes. It took longer to defeat Russian Soslan Bostanov before confidently snatching a win from Latvian Vladimirs Osnachs in the semi-finals.

In the ultimate match, Igor faced Egypt's Islam El Shehabi: the favourite among the top three and in excellent physical shape. The Egyptian recently won a continental forum in Dakar, to become African champion for the eighth time. From the very beginning of the match, the Belarusian tried to snatch the initiative.

However, his opponent was larger, with strong defence skills. Unfortunately, during the third minute of the match, El Shehabi claimed decisive points, leaving no chance for Igor to turn the situation to his favour. In addition, Alexander Steshenko (81kg) of Belarus wrestled well in Baku, reaching the quarter-finals, where he faced titled host athlete Elhan Radzhabli. Although equally matched initially, the Azerbaijani finally claimed victory and went on to win silver.

Another title for Victoria

Championship doubles title plus single's silver for Victoria Azarenko at WTA tournament in Madrid

By Yuri Karpenko

Our Belarusian tennis leader is now seeded fourth, the highest ever ranking for our tennis players. In the quarter-finals of the Madrid event, Victoria beat Lucie Šafářová of the Czech Republic in three sets, and knocked out Julia Georges of Germany in the semi-finals. "I was strongly motivated to win this match, showing my best tennis of the season," stressed Azarenko. "I had to set the pace and prevent her from dominating, which worked."

In the finals, Victoria confronted Petra Kvitová, playing for 100 minutes. Both lost their serves and the Czech player managed to realise four break-points, while Victoria had only three. A tie break settled the match, with Kvitová claiming victory. She had been stronger in the decisive matches of the second set. "Petra had an excellent week and deserved this win," emphasised



Victoria Azarenko demonstrates top tennis at WTA tournament in Madrid

Azarenko after the match. "There were moments when I could have played more skilfully but tennis is tennis. She was stronger today."

Commenting on her world ranking of fourth, Victoria noted, "It's nice to feel part of your home coun-

try. There are many tennis schools in Belarus and I'm pleased to realise that the upcoming generation sees me as an example, among others. I will do my best to improve."

In the doubles event in Madrid, Victoria and Russia's Maria

Kirilenko defeated Czech Květa Peschke and Slovenia's Katarina Srebotnik. In the quarter-finals, the Belarusian-Russian duo knocked out first seeded Italian Flavia Pennetta and Gisela Dulko from Argentina.

Medals from Poznan

By Yuri Kovalev

Belarusian kayak and canoe rowers gain good experience and bring home medals from regattas

As a rule, our sportsmen bring home sets of medals. However, their recent crop of eleven medals, during the first round of the World Cup, held in Poland, is exceptional: six gold, one silver and four bronze. More importantly, six of the awards were earned in Olympic events. Belarus was the admitted leader overall.

Oleg Yurenya's success in the most prestigious men's kayak singles race is particularly significant.

His main rival in the 1,000m was famed Norwegian Eirik Larsen, who missed last season. Larsen aimed to mark his return with a win but the young Belarusian was one second faster. Another well-known Scandinavian, Anders Gustafsson of Sweden, was two seconds behind the Belarusian rower. In the 5,000m race, Yurenya snatched a win from Norway's Oyvind Solberg and Portugal's Fernando Pimenta by half a second.

The women's kayak four took gold in the 500m: a welcome victory after the team's dry spell. Their first win was last summer, during a cup round in Duisburg, when they claimed bronze. This

time, Irina Pomelova, Nadezhda Popok, Olga Khudenko and Marina Poltoran were the first to cross the finish line. In the doubles kayak, young Khudenko and more experienced Poltoran came third, while Poltoran also took an individual gold — in the 5,000m, repeating her long distance race skills.

Olympic champions Roman Petrushenko and Vadim Makhnev confirmed their advantage in the kayak double, in their favourite 500m race. They also earned silver in the 1,000m, with their Beijing Olympic crew mates Alexey Abalmasov and Artur Litvinchuk (with whom they achieved success).



Giro d'Italia route

By Kirill Karin

Belarusian cyclists take part in prestigious super multi-day Giro d'Italia race

Since 1909, the Giro d'Italia has been part of the three Grand

Four Belarusians in Giro d'Italia

Tour races (alongside the Tour de France and Vuelta). This year is its 94th anniversary, with Belarus represented on the Spanish team Movistar by Vasily Kirienko, 29, and Bronislav Samoïlov, 25. In addition, Alexander Kuchinsky, from Russian Katyusha, 31, and Konstantin Sivtsov, 28, from High Road (USA), cycle for the squad.

The multi-day race consists of 21 rounds and finishes on May 29th in Milan. It covers 3522.5km and, due to its mountainous terrain, is viewed as the most complicated of recent years. Previously, the best Belarusian achievement in the Giro d'Italia

was claimed by Konstantin Sivtsov, who gained 16th position overall in 2009. He also won a separate round at the Italian multi-day race: an 8km leg between Morbegno and Bergamo, which was 209km long.

This season, Vasily Kirienko is showing the best results, having won the 2nd stage of the multi-day Tour of the Basque Country. He was also placed second in a two-day highway race called the Critérium International, hosted by the island of Corsica. Bronislav Samoïlov came third in the first round of the multi-day Tour de Romandía, held in Switzerland.

Lesson to be learnt



Belarusians prove weaker in match against Latvia

Belarusian national hockey team knocked out of qualification stage of World Championship, held in Slovakia, but keeps place in elite division

Our Belarusian hockey players have given perhaps their worst performance of recent years. Head coach Eduard Zankovets' forecast of reaching the quarter-finals has been dashed after the squad was beaten by formidable Canada and promising Switzerland. The first match against Canada was an exciting one; in the first two periods, Belarus was quite active yet failed to take advantage of its opportunities. Meanwhile, Canada employed every chance to score, closing with a 4:1 lead. The match against Switzerland was also no piece of cake, as the opponent was flawless. The team easily swept aside our National Hockey League players, Mikhail Grabovsky and Andrey Kostitsyn, winning as a result. Compared to Canada and Switzerland, France had been viewed as an easier target

but they also turned out to be fast, with sharp attack skills. Their goalkeeper, Cristobal Huet, played exceptionally well, swinging the outcome of the match to a 2:1 victory during overtime.

As a result, Belarus was fighting for survival. Belarus managed to defeat Austria (7:2), but lost to Latvia (3:6) before beating Slovenia in a decisive match (7:1). This enables our national squad to stay in the elite hockey group, which it first joined in 1998. It has stayed for 12 seasons and has only twice before dropped below 14th position (as it has now). Our squad's performance in Slovakia has revealed obvious training shortcomings. With lack of physical skill, it is hard to talk about tactical strength. Another impression is that not all of our strongest players have been invited to join the national team: we lacked sufficient leaders to set the necessary pace. Hopefully, at the next championship, Belarus will show improvement.