

Makarov's successful return to judo arena

Belarusian judo wrestler brilliantly wins Grand Prix round in China

By Dmitry Kirillov

Four out of five matches in the over 200kg weight category have been won by Makarov by 'ippon'; in two he needed just over four minutes to claim victory. This bodes well for him facing Egypt's Islam El-Shehabi, Brazil's Rafael Silva and Korean Sung-Min Kim at the next Olympics (each being ranked in the top ten worldwide). This will be Makarov's

first Olympic appearance since Athens, as he failed to qualify for Beijing. He changed weight category and many anticipated the end of his career but his recent win allows him to go through to London.

"Igor was upset by his failures," notes prominent Belarusian judo coach Natik Bagirov. "Accordingly, he's thirsty for a win. His four victories in Tsingtao have pushed him from 21st place



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Final fight between Igor Makarov and Kim Sung-Min

to 16th worldwide."

Only the top 22 in each weight category gain places

at the Olympics. Belarusian Alexander Steshenko (under 81kg) was placed 9th in

China, being defeated in the 1/8 finals by world champion Ivan Nifontov, from Russia.

New hockey strategies

By Valentin Orlov

Belarusian national ice hockey team placed second in Austria Cup

The second tournament with the new coach from Finland, talented Kari Heikkil, went well. A month ago, at the Polesie Cup, Belarusians lost all three matches (3:18) to finish last. At that time the coach presented an experimental line-up while almost the strongest line-up of the national squad headed for Austria. During the final match against Switzerland, Belarus found itself behind three times and then caught up three times. Just 90 seconds before the final whistle, the Belarusian goal-keeper, Andrey Mezin, was substituted by a sixth field player and the fate of the Austria Cup was settled by a series of after-match penalties. Belarus secured the advantage but lost it to Julien Sprunger's confident performance and Switzerland eventually championed, to take home the trophy.

Guru of snow hills Thomas Hutchinson

In Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction*, Mr. Wolf specialises in crisis management in the gangster world, teaching his colleagues how best to deal with tough situations, in the quickest and most rational way. Thomas Hutchinson is such a guru in the world of sport. Rather than an austere suit, cold look and German punctiliousness, the red head exudes positivity and will often be found wearing a T-shirt in Canadian national colours. He may not look like a successful coach but he has led the Canadian national snowboard team to five Olympic medals. Three were claimed in Vancouver in 2010 (including gold earned by Jasey-Jay Anderson and Maëlle Ricker).

By Denis Komarov

In Belarus, Thomas Hutchinson is now building a training system for our snowboarders to ensure the presence of our snowboarders at the Snowboard Park in Sochi.

How did you come to Belarus?

A friend of mine — a referee at the Olympics — received a call from Belarus asking for a snowboard coach. He contacted me to ask if I could recommend anyone and I immediately thought of myself! I'd been working with the Canadian national team for nine years and was longing for a change.

Did you have any idea of what Belarus was like?

Not at all! I had a vague idea of its geographical position but no clue as to Belarusian snowboarding. My wife and I arrived in Belarus in October 2009. We met Natalia Petkevich [Chair of the Belarusian Ski Union] and, outside the meeting room, my wife immediately said that I should go ahead, so I agreed.

In Canada, you had a stable job training the Olympic team, with serious prospects...

I like a challenge and the idea of setting up a new system attracted me greatly.

The Belarusian snowboarding team is young and inexperienced.

In accepting the job, I was asked to push at least one athlete

8 and 12 years to prepare an Olympic athlete although, looking at my trainees, I think we can cut this to four years, using a special system. Participating in a great many



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towards the Olympics. We can't speak of gold medals but that is the ultimate aim. You're right that the guys I'm training have no experience of snowboarding but they are athletes in other sports, which is a good start. It tends to take between

events is exhausting so, for the first two years, it's more important to concentrate on training. Only then should they attempt high ranking events.

How many athletes are you training?

I'm taking four for training in Canada and the USA. They've come into snowboarding from other sports: gymnastics and synchronised swimming. Two were already part of the Belarusian national team, with some snowboarding technique, but we started from scratch anyway. As for the girls, last July, one of them began studying with my wife how to put a snowboard on. Another was an amateur but due to gymnastics experience and sense of co-ordination their strength and balance have greatly improved. In July, they could hardly move on a snowboard; by March, they were doing one metre half-pipe jumps; from scratch, it would usually take five years for that!

How do you communicate with them? Do they speak good English?

Oh, it's one of the funniest things! At first, I had to use my mobile phone to demonstrate movements and tricks. We're much further along today.

Does Belarus have enough facilities for snowboarding to become a popular sport?

Surprisingly, most people think you need steep slopes but it's not true. Jasey-Jay Anderson — a Canadian Olympic champion and multi-time world champion — has always trained on slopes of no more than 100m, which are easily found in Belarus. I can assure you that, with the proper approach, such slopes are sufficient. In fact, they're easier to use than real mountains. As for popularity, snowboarding is a great way to spend free time, although it's easier to learn to ski initially. During your first hour and a half on a snowboard, you'll feel miserable but it is fun!



Snowboarding is like skateboarding; it has its own cult following which is spreading fast. People take part in sports to have fun, so snowboarding is taking off like an epidemic. It's not hard to find promising young snowboarders.

Do you really think so?

Just choose a rainy day and go to the slopes. Anyone out there in that weather is team material; those who only go in sunny weather aren't committed. Of course, not everyone out in the rain can be automatically accepted. Snowboarding requires constant training; the slope and weather conditions are of secondary importance. Children are children and athletes are the same; only the strong willed achieve real results. Temptations are everywhere but, in sport, what you eat in the morning matters. I had an athlete in Canada who had brilliant talent but, outside our training sessions, he couldn't control himself, sleeping away half of our time. He achieved nothing as a result. I hope the Belarusian squad won't slip into such a pattern and make the same mistakes.