

Names of would-be rivals announced

By Dmitry Baranovsky

Two Belarusian teams to perform in quarter-finals of European handball tournaments

The European Handball Federation Cup is to see Dynamo Minsk reach the quarter finals of its prestigious tournament. In the return match of the 1/8 finals, they lost their away match against the Spanish Granollers — 25:27. However, their overall points allow them to qualify, as their home match at Minsk's Palace of Sports ended in victory — 35:27.

HC Meshkov from Brest snatched two confident wins in the 1/8 finals of the Cup Winners' Cup, playing at their home Victoria Complex against Swiss Lugi — 37:19 and 25:24. A draw held recently has settled the Belarusian clubs' next opponents — in the quarter finals of the Cup Winners' Cup. Dynamo Minsk is to face German Göttingen twice (11th in the Bundesliga) while Brest Meshkov is to play Spanish Aragón (Zaragoza) — ranked fifth in its national tournament.

Belarusian handball experiences transfer scandal

Just a couple of years ago, the Belarusian Handball Championship — which rarely sees many transfers — was hit by Boris Pukhovskiy's transfer from SKA to Dinamo Minsk; he was almost 'stolen' away from the famous squad. Pukhovskiy blended in with his new club well, becoming a leader of the team, playing in European Cups and for the Belarusian national squad.

Now, history has unexpectedly reversed. Boris went for try-outs with Hungarian Veszprém without official permission, to the disapproval of the leadership of the Minsk team, which dissolved his contract. During a match between Dinamo Minsk and German Göttingen, in the ¼ final round of the EHF Cup, Boris was absent from the court, and has failed to sign a contract with the Hungarians yet.

"Unfortunately, scandal has been unavoidable," notes Mr. Pukhovskiy. "I did tell the club leadership that I wanted to try-out but they weren't understanding." According to Pukhovskiy, during the off-season, he should have several options open to him, being much in demand. He has always played a leading position in national championships and European Cups.

Darya Domracheva becomes world champion

Darya Domracheva brilliantly starts at World Biathlon Championships in German Ruhpolding, winning two medals and a world champion title after three races

By Vladimir Dmitriev

The World Biathlon Championships has become a high point of the season notable for a fight between Belarusian Darya Domracheva and German Magdalena Neuner. From the first starts, the both sportswomen claimed for supremacy at each race, also competing for the Big Crystal Globe (awarded to the best biathlete of Cup rounds). In Ruhpolding, Domracheva and Neuner came to the fore again, meeting face to face in the mixed relay; sadly, the Belarusian team failed to win a medal. Accordingly, the major fight between sportswomen took place in the sprint. During the 7.5km race, the Belarusian made no failures but spent too much time on finding the target and lost over 15 seconds to Neuner. The German won the same time in the pursuit which was a true sporting drama.



Darya Domracheva wins gold in pursuit race at World Biathlon Championships

Domracheva was evidently quicker covering the distance, twice cutting the gap; however, her rival twice restored the position on the account of quick shooting.

On the third firing range, Neuner seemed winning; Domracheva made a mistake while the German accordingly doubled her advantages and chances for success. To

splitter the last doubts, Neuner needed to precisely shot for the last time. However, she failed twice! The Belarusian, in turn, shot all five targets and preserved her supremacy

until the finish line.

Actually, the women's pursuit was close to another scandal related to the distribution of medals after the finish. The first scandal occurred during the mixed relay when the panel with target failed to work and Norwegian Ole Einar Børndalen was sent to a penalty lag; the accident deprived the Slovenian team of four of gold. Jakov Fak was first to cross the finish line but the 30 seconds — which judges decided to minus from the Norwegian team — made Scandinavians world champions. After the pursuit finished, the German team voiced their protest, suspecting the equipment was operating incorrectly; they claimed to 'delete' one lost target from Neuner's result. If this would happen, then Darya Domracheva would have win silver. However, after a long discussion, the decision remained unchanged.

Dances and pirouettes on Minsk's hospitable ice

Minsk-Arena hosts ISU World Junior Figure Skating Championships, bringing together 207 figure skaters from 52 countries

For a whole week, young athletes fought for medals, with the Russians claiming the greatest number, followed by China and the USA.



Belarusian pair Victoria Kovaleva and Yuri Belyaev

In the individual skating, Han Yan of China (earning 222.45 points) claimed gold for his short and voluntary programmes. He was followed by Joshua Farris of the USA (221.97) while bronze went to another American — Jason Brown (214.90). Unfortunately, Belarusian figure skater Pavel Ignatenko came last among thirty entrants in the short programme, knocking him out of

the tournament.

Yulia Lipnitskaya of Russia (187.05 points) won the women's gold, with Gracie Gold of the USA (171.85) taking silver

and Russian Adelina Sotnikova (168.45) following in third place. The latter was last year's champion and is currently considered to be one of the most promising figure skaters worldwide. Belarusian figure skater Kristina Zakharenko came 29th (among 31) in the short programme and failed to qualify for the voluntary competition.

Victoria Sinitsyna and Ruslan Zhiganshin (153.81) won gold for their performance, while Russian duo Alexandra Stepanova and Ivan Bukin (147.74) took silver and Alexandra Aldridge and Daniel Eaton from the USA (141.14) followed behind. Belarusian duo Victoria Kovaleva and Yuri Belyaev finished 18th (of 20 pairs) in the voluntary programme, earning 58.37 points; they came 19th after two disciplines.

Wenjing Sui and Cong Han of China (175.69) won the short and voluntary programmes, followed by teammates Xiaoyu Yu and Yang Jin (167.48) and Russian Vasilisa Davankova and Andrey Deputat (153.66). Belarusian Maria Polyakova and Mikhail Fomichev were knocked out after their short programme, finishing 19th out of 20 couples.

The task for all Belarusian figure skaters before the tournament was to reach the top twenty. In the final standings, Russia earned 5 medals (1 gold, 1 silver and 2 bronze), followed by China (2, 1, 0) and the USA (0, 2, 2). The programme finished with a colourful gala-performance, featuring those in 1st to 4th place, as well as those invited by the organisers.

Andrey Kostitsyn re-writes history

By Valentin Orlov

One of Belarus' best hockey players, national team forward Andrey Kostitsyn, has moved from the NHL's Montreal to Nashville, with Montreal taking the decision on the last day of the 'transfer window'

The Canadian team has been unsatisfied with his results this season (13 matches with no goals). However, in the second match with his new team, Kostitsyn managed to open the score against Buffalo: his 100th puck with the National Hockey League. Moreover, he earned an 'assist point' in the middle of the third period. Interestingly, Kostitsyn is Belarus' top performer with the NHL, having played 381 matches and scoring 99 goals with Montreal (over 379 matches and seven seasons).

Mikhail Grabovsky is the second most successful Belarusian in the NHL, also playing forward (82 goals over 304 matches) and Vladimir Tsyplov is third (69 goals). The latter ended his performance abroad in 2001, after playing 331 matches with Los Angeles and Buffalo. An-



Andrey Kostitsyn in action

drey Kostitsyn's younger brother, Sergey, is close behind, with 62 NHL goals to date.

Interestingly, Sergey also plays for Nashville, where he moved two years ago from Montreal, after a series of failures. He is now playing much better, showing himself to be a team leader. Mikhail Grabovsky has also broken his 'goal drought' of 14 matches. In the last minute of the match against strong Montreal, he scored twice, bringing victory to his team and allowing Toronto's new coach, Randy Carlyle, to debut with a victory.