

It's sometimes not enough just to want to play well

Belarusian hockey players perform at 2012 IIHF World Championship in Helsinki

By Dmitry Baranovsky

A serious test lies ahead for our national squad, although Finnish coach Kari Heikkilä has every faith in them. Recently, he signed a new contract with Dinamo Minsk (playing in the Continental Hockey League).

Optimistically, Mr. Heikkilä is unworried by our less than brilliant results, losing to Sweden and Finland in friendly matches; he notes that Belarus played well in the Skoda Cup, coming second in Bratislava.

"We've had a hard month of training, with many team members noting their exhaustion. However, after the

match against Norway at the Skoda Cup, I asked them, 'Do you think the Norwegians are less tired? Yet you beat them.' We're approaching the World Championship in good spirits but need to further improve our performance. All our players need to give their utmost to training. If they do so, I think we'll have a chance of returning home in a good mood!" asserts Mr. Heikkilä.

However, the start of the World Championship was frustrating for the Belarusian team. Defeat by the Finnish squad in the first match of the tournament was no tragedy — as the World Champion was no easy rival, and the

Belarusians allowed through only one Finnish goal. The match against Switzerland was far more important from the point of view of tournament prospects. The Belarusians fought hard, twice equalising, and had enough opportunities to move ahead, but the Swiss finally claimed victory. The second defeat in a row has significantly worsened the position of the Belarusian team but we are still in with a chance.

Heikkilä's squad is still finding its feet, doing better with each appearance on the ice. Secondly, the players have had a difficult season, with many performing leading roles in their clubs.



Belarus' Roman Graborenko (L) fights for puck with Switzerland's Matthias Bieber

Moreover, the team is yet to play with its optimal lineup. On the eve of travelling to Helsinki, Omsk Avangard forward Alexey Kaly-

uzhny, known as a strong player, joined the squad. Meanwhile, for obvious reasons, the Kostitsyn brothers (performing in the NHL)

were unable to take part in the friendly matches (their Nashville team was fighting for a place in the finals of the Stanley Cup).



Sergey Martynov at shooting range

Shots have proven truly high class

Belarusian marksman Sergey Martynov opens season with victory, as at end of last season

By Dmitry Komarov

He has won the World Cup round, which was held at the same shooting range scheduled to host the coming Olympics (within just two months). His victory is certainly pleasing; although he only beat his rivals in the prone rifle event by one point, in shooting terms, this is significant.

He is modest in his self-assessment, noting the difficult weather conditions which have prevented him from earning the maximum number of points. Despite scoring 595 points in qualification, he has

earned the maximum of 600 points several times previously (already registered in the Guinness Book of Records). Meanwhile, his rivals have often failed to score 595.

His Belarusian shooting colleague Ilya Chergeiko, 19, came third. Pleasingly, in 2010, he won silver at the Youth Olympic Games. This season, he has shown his ability to be ranked among the leading marksmen, qualifying for the Olympic Games. Commenting on his brilliant performance, Ilya does not hide his ambitions, saying, "I'm aiming for a medal within two months, at the Olympic Games."

Poirée arrives to train team

Raphaël Poirée coaching Belarusian national men's biathlon squad

The Frenchman is to sign a contract with the Belarusian Biathlon Federation to coach the national team in the nearest time, although his tasks are yet to be announced. The collaboration promises to be interesting, as the many-time world champion and Olympic medallist has been coaching since

2007. He has distinguished himself in training the Norwegian national junior team and Norwegian biathlete Tarjei Bø (whom he assisted in marksmanship). However, successful work with the Belarusian national team could take Poirée to a new level. Unlike the women's team, the men's squad has failed to demonstrate impressive results in recent years.

Except for Sergey Novik-

ov's silver medal at the Olympics in Vancouver, our athletes have rarely entered the top 30 at World Cup events. In inviting the famous French biathlete, the Belarusian Biathlon Federation hopes to see him repeat the success of German coach Klaus Siebert. Several years ago, the German began working with the country's women's team, taking it to a leading position in world biathlon.

Game with mixed success

By Ivan Rafalsky

Minsk's Horizont and Grodno's Olympia placed second and third in Baltic Women's Basketball League

The Final Four tournament, held in Lida, also included Belarusian team Minsk-2006, in addition to the 12-time League champion Lithuanian Vici Aistes Kaunas.

In the semi-finals, Horizont (headed by the former coach of the Belarusian national team, Anatoly Buyalsky) defeated Minsk-2006 in the last seconds. It met Vici Aistes in the finals and, sadly, lost to the Lithuanians. The match proved challenging, with the opponent playing slightly more precisely, being self-collected. They took their 13th title, leaving Horizont



Female basketball players from Minsk's Horizont in action (in white)

to claim second place. The Minsk-based team took some consolation in becoming national champion a week later at the same Olympia Sports Complex, in Lida.

Third place went to Grodno's Olympia (coached by Alexander Shimkovyuk) after losing to the Lithuanians in the semi-finals and beating Minsk-2006.