

Game off on wrong foot

The Belarusian national team has not reached the top eight squads at the World Hockey Championship, failing to meet head coach Kari Heikkilä's hopes in Helsinki

By Dmitry Baranovsky

The match against the Swiss national team was vital, while the presence of Canada, the USA and Slovakia in our group automatically made each match significant. Unfortunately, we lacked sufficient strength and saw defeat from Finland (0:1) and Switzerland (2:3).

Despite victory over Kazakhstan (3:2), a small miracle was required against the Americans and Slovaks to reach the play-offs. After missing two goals from the USA at the beginning of the first half — leaving the score at 0:2 — Belarus

managed to equalise and even had opportunities to take the lead. However, inconsistent play and lack of luck led to our opponent taking victory.

Mr. Heikkilä remains optimistic, even after such a frustrating defeat. However, neither he, nor the presence of the Kostitsyn brothers (joining after their Nashville club lost in the Stanley Cup), could help the Belarusian national team.

On the eve of the key match against the Slovak team, the most experienced goal keeper, Andrey Mezin, staged a walk out from the Belarusian squad. Accord-

ing to Mr. Heikkilä, this left the team's spirits dejected, leading to a frustrating defeat of 1:5. The team now has absolutely no chance of reaching the play-offs.

Scoring points from the 2012 IIHF World Championship are now being calculated to determine who will go to the Olympics in Sochi directly and who will enter the qualification tournament (struggling for three more places). The rest will have to be content to attend as guests. Heikkilä's team will be trying to 'jump into the last wagon' in its matches against the French and Canadians — no easy task.



Belarus' Alexey Ugarov (L) fights for puck with Alex Goligoski of the USA

Places at Olympics reserved



Belarusian boxer Sergey Korneev wins

By Valentin Orlov

Belarusian boxers win three medals at London Olympics. One has been earned by World Championship prize holder Sergey Korneev while two more have been claimed at the qualification tournament in Turkish Trabzone

Ten Belarusian boxers struggled for Olympic places, while just two succeeded in reaching the semi-finals and finals — which guaranteed licenses. Vazgen Safaryants was a success in the 60kg category, beating all other Belarusians. He was forced

to bow out of the finals, on a doctor's assessment; luckily, the match against Lithuanian Evaldas Petrauskas was a formality, as he had gained his entry to the Olympics in the semi-finals. "Safaryants boxed brilliantly!" concisely asserts the head coach of the national team, Valery Kornilov.

Safaryants' success was expected, due to his wonderful performance in the World Boxing Series for the second year. Meanwhile, Mikhail Dolgolevets' ticket was a pleasant surprise — gained 'under additional results'. He lost his tough semi-final match (81kg category) to Turkish Bahram Muzaffer but justice reigned

in the finals, where Muzaffer defeated Azerbaijani Vatan Huseynli. The win brought an Olympic license to Mikhail as a result. "With my coach, I've done a good job. Over the past six months, since the World Championship in Baku, I've advanced significantly, which cannot but bring results," emphasises Mikhail.

Athens Olympics prize holder, heavy weight boxer Victor Zuyev, was not so lucky, despite being one of the strongest fighters in the World Boxing Series. He defeated World Champion Roman Kaptonenko of Ukraine in his first match but lost to Russian champion Magomed Omarov the next day (another Olympic contender). Zuyev, like World Championship prize holder Magomed Nurudinov (who was smashed by Turkish Abdülkadir Köroğlu) now has no chance of fighting in the Olympics in London.

"All the European teams performed at the Turkish tournament; such boxing giants as Poland and Germany only won a small number of licenses or, even, none at all," notes Mr. Kornilov. "Meanwhile, Belarus is now ahead of many European states, having three Olympic tickets. I believe we've won an optimal number and can now start training for the major competition, which is held every four years."

Earning bronze medal in Europe

Andrey Kazusenok (under 90kg) wins bronze at European Judo Championship, held in Russian Chelyabinsk

In the match for bronze, Andrey Kazusenok defeated French Roman Buffe. Another represent-

ative of Belarus, Yevgeny Bedulin (under 100kg), came fourth after losing to Russian Zafar Makhmadov, in the match for bronze. The remaining team members failed to reach the final struggle for medals.



Andrey Kazusenok

Max Mirny returns to the top

Belarus boasts two world #1 tennis players: Victoria Azarenko and Max Mirny. Victoria has held her first seed position for several weeks now, and recently played brilliantly at a tournament in Madrid



Max Mirny (L) and Daniel Nestor (far side) in action

By Ivan Rafalsky

Meanwhile, Max, who partners Daniel Nestor of Canada, has returned to first ranking in the men's doubles. Max's first seed rating has been largely helped by the Madrid tournament being delayed by one week (negating the points earned by Bob and Mike Bryan at the event in 2011). The American brothers led for 90 weeks and are the closest rivals to Max and Daniel.

Prior to the tournament, Daniel Nestor had been ranked first seed for 116th weeks; for Mirny, it was his 40th week. Previously, Mirny partnered Swedish Jonas Bjorkman, winning many titles. However, on parting ways, many incorrectly forecast the decline

of his tennis career.

"Frankly, I didn't think about how the delay would affect the points for a new rating," muses Mr. Mirny. "However, I don't think it's pure luck. Our new status is the result of successful play and hard training. To top the world ratings is a great honour, of which a professional can only dream. I'm proud to neighbour other great doubles tennis players."

Victoria Azarenko is also taking the lead. Even her defeat in the finals of the tournament in Madrid by Serena Williams couldn't shake her from her throne. Her major rivals have already completed their games, leaving the Belarusian with a brilliant chance to 'slip through' on her least favourite court surface, keeping her rating as first seed.