

Neighbours honour him

One of Belarus' top footballers, Valentin Belkevich, named best Ukrainian legionary of past 20 years, as voted by experts and fans

The Belarusian half-back used to play for Dynamo Kiev, having moved there in 1996. He helped the squad claim the Ukrainian championship title eight times and, in 1999, reached the Champions League semi-finals. For four seasons in a row (2000/01, 2001/02, 2002/03, 2003/04) Belkevich was named top Ukrainian footballer. He has played 56 matches with the Belarusian national team and has scored ten goals.

Stroitel outstrips Etta

Minsk volleyballers enter 1/16 finals of European Challenge Cup

In the return match of the second qualification round, the Belarusian champion confidently defeated the visiting club from Finland: Etta from Oulu. The final score of 3:1 at the Minsk Palace of Sports gathered 1,400 fans for the 103 minute game. Previously, Belarus had defeated the Finnish team away with the same score of 3:1 (26:16, 25:23, 19:25, 25:12). At the next stage, Belarus is to face Austrian Posojilnica.

Football retreat

Belarusian national football team ends season placed 64th worldwide, according to International Football Federation

Last year, the Belarusian football squad, trained by Bernd Stange from Germany, played 11 matches: two wins, four draws and five defeats. In February 2011, Belarus (Georgy Kondratiev has recently begun to coach it) was ranked 36th so has dropped significantly in the rankings. For the 2014 World Championship group, Spain is ranked first, with France 15th, Georgia 74th and Finland 86th. The top ten also includes Holland, Germany, Uruguay, England, Brazil, Portugal, Croatia, Italy and Argentina. FIFA's December rankings cover 208 squads.

As before

An extended sitting to discuss issues relating to the 2012 Belarusian football championship has decided to leave arrangements unchanged. As in the previous two years, the event will have three stages, with each team playing 33 matches. The first round is to start on March 24-25th, closing on November 25th. Teams are to play the opening matches on artificial pitches. The ¼ final matches are scheduled for March 17-18th. The match for the Belarus Super Cup, between BATE and Gomel, should be held on March 5th.



Team captains at 8th Christmas Tournament for the prizes of the President of Belarus

Amateurs like professionals

Minsk has hosted traditional 8th Christmas International Amateur Ice Hockey Tournament for the prizes of the President of Belarus

By Dmitry Komarov

From January 4th to 7th, national teams from Austria, Canada, Russia, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Finland, Sweden and Belarus fought on three Minsk ice rinks: at Minsk Arena, the Ice Palace and the Sports Palace.

According to the Chairman of the Belarusian Hockey Federation, Yevgeny Vorsin, twelve teams were keen to take part but only eight were able to attend, as the organisers were 'restricted by a finite number of days for the competition'. Those chosen for the two qualifying subgroups trained thoroughly in preparation. Despite the amateur status of the tournament, some of the squad members have already



Hosts take revenge for last year's loss

topped the hockey hierarchy, taking part and winning medals at world championships and the

Olympic Games. Several of the players are quite famous, having long been idols of amateur

sportsmen. The current head coach of Belarus' national team, Kari Heikkilä, took to the rink for the Finnish team.

Despite their maturity (in sporting terms) the legends didn't disappoint, even at the preliminary stage. The matches saw a tough struggle worthy of professional ice hockey. The Belarusians have won and, in the finals, the President's team sought revenge on the Russians (who defeated them last year, on penalties) and celebrated a clear victory — 4:1.

In previous years, the Belarusian team has won the Christmas tournament five times (in 2005, 2006, 2008, 2009 and 2010). The Russians have claimed success twice.



Driver Alexander Polishchuk — ready for Dakar

Extreme trip to Lima using MAZ vehicles

The Dakar Rally is a unique competition. Only the strongest and toughest withstand two weeks of extreme desert driving. Over the years, the race has come to symbolise a true test of skill and endurance; even participation is prestigious. This year, Belarusian trucks are taking part for the first time — across Latin America.

Two Belarusian crews, driven by Alexander Vasilevsky and Alexander Polishchuk, are headed for Peru's capital of Lima. The first race for the test drivers of the Minsk Automobile Works is going rather well compared to last year's debut for MAZ in the *Silk Road* race — where the drawbacks of the vehicles became apparent. This time, the better of the two crews, headed by Alexander Polishchuk, finished 61st among 73 trucks in the first

section of 14. By the end of the three day event, the crew finished in 42nd place: a fair result.

The first five rounds of the Dakar Rally pass through Argentina, before crossing the Andes (a one-time crossing — unlike previous years) and entering the dunes of the world's driest desert: Atacama. Rain falls only once every few years. The next five stages cross Chile and Peru — an unexplored part of the route, where sand dunes and mountains may bring unpleasant surprises. The rally ends on January 15th, in Peru's capital of Lima, where the results will be assessed.

"Our major task is to gauge the competition and assess our own strength, while deciding how to use our vehicles to best advantage," explains Grigory Patskevich, a member of the team, giving one of his few interviews.

Journalists make their choice

Alexandra Gerasimenya and Alim Selimov have been named Belarus' top athletes of 2011, following a traditional poll of sports journalists, organised for the 53rd time. A record number of media representatives — 138 — took part in the vote.

73 athletes, representing 26 events, were nominated, with the top six positions secured by sports-women. Swimmer Alexandra Gerasimenya earned the greatest number of points, having won the prestigious 100m freestyle at the World Championships in Shanghai — a true sensation. Meanwhile, weightlifter Anastasia Novikova — a world champion — came second, followed by biathlete Darya Domracheva. Greco Roman wres-



Alexandra Gerasimenya

ler Alim Selimov topped the men, having earned his second gold at the World Championships in Turkish Istanbul. He was returning after a long break due to injury. He was neighbored by freestyle wrestler Alexey Shemarov, who became the world champion in Istanbul in the under 120kg category.

The men's sabre fencing team won the 'Best Non-Playing Team' nomination, rewarded for their sensational silver medal at the World Championship. They beat the national canoe and kayak crew (often a favourite with journalists), despite their eight World Championship medals.



Alim Selimov