

Handball players aim for world tournament

Belarus' national handball team begins 2013 World Championship play-offs

After defeating teams from Romania and Luxembourg, Belarus must twice beat the strong Slovaks, to join the world's top handball squads. Their first match was held in Košice, while the return will be hosted by Belarus' largest sports facility: Minsk-Arena. It is set to be a fateful time for Belarusian handball.

Belarusian handballers have twice performed at top level. In 2008, they reached the finals of the European Championship. However, they haven't returned to the World Championship since 1995 — when Andrey Parashchenko and Mikhail Yakimovich brought Belarus to the play-offs.

According to the head coach of the Belarusian national handball team, Yuri Shevtsov, Slovakia is a serious opponent. "They have a very strong goal-keeper, alongside defence; every player is aggressive, powerful and flexible. František Šulc and Daniel Valo are key players. Fortunately, leader Peter Kukučka will be absent from one match, but we must defeat the Slovaks both with Kukučka and without him," asserts Mr. Shevtsov, on the eve of their departure for Košice.

The Belarusians do have their own trump card: the world's handball star, Sergey Rutenko. The Champions League winner and five time champion of Spain (where he plays for Barcelona) changed his sporting citizenship four years ago to allow him to play for Belarus. Regardless of traditional ideas about a balanced team, the major hopes of Belarusian fans will be pinned on Rutenko in these forthcoming matches.

Major basketball returns with hope

Belarusian national women's basketball team plays last matches on eve of European Championship selection round

Our basketball players played two matches at the Sports Palace in Minsk, confidently defeating Russia in their first game 69:53 and losing 49:55 in the second. Anastasia Veremeenko, a central player with Turkish Fenerbahçe SK, was the best on the Belarusian squad.

Under the guidance of Anatoly Buyalsky the team has achieved its highest results to date. He was replaced by Lithuanian Rimantas Grigas, following the squad's failure at the last European Championship.

The team will continue training for the start of the 2013 European Championship selection round, facing Hungary, Portugal, Israel and Ukraine in Group A. The top two squads from five qualifying groups will go through to the final stage of the European Championship, held within a year in France.

Mirny conquers Paris again

Max Mirny wins French Open, partnering Daniel Nestor of Canada, confidently defeating American brothers Bob and Mike Bryan 6:4, 6:4, in doubles final

By Vladimir Dmitriev

Mirny's latest victory is his fourth at the Roland Garros. His powerful service and attacking style tends to suit the fast courts, but he has always done especially well on the clay courts of the Grand Slam French series. It was here that he found success in 2005 and 2006 (partnering Jonas Björkman of Sweden) and in 2011 and 2012 (with Canadian Daniel Nestor). The well-known tennis player now boasts six doubles trophies from Grand Slam tournaments.

Max and Daniel's road to the finals was certainly impressive.

Seeded first, the Belarusian and Canadian duo won every set and only once endured a tie-break. In the decisive match, the Bryan brothers seemed to initially have the upper hand, playing fluidly, with confident service. Max and Daniel appeared a little inconsistent but, as soon as they settled, established their familiar interaction. The Bryan brothers then faced great problems in returning their strong play. Mirny and Nestor ended by winning on two break-points.

Mirny has now celebrated his 44th victory at ATP tournaments and Nestor his 78th.



Max Mirny(L) and Daniel Nestor with winner's cup at Roland Garros

Earning gold and silver

Belarusian athletes earn 8 medals (1 gold and 7 silver) at 28th European Rhythmic Gymnastics Championship, hosted by Russian Nizhny Novgorod



Performance lifts the spirits

The Belarusian squad has returned with 3 medals (1 gold and 2 silver) in adult group exercises, and 5 silver medals in junior events. Marina Goncharova, Anastasia Ivankova, Natalia Leshchik, Alexandra Narkevich, Ksenia Sankovich and Alina Tumilovich took gold for their exercise with 3 ribbons and hoops, earning 28,000 points. Those from Bulgaria came second while bronze went to Italy. Our squad came second in the exercise with 5 balls (28,050) behind only Russia (28,800), while Bulgaria claimed bronze (28,000).

Another silver medal in group exercises was earned by the Belarusian squad in the all-round event on the first day of the European Championships — June 1st. The Belarusian team earned 56,325 points after two events (28,300+28,025). The gold in the all-round (an Olympic

discipline) went to the hosts of the European Championship while the girls from Italy came third. In total, teams from 17 countries performed group exercises.

In the individual exercises, medals were only given in the Olympic all-round (as is traditional in even years). Unfortunately, we had to be content with fourth place from Lyubov Cherkashina (112,700 points for hoop, ball, clubs and ribbon exercises) and sixth from Melitina Stanyuta (111,900 points) among 19 entrants.

Yevgenia Kanayeva of Russia became the all-round European champion. She took gold at the Beijing Games in 2008 and was European champion in the all-round in 2008 and 2010, also boasting three victories in all-round events at World Championships (in 2009, 2010 and 2011). Russian Alexandra Merkulo-

va came second while bronze went to Aliya Garayeva of Azerbaijan.

In the junior events (under 15) our gymnasts earned five silver medals, with four claimed in the finals of separate exercises during the individual competition. Belarusian Yelena Bolotina took silver for her hoop exercise (behind Diana Borisova of Russia) while bronze went to Nilufar Niftaliyeva of Azerbaijan. Yekaterina Galkina won silver in two exercises (ball and ribbon) while Russian Yana Kudryavtseva took gold and Ukrainian Anastasia Mulmina claimed bronze. Alexandra Soldatova of Russia claimed gold for the ribbon while bronze went to Gulsum Shafizada of Azerbaijan. Maria Kadobina of Belarus took silver in the clubs, behind Russian Yulia Sinitsyna, while bronze went to Gabriela Khvedelidze of Georgia.

The Belarusian juniors took another silver medal on June 2nd, during a team tournament. After four exercises, the Belarusian squad had earned 106,550 points, while Yekaterina Galkina came second with the ball, Yelena Bolotina with the hoop, Maria Kadobina with the clubs and Yekaterina Galkina with the ribbon. Russia took gold (Diana Borisova, Yana Kudryavtseva, Yulia Sinitsyna and Alexandra Soldatova) and Georgia claimed bronze (Gabriela Khvedelidze, Salome Phajava and Sophio Pharulava). An impressive 34 states took part in junior competitions, while 35 countries participated in the 28th European Rhythmic Gymnastics Championship.

Jubilee celebrated in the regular course of work

Last week, Belarus' national football team played a friendly match against Lithuania, following on from several other such games, of which Belarus has won four and Lithuania two (with one draw). This time, there was another draw (1:1); Dynamo Minsk team captain Stanislav Dragun scored.

The Belarusian squad's long-term leader, Alexander Kulchy, aged 38, was also celebrating his 100th match, played for the Belarusian national team. This is an absolute record! The Chairman of the Belarusian Football Federation, Sergey Rumas, awarded Kulchy a special UEFA medal and a commander's cap in honour of the anniversary, while the squad presented him with a national T-shirt signed by the whole team.

The warm yet solemn presentation was more pleasing than the game itself, in which Belarus managed to claim ownership of the ball many times and reach the opponent's net ... without scoring. There were few thrilling moments for fans, as the head coach of the Belarusian national team, Georgy Kondratyev, admits. He adds, "We wanted to win very much and tried our best, but failed to score in the first half. Our guests waited for a mistake from us, scored and then reinforced their defence, making it extremely difficult for us to break through. We need to work on this."