



Belarusian athletes take part in solemn opening ceremony of 30th Summer Olympic Games

# Olympic athletes may soon claim medals

Almost two hundred Belarusian athletes at London Olympiad, with goal of 25 medals

By Dmitry Baranovsky

The Sports and Tourism Ministry's goal of 25 medals is yet to kick off, although optimism continues regarding our chances. Sadly, Athens Olympic 100m champion Yulia Nesterenko is absent from London, due to injury, alongside weightlifter Andrey Aryamov — who took gold in Beijing — and hammer thrower Vadim Devyatovsky.

Alexandra Gerasimenya — last year's swimming world champion — came 6th in the semi-finals of the 100m butterfly (58.41 seconds) which

isn't enough to see her through to the finals. Gymnast Dmitry Kasperovich has also been unlucky, finishing just 0.133 points behind Ukrainian Igor Radivilov in the vault (2 qualifying attempts). Belarusian Yelena Tel-pushkina came a disappointing 34th among 37 entrants in the dressage eventing and Alexandra Pavlovich has been knocked out in the second round of the table tennis.

However, the Belarusian favourites are yet to join the battle. Yekaterina Karsten is easily through to the next round in academic rowing, look-

ing confident for a medal at her sixth Olympiad. Weightlifters Anastasia Novikova and Andrey Rybakov seriously intend to fight for gold, as does the canoe and kayak squad, headed by Vladimir Shantarovich (having done well in Beijing).

Hammer thrower Ivan Tikhon, shot putter Nadezhda Ostapchuk, cyclist Olga Panarina, tennis players Victoria Azarenko and Max Mirny, wrestler Alexey Shemarov, World Boxing Champion Sergey Korneev and marksman Sergey Martynov all have high hopes of success, as do our

gymnasts. The potential is vast but competition in London is strong.

Swimmer Michael Phelps was unrivalled four years ago yet must now be satisfied with silver. Alexander Vinokurov of Kazakhstan celebrated victory in the road cycling race, but seriously considered retiring a year ago, following a thigh fracture. Mark Cavendish, who was predicted the major prize, failed even to join the leaders. No doubt, this Olympiad has surprises in store but we hope that our athletes will play a major role in this colourful and intriguing sporting event.

# Footballers begin with victory

First matches show vividly that Belarus has great chance of reaching next stage

By Vladimir Dmitriev

A thrilling match against New Zealand marked our debut at the Olympic Games, keeping the audience in suspense from the first to the last minute. Both sides had plenty of opportunity to score but Belarus was the only one to send a ball into the net — in extra time. Within the first half minute, Dmitry Baga had headed the ball from Renan Bressan's pass.

The Brazilian with the Belarusian

passport made a huge contribution to our victory over New Zealand and, in the match against Brazil, Renan opened the score. Although coach Georgy Kondratiev will be disappointed to have seen his team lose its second match, having let in three goals, even sceptics admit that Belarus gave iconic Brazil a run for its money over the 90 minute game. Moreover, Brazil had sent its 'dream team'.

If our Belarusian squad can maintain the lead begun by Bressan,



Moment from the Belarus — Brazil match

reaching the next stage could become reality. The next match, against the strong Egyptian team, will decide our fate. Well-coordinated and serious, but lacking consistency (as is common in young teams) the team is not

unbeatable. Our team's desire for victory and obvious discipline can only be a subject of envy at the Games, despite their lack of experience and skill. Even the Brazilians consider us a worthy opponent.

# Alexander Hleb races to rescue BATE team

By Kirill Pirogov

Only two Belarusian clubs are still battling in European Cup tournaments. BATE Borisov has made an important step on its way to the Champions League Group Stage, after drawing 0:0 in its return match against Vardar. BATE is joined by Gomel's squad — the only Belarusian representative in the Europa League.

The return match of the second qualifying round in the Europa League, hosted by the Gomel Stadium, aroused true excitement among fans — although most were more interested in Liverpool than in Renova! The winner of the match between the Belarusians and the Macedonians would have the chance of facing the famous British club. Sadly, Macedonia took victory but failed to score enough points to qualify for the next round.

Soligorsk Shakhtyor and Novopolotsk Naftan are each knocked out, with Shakhtyor failing dismally to improve on its home draw of 1:1 against Austrian Rid, despite having at least one chance of scoring another goal. The Austrian squad now continues through to the next round while Shakhtyor continues its unsuccessful Euro Cup tradition (ex-



Alexander Hleb

cept for Intertoto Cup the team from Soligorsk has been always knocked out in the first round of international tournaments).

Naftan's failure had less of a bitter edge. Following Crvena Zvezda's 4:3 win in Vitebsk, the Belarusian team was expecting a tough match in Belgrade. By the 15th minute, the Serb team had scored twice and seemed set to reach the next round. However, their exultancy didn't last long. Even after losing their captain (Nikita Bukatkin was withdrawn in the 68th minute) Naftan managed to take the initiative and, eight minutes before the final whistle, took the lead — 3:2! However, Marko Vesovic managed to score the decisive goal during extra time.

Next week, BATE will continue in the Champions League, despite having lost its leaders to the Olympics on the eve of its match against Debrecen of Hungary. However, taking their place are Roman Vasilyuk — who recently signed a contract with the club — and Alexander Hleb — several times named as Belarus' best footballer. Hleb's contract lasts until August 30th. The half-back has noted his desire to 'thank the club which launched his sporting career'. We'll soon see how efficient his assistance will be, as Hleb will be playing at the Borisov stadium in BATE colours for the first time in 12 years.