

Sergey Martynov shoots like a champion

By Sergey Klimushkin

With a world record of 600 points, Martynov easily proved his supremacy in the first round, and achieved another record — 705.5 points — in the final. The President's greeting reads: 'I heartily congratulate you on such a bright performance, which has brought the first gold medal to the Belarusian team at the 2012 Olympic Games. I'm convinced that your victory will inspire our Olympians to further sporting achievements.'

President Lukashenko noted that Sergey Martynov's performance has brought happiness to fans of the sport worldwide, while showing his determination and true skill. Martynov is a true 'professor' of shooting and has long been 'related' to a rifle. Lying in a prone position seems to be the same as lying on the sofa for him! Of course, we

can only guess at his real inner feelings and what may be hidden behind his external calm.

As I watched Sergey mount the podium to collect his medal, I couldn't help recalling our recent meeting in frostbitten February, when Martynov was training in Minsk's Gai Street. I went to interview him and, of course, we tackled the forthcoming summer Games. At the end of our conversation, I asked him about his feelings on going to London and he responded that he held hopes but wasn't indulging in 'any thoughts at all'. I understood what he meant since an ideal marksman must be able to switch off and simply shoot, undistracted by thoughts of medals or points. He can flick a switch, hear a crack and claim a gold medal without excessive words.

Even during the morning Olympic qualification round,

Martynov inspired correspondents from all over the world to speak of him with adoration and admiration, repeating the world record of 600 points (the maximum amount). He has managed to do this six times during his rich career and sees nothing surprising in it. Shrugging his shoulders, he noted, "Yes, I've scored. What of it? Frankly, it was only exciting near the end, when the thought of missing tickles your nerves." However, this is the first time that Martynov has shot so accurately at an Olympiad.

Before London, he has attended five Olympic Games: from Seoul in 1988 and all the others — except Barcelona in 1992. His most successful were those held in Sydney and Athens — where he claimed two bronze medals. However, he failed to do well in Beijing and only finished 8th in the finals in his 'favourite' event — after

coming 6th in the previous round.

"It's very difficult in our sport to win and almost impossible to forecast the result. So many are at approximately the same level — some 30 people are aiming for victory. Before this, I hadn't won an Olympiad. I haven't even been European champion, although I've been world champion twice. My luck may be changing," he smiles.

This time, everything went perfectly, creating a 'royal flush'. Martynov's hawk eye and steady hand combined to bring Olympic gold, which was fantastic, although good fortune also played a hand. "Many factors need to coincide for victory. In addition, you need to be lucky, doing everything well while your opponents fail," he admits.

At the Royal Artillery Barracks, we saw the strong



nerves of all those taking part; it quite sent shivers down the spine. The fate of the medals seemed a little uncertain but Martynov kept his cool

and dominated on the day, leaving no chance of gold to the others. The world's most accurate marksman clearly lives in Belarus.

Trying on silver but dreaming of gold



Alexandra Gerasimenya has won two Olympic medals in London for her swimming although, a few weeks ago, only she herself and her coach, Yelena Klimova, may have believed it possible. In fact, in the entire independent history of Belarusian swimming, she is the first to win an Olympic medal. None of our swimmers have even come close, presenting no threat to their rivals. This may be why no one believed in Gerasimenya; there have been no swimming world champions, particularly in the prestigious 100m freestyle event, in the history of Belarusian swimming... prior to Alexandra.

The qualifying heats of the Olympic tournament saw her end 7th, which didn't inspire confidence. Of course, even a few hundredths of a second can be crucial!

Her less than impressive performance in the qualifying round left her to take the 8th lane in the final but many were delighted simply to see her taking part. Alexandra had her own opinion, actually creating a new national record for her swim: 53.38 seconds. Afterwards, discussing her silver medal success, she seemed almost upset and discouraged, as she felt she had misjudged her stamina. Dutch Ranomi Kromowidjojo managed to spurt powerfully ahead in the final 20m, snatching gold from Gerasimenya, who sped along from the very start and lead for most of the race. However, she failed to leave enough reserves for final acceleration. She sighed, "Yes, I'm a little upset. Of course, I wanted gold. It was possible but I didn't manage it. I'm not sure what happened, as I know that I'm the fastest and could catch my rivals."

She soon had the chance to prove her-

self again — in the 50m freestyle. She set another national record but once more had to be content with silver, as Ms. Kromowidjojo again claimed gold. Her rival set off like a torpedo and, perhaps, only Gerasimenya could have caught her. Alas, the Belarusian was slightly delayed on the starting signal, and it is impossible to win back such time over the shortest of Olympic distances. Naturally, there are two sides to the coin; there wouldn't have been a beautiful finishing spurt without a starting hitch.

In London, Ms. Gerasimenya won two silver medals over two days, becoming the most titled swimmer in the history of Belarusian sport. In comparison, the whole Russian team has won two swimming medals, despite being considered a favourite at the current Olympics. Nevertheless, she leaves the capital of the United Kingdom with mixed feelings, having lost both times to Dutch Ranomi Kromowidjojo. It seems impossible to compete with this phenomenal swimmer at present but, knowing our Alexandra, her goal will be to beat her Dutch rival — perhaps in four years at Olympic Rio de Janeiro...

"I don't create idols," she asserts. "Some people's achievements are impressive, so I want to equal them. Michael Phelps won the Olympic gold 18 times but I still don't idolise him. I'll just try to swim even faster. In the near future, I plan to swim at the European Championship, maybe even at the World Championship. Then, I'll take a short break, as I want to finish my degree at the Belarusian State Economic University, becoming an economist-manager. I should have graduated this year but postponed due to training for the Olympics. Now, I'll have the chance to complete my studies."

Beautiful place on medals podium

By Dmitry Mashutin

Irina Kulesha of Belarus — Olympic bronze medallist in the under 75kg category — lifts 269kg in two exercises

The event was full of thrills, culminating in a tough struggle between Russian Natalia Zabolotnaya and Svetlana Podobedova of Kazakhstan. Interestingly, Ms. Podobedova has only recently begun to compete under the Kazakh flag, having represented Russia previously. Prior to the Beijing Games, the Russian Federation forbade her from changing citizenship, fearing competition, despite all the usual terms being met.

In London, Ms. Zabolotnaya and Ms. Podobedova set four Olympic records, both lifting 291kg. However, the Kazakh sportswoman was awarded the gold medal because of her

lighter body weight (by a few grams). From the Belarusian village of Oberovshchina (in the Brest Region) she previously found herself in fourth position at most events, watching the final fight from afar. Russian weightlifter Nadezhda Yevstyukhina took the championship title from Podobedova at the previous World Championship but failed to lift the initial weight of 125kg at the Games, helping the Belarusian on her way to her medal.

Among a trio of favourites, Belarusian record breaker Irina Kulesha began her snatch exercise from a 'warm-up' position of 116kg; she ended at 121kg, failing to lift 125kg. However, due to Yevstyukhina's absence, this was enough to bring her a medal — after lifting 148kg in the clean & jerk. Only 20kg separated Kulesha from Zabolotnaya, ranked second.

