

Something to fight for

By Igor Grishin

Victoria Azarenko keeps first seed ranking while Irina Shimanovich wins her second junior tennis tournament in a row

In the latest WTA ratings, Belarusian tennis player Victoria Azarenko has kept her top seeding, although Poland's Agnieszka Radwańska has removed Maria Sharapova from second place.

Our junior athletes aren't lagging behind, with Minsker Irina Shimanovich winning her second junior tennis tournament in a row. This time, she achieved success in Poznań, beating Karoline Kurz, 16, in the final match (ranked 317th) — 6:4, 6:3.

Other achievements include Yulia Izotova from Minsk winning the European tournament doubles for under 16s in Lithuanian Siauliai. Partnering Russian Anna Kholodnaya, she helped defeat top seeded Polina Novikova and Anzhelika Shapovalova from Russia — 6:7, 6:4, 10:8.

Belarusian Andrey Vasilevsky partnered Ukrainian Artem Smirnov in defeating the Polish hosts of the tournament in the doubles final: Michał Przysiężny and Grzegorz Panfil — 7:6, 6:0. This is the eighth doubles tournament for Vasilevsky.

Belarusian female handball players to perform in Group 3

European qualification tournaments for 2013 World Women's Handball Championship, hosted by Serbia from December 7th-22nd, are drawn in Vienna

The Belarusian women's national team will be playing in Group 3, facing Poland, Lithuania and Italy in the first round. In total, teams are playing in three groups of four squads plus one group of three.

Each squad will play home and away matches — from October 3rd to December 2nd, 2012. If all teams of the group agree, qualification could then take place quickly, with the ultimate match hosted by any of the rivals (from November 28th to December 2nd, 2012). The winner of each group will then go through to the second stage: a play-off round of 16 teams, divided into 8 pairs. This is scheduled for June 1st-2nd and June 8th-9th, 2013 (one home and one away match).

The final eight will qualify for the 2013 World Championship while the 12 worst teams from the 2012 European Championship, hosted by Serbia from December 4th-16th, will also receive tickets to the play-off round. Norway and Serbia have automatic entry to the World Championship — Norway having won last year and Serbia being the host team. Two more tickets will be automatically given to the best two squads of the 2012 continental championship.



BATE footballers beat Israeli Hapoel in first match of Champions League play-offs

BATE one step from Champions League

BATE Borisov FC has made an important step towards the Champions League Group Stage, with Victor Goncharenko's trainees defeating Israeli Hapoel in the first match of the qualification play-offs at Minsk's Dynamo Stadium

The match against the club from Kiryat Shmona didn't promise to be easy but, after achieving a 2:0 score, BATE has created a promising 'safety margin' before the return match.

Interestingly, the Borisov team has two leading players: Renan Bressan and Alexander Hleb. Both have played in the main line-up, focusing on attack. Hleb tends to take the role of a strategic player while Bressan does his best to provoke defensive play from his opponent. Although they saw mixed success, the match was certainly in their favour from the first minutes.

It was only a matter of time before a goal was scored, occurring in

the 29th minute, when Mozolevsky skilfully delivered a pass with pinpoint accuracy to Vitaly Rodionov. The latter turned sharply and shot low into the bottom corner of the net. Rodionov scored the next goal just after the 70th minute, when Dusan Matovic was sent off after attempting to stop Rodionov. With a score of 2:0, BATE's chances of reaching the next stage of the Champions League have been raised considerably.

Despite their success, BATE's players are remaining rather reserved, knowing that they must face the second part of the battle; it's too early to celebrate.

The major hero of the match, Vitaly Rodionov, notes, "Certainly, the 'cushion' we've made is large but it isn't enough to allow us to rest on our laurels. The Israeli players know how to work the ball and brilliantly avoided our attacks. I think everyone realises that the Israeli team is a tough nut to crack so our return meeting will be difficult, especially taking into account the Israeli climate."

One of the country's top footballers, Alexander Hleb, agrees, saying, "One more goal would have been preferable, making it a difficult score to beat in a return match. The temperature is very hot over there."

The Israelis will also have the advantage of playing at home. The squad's head coach, Gili Landau, muses, "The defeat hasn't affected our self-confidence as we have a good club which is developing from game to game. Yes, we've lost this time but we believe that we'll do better at home, winning with a result which will satisfy us."

Fortunately, his Borisov colleague, Victor Goncharenko, is well aware of this and finished the victorious press conference with the firm statement that 'there won't be an overconfident mood in Israel'. "We'll be fighting to the last minute!" he asserts.

Quite different Olympic Games

By Egor Glebov

In all, 31 Belarusian athletes are travelling to London for the Paralympic Games, each commanding great respect, regardless of whether they reach the finals in any event. They deserve a medal simply for their determination in overcoming difficulties. However, there is no doubt that they have a desire for victory in their hearts.

The Belarusian national team will be taking part in athletics, swimming, rowing, fencing, judo, cycling and weightlifting, with

some chance of medals, notes the Secretary General of the Belarusian Paralympic Committee, Nikolay Shudeiko. "80 percent of those taking part went to Beijing, including those who won medals. We'll surely claim awards in all kinds of events."

Tamara Sivakova, who won the discus in Beijing and took silver in the shot putt, is among the favourites, alongside previous gold medallists in the tandem road race Irina Fedotova and Yelena Drozdova and long jumper Olga Zinkevich. Of course, multi Paralympic champion Lyudmila Volchek is sure to delight fans but these old hands are also



Belarusian Paralympic athletes aim for victory

joined by fresh young athletes, who are sure to cause a stir and step up to the podium.

The Paralympic Games in Athens 2004 were the most successful for Belarus, with 30 athletes bringing home 29 awards: 10 gold, 12 silver and 7 bronze. Four years ago, our squad took 13 medals from Beijing but the Paralympic Committee is avoiding setting firm targets,

despite their optimism. Fortunately, no acclimatisation is needed for London (as hindered many of our athletes in Beijing) and the Chinese will lack the home advantage (in Beijing, they won nearly half of all medals). In the UK, a wider range of athletes will have the chance to claim medals; we hope, there will be many Belarusians among them.