

Everything shaping up well now

Minsk's Stroitel volleyballers successfully kick off Challenge Cup play-offs, beating Dinamo București in 1/16 finals at Minsk's Sports Palace

The Romanian volleyball players initially led in the first two sets, but Belarus proved stronger, with scores of 25:21 and 25:20. The third finished with an even more confident win of 25:17.

A place in the 1/8 finals will be determined by a return match between the Belarusian champion and Romanian championship bronze medallist Dinamo București; the winner will go on to the next round, facing either Greek Olympiakos or Bulgarian Levski.

Belarusian Grodno Kommunalnik is also playing well in the Challenge Cup, defeating Greek Aris in the 1/16 finals (3:1). The return match is being hosted by Greek Thessaloniki, with the winner to play either French Rennes or Russian Urals, depending on who claims victory.

Dinamo heading for play-offs

Dinamo handballers continue in Champions League Group Stage, facing Bundesliga team Berlin in the seventh round

One of Germany's leading squads was viewed as a favourite. Their defeat of their strong rival (31:24) has given Dinamo a place in the play-offs.

Early in the game, Berlin seized the initiative and led until the 22nd minute, when Sergey Bebeskko's trainees managed to equalise. By the break, they were one goal up and, in the second half, kept their guests at bay, bringing their advantage to seven goals by the final minute. Dinamo's Ukrainian legionary Sergey Onufrienko scored the most goals, with nine accurate shots, followed by Montenegrin Vasko Ševaljević with five and Denis Rutenko and Dmitry Nikulenko, each with four.

The victory is the fourth in a row for Dinamo, who have beaten Pick and twice defeated Swiss Schaffhausen. The Minskers are currently ranked third in their group, behind Barcelona and Berlin (having lost to Berlin early in the tournament).

Darya Domracheva challenges all leading positions

Belarusian biathlete takes first place in sprint during second stage of Biathlon World Cup, held in Austrian Hochfilzen

By Yegor Glebov

Over a distance of 7.5km, with two sets of shooting, Darya Domracheva boasted a time of 22 minutes 24.7 seconds: ahead of her nearest rival, Kaisa Mäkäräinen of Finland, by 4.7 seconds. Norwegian Tora Berger took third place.

Ms. Domracheva took her first lap unusually slowly and then made a mistake on her first shoot, leaving the range in disappointing 23rd position, 38 seconds behind the leader, Polish Krystyna Pałka. However, in the second half of the race, she sped up and, after flawless shooting at the second range, took the lead.

Due to adverse weather, some leading skiers were placed later in the start list by their coaches — including the overall World Cup favourite, Norwegian Tora Berger. Naturally, Darya was concerned for her main rival's performance but she managed to keep her lead, as Ms. Berger made a mistake at the second shooting range and lacked enough speed to rise above third place.

Another two Belarusian athletes reached the top 40: Nadezhda Skardino (+40.2 seconds) who was without a shooting fault, shared 7th place with Slovenian Teja Gregorin, having given the best sprint result of her ca-



Darya Domracheva tops sprint results

reer. Belarusian Anastasia Dubarezova was 36th (with 3 faults and a speed of 1 minute 46.7 seconds). Irina Krivko, 21, took 42nd place; her speed (+ 1 minute 57.2 seconds with no misses) was her best in the sprint to date.

Following the results

of two stages of the World Cup, the leader of the Belarusian team, Darya Domracheva, is in second place overall, with only Norwegian Tora Berger ahead.

This season, Ms. Domracheva has taken three World Cup individual medals: silver in the individual

15km and in the 10km pursuit (first stage in Swedish Östersund); and gold in the 7.5km sprint (second stage in Austrian Hochfilzen). So far, Darya has 244 points, while Ms. Berger has 282; the top three is closed by Russian Olga Vilukhina, with 172 points.

Useful lessons can be learnt from defeat

By Igor Leshin

Dinamo hockey squad aim to return to true form

After a shaky start to the season, leading to head coach Kari Heikkilä from Finland losing his position, the Minsk team are being guided by Alexander Andrievsky. Their luck is yet to change however. After a sensational defeat by Avtomobilist, ranked last in the championship, the team partially redeemed itself against Yugra. Sadly, their match against Avangard Omsk (for whom national forward Sergey Kostitsyn plays) led to another humiliation. Unfortunately, Kostitsyn indirectly helped the rival team score in the second half, when Frolov and Piganovich scored the second and third goals using his passes. The match finished with a confident win by Avangard of 5:3.

After Avangard, the Minskers faced a frustrating defeat from Kazakh Barys — 2:7. The Bela-



Dinamo Minsk play Dinamo Riga

rusian squad missed 17 pucks across three matches. Therefore, before the home match against Dinamo Riga, the coaching staff focused on reliable defence and managed to evoke a response from the players; the team beat Dinamo Riga — 2:1. Dinamo Minsk will continue its home series of

six matches after a ten day break in the CHL Championship, facing Neftekhimik Nizhnekamsk on December 19th, Cherepovets' Severstal on December 22nd, Donetsk Donbass on December 27th, Spartak Moscow on December 29th and Dinamo Riga again on January 3rd.

BATE's final note strikes minor chord

BATE has been knocked out of the Champions League, playing its last group stage match in Munich — against Bavaria

The Borisov team's sensational win over the German legends in the previous match added intrigue to the game but, this time, Bavaria confidently won — 4:1. Victor Goncharenko's players began reasonably well, making just one error in the first half which, eventually, resulted in a German goal. In the 22nd minute, Bavaria's Swiss Xherdan Shaqiri approached the penalty line from the left, dodging BATE defender Denis Polyakov before passing to the centre. Mario Gomez then promptly sent the ball into Andrey Gorbunov's net.

BATE had the chance to remedy the situation early in the second half, when Jérôme Boateng was sent off for kicking Borisov forward Artem Kontsevov's leg. However, the head coach admits, "Sadly, we lost our way after receiving this advantage. I can't help thinking that we'd have been better off playing with a full eleven players on each side. Our nerves got the better of us."

The Germans, in turn, took advantage of their rivals' embarrassment to score twice in just 11 minutes. Initially, Bastian Schweinsteiger passed from the penalty line to Thomas Muller, who scored. Later, the Munich team scored again, when Xherdan Shaqiri received a pass from Mario Gomez and outmanoeuvred Maxim Borodachev, heading the ball home.

BATE scored once, when defender Yegor Filipenko's entry onto the pitch led to a successful kick from the penalty area. Unfortunately, Bavaria had already scored four times (the last by David Alba) so the outcome of the match was a foregone conclusion.

Afterwards, Alexander Hleb stressed that BATE should look back on its Champions League season as valuable experience. "The team has many talented players but their only practise is in Belarus' championship, which tends to be rather weak. If it were more challenging, we'd develop more quickly and be ready for intense matches like those in the Champions League. Nevertheless, BATE is moving in the right direction, although with modest steps," he said.