

Hleb chooses Russia

The world of football is full of shifts. Renan Bressan, Marko Šimić and Andrey Shcherbakov have prolonged their contracts with Belarusian champion BATE Borisov, while Vyacheslav Hleb has joined Gomel's club

Meanwhile, Alexander Hleb is the major newsmaker, having cancelled his contract with Spanish Barcelona ahead of schedule, by mutual consent, in late January (the day before the transfer window closed in Western Europe). Belarus' top footballer received proposals from Stuttgart and Olympiacos, choosing the Greek team. However, Olympiacos behaved incorrectly and made it clear for Hleb (having already passed his medical examination) that they aren't ready to sign a contract with him.

The press speculated that he might join Anji, Moscow's Spartak, Lokomotiv or Dynamo, St. Petersburg Zenit, Dynamo Kiev, Kuban or, even, Chicago Fire (in the American MLS). However, he finally chose Russian Krylia Sovetov, signing a contract with Samara club for the coming season. Hleb has already appeared on the field with his new team (currently preparing for the season in Holland), playing a friendly match against Dutch WHC; he made two goal passes, with his team winning 3:1. "I don't regret anything: my move or failure to play for Olympiacos or any other famous club. It's Fate. I didn't see much sense in training with Barcelona knowing that I wouldn't appear on the field under any circumstances. I'd rather play!" Alexander admits.

Truly golden tatami

Belarusian athletes earn 15 medals at Belarus Open Sambo Championship

By Dmitry Komashko

Gold medals and a championship title have been awarded to Andrey Kurlypo (under 52kg), Vae Tutkhalyan (under 62kg), Alexander Koksha (under 68kg), Alexey Stepankov (under 82kg), Yevgeny Semochkin (under 100kg) and Yuri Rybak (above 100kg). Silver went to Ivan Aniskevich (under 57kg), Igor Sedoy (under 68kg), Alexey Romanchik (under 74kg) and Vasily Kuznetsov (under 100kg). Bronze medals were claimed by Narek Arakelyan and Dmitry Aleksashin (both under 52kg), Arif Bagirov (under 57kg), Igor Moshko (under 74kg) and Suleiman Askerov (under 100kg).

Yuri Rybak's performance was the most spectacular. The athlete, who has earned the highest awards at Sambo and judo tournaments many times, defeated Russia's Roman Mikhailchenko — 12:0!

The only weight category to lack Belarusian medals was the under 90kg. The leader of our team in this category, Andrey Kazusenok, is currently training for the 2012 Olympics, and was performing at a Judo event in Düsseldorf, Germany.

Interestingly, this Belarusian championship was the most 'open' over recent years, gathering squads from Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Latvia, Morocco, Serbia, Turkmenistan, South



Fighting in under 52kg category: Andrey Kurlypo (Belarus) vs Beimbet Kanzhanov (Kazakhstan)

Korea, Greece, Ukraine, Lithuania, Russia, Uzbekistan, Turkey, Romania, Tajikistan, Armenia and Iran, at Minsk's Palace of Sports. For the fifth year in a row, the tournament was a World Cup round and a qualification stage of the World Championship — to be held in November in Minsk.

"We are now training hard both

for the European Championship, being hosted by Moscow in May, and for the World Championship, scheduled for November in Minsk," notes the head coach of the Belarusian squad, Vyacheslav Kot. "Our Open Belarus Championship (for prizes of the President of the Republic of Belarus) has been a

qualification round for those grand events: a useful practice ground."

Over all, Belarus claimed 6 gold medals, 4 silver and 5 bronze, taking the lead position. The squad was followed by Russia (1, 2, 3), Kazakhstan (1, 2, 0), Georgia (1, 1, 3), Ukraine (0, 0, 6) and Bulgaria (0, 0, 1).

Unsuccessful home trampoline

Raubichi Sports Complex hosts FIS Freestyle Ski World Cup round for second time

By Ivan Rafalsky

Belarusian athletes have been left without medals at the home stage of the World Cup, hosted by Raubichi. "The team performed in line with its state of readiness," notes the head coach of the Belarusian national team, Nikolay Kozeko. He explains that, despite pre-season training being almost thwarted, the aerial skiers did well, and were in with a chance of several medals.

Anton Kushnir — the top aerialist of 2010 and the last year's World Cup champion (held for the first time at Raubichi Sports Complex) — was suffering from an injury received on the eve of the World Cup first stage. His season has been less than successful, only managing bronze in January; it hardly serves as grounds for Olympic hopes. In Raubichi, Kushnir gave his all. To reach the final, a less difficult programme would have been sufficient. However, Anton wished to perform brilliantly at home and, as the result of a fall, finished 17th overall.

Dmitry Dashchinsky and Denis Osipov managed to almost repeat last year's performance, when two Belarusians claimed medals (Osipov being one). This time, Osipov arrived in Raubichi with an impressive group of fans and a strong desire to win. He came third in the qualification round but failed to find a place among the top four in the finals. "The wind was against me," he sighs. "Moreover, the snow was too soft and wet, making the



Belarusian athlete Alexandra Romanovskaya

skis slide badly; it was difficult to calculate speed."

Criticising the weather hardly changes the situation, as every skier had their own battle against fitful wind, rain and loose, sticky snow. It was especially frustrating for Dashchinsky — the most experienced athlete on the Belarusian team, who was unrivalled in the qualification round, claiming first place. He had a good chance of going through to the super-finals at the very least but, alas, lost his balance during landing and ended in 9th place.

"There was a gust of wind and, as

I lacked speed, I had to accelerate by twisting; it was just bad luck," mused Dmitry, after his poor landing. "The whole team has done less than brilliantly this season; even in the preliminary stage, we failed to practise well triple somersaults — as needed for the World Cup rounds. Thankfully, there is no World Championship or Winter Olympics this season, so many leading skiers have been absent."

The head coach of the Belarusian team hasn't lost optimism though, blaming thwarted pre-season training for most of the team's failure during the home stage, alongside tricky and

unpredictable weather conditions. Moreover, financial difficulties have curtailed training and an unexpected visa problem made them miss two stages of the World Cup in Canada.

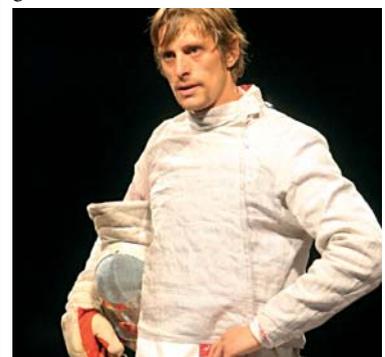
"I don't want to find excuses for the performance of our Belarusian athletes; moreover, there's nothing to excuse," noted Mr. Kozeko, speaking on the slopes even before the press conference. "The team is experiencing a shift of generations; it isn't painless, so swings in results are inevitable. We performed in a way fitting with our training. Our leaders' failure to earn medals is due to a host of reasons — on which we'll be working. Meanwhile, young Denis Osipov and Anna Guskova are just one step from the super-finals, so we have hopes that, next season, we may perform more successfully at the World Championships and at the Olympic Games in Sochi in 2014."

Next year, Raubichi will be welcoming the world's top aerial freestyle skiers again. Eddy Glenn, the FIS Technical Delegate, and Reinhard Krampf, FIS Race Director, attended the event. They agreed that, despite difficult weather conditions, the organisers had managed to hold the World Cup stage at a very high level. "We're truly impressed with the organisation," admitted the guests. "The illumination around the run was especially spectacular. Next year, the World Cup round will be again hosted by Minsk and it would be wonderful to organise a competition at night. It would be a very spectacular show!"

Sabre fencers deserve victory

After claiming silver at the World Championship — the best result for Belarus in sabre-fencing over recent years — the squad has climbed to second place in the World Cup round, hosted by Padua

On the way to the finals, Belarus defeated Great Britain — 45:30, Romania — 45:29, and Russia — 45:40. In the finals, our team opposed Germany who, in a tough struggle, managed to stop the unbeatable Belarusians and snatch gold.



Dmitry Lapkes

In the individual event at the World Cup in Padua, Dmitry Lapkes was the best among the Belarusians, being placed 35th. Belarusian fencers Dmitry Lapkes, Alexey Romanovich, Valery Priemko and Alexander Buikevich have earned 296 points as a team, giving them fourth ranking worldwide and guaranteed entry to the 2012 Olympics, being hosted by London. Their nearest rival is Romania, with 260 points, while Russia (372), Italy (348), and Germany (332) are ahead.