

Simply high ranking

The past sporting year has brought many wonderful moments but among the brightest has perhaps been Victoria Azarenko's brilliant season and Sergey Martynov's fabulous Olympic success. It's no surprise that they've been voted Belarus' athletes of the year for 2012 — according to a traditional poll by *Sportivnaya Panorama* newspaper.

By Andrey Samokhvalov

According to the survey, Ms. Azarenko gained 964.5 points. Her spectacular year has seen her take Olympic mixed doubles gold (partnered by Max Mirny) and the singles bronze, alongside the

Grand Slam Australian Open gold. She became first seed this year, and remains so today. 2012 Olympic champion in small-bore marksmanship Sergey Martynov (44) earned 913 points. He has twice won World Cup events this year, as well as coming second.

Third place goes to swimmer Alexandra Gerasimenya, who boasts 908 points. The top ten also includes Darya Domracheva, Max Mirny, Lyubov Cherkashina, kayakers Roman Petrushenko and Vadim Makhnev, canoe pair brothers Alexander and Andrey Bogdanovich,

Marina Shkermankova and Sergey Rutenko.

The best three coaches this year, according to voters, are national canoe and kayak team coach Vladimir Shantarovich, the head coach of BATE Borisov, Victor Goncharenko, and Alexandra Gerasimenya's

coach, Yelena Klimova.

BATE has proven unrivalled among sports teams, followed by the men's national handball squad and the handballers of Dinamo Minsk. The national artistic gymnastics team deservedly occupies first place among non-match sports.

BATE to pit strength against Fenerbahçe

By Sergey Kemerov

Swiss Nyon hosts draw for Champions League 1/8 final and Europa League 1/16 final, with opponents learning of each other

In February, Belarus' champion — BATE Borisov — will face Turkish Fenerbahçe. At this stage, every team is strong and Istanbul's Fenerbahçe is no exception, having a long football history. It is one of the leading squads in Turkey and enjoys a reputation in Europe. In the 2007-2008 season, the team reached the Champions League ¼ final: its greatest achievement internationally to date. Unpleasantly, last year, the team was involved in a scandal, being expelled from the Champions League after participation in fixed matches. It risked relegation to the third division of the national championship but managed a miraculous escape.

In the Europa League Group Stage, Fenerbahçe performed in Group C, taking first place ahead of Borussia (from Mönchengladbach), Marseille and AEL. The squad is coached by Aykut Kocaman while its star player and captain is Dutch forward Dirk Kuyt.



Christmas International Amateur Ice Hockey Tournament for the Prize of the President of Belarus bodes well for 2014 Championship

Showing hockey from its best side

The IIHF World Championship is being hosted by Minsk in less than 500 days, bringing discussion of finer details

By Konstantin Semakov

The release date for tickets has been decided, alongside ways of making guests feel especially welcome, notes the Chairman of the Belarusian Ice Hockey Federation, Yevgeny Vorsin, who heads the directorate for the world championship. He opened a recent conference by saying, "This will be the best championship of recent years as regards its organisation; nobody else has prepared as meticulously as we are doing."

The conference was delayed in opening by half an hour, as one of the key participants was stuck in traf-

fic: hardly a positive start. However, once the meeting was underway, any doubts faded, leaving all present to believe that the organisation will be the best yet, due to meticulous attention to detail.

Mr. Vorsin's assertions are more than mere words, prompted by the desire to promote Minsk and Belarus to tourists for many years to come. The immediate revenue generated from the ice hockey tournament is secondary to this longer-term target. Mr. Vorsin emphasised that rumours regarding the championship being moved elsewhere are without foundation. "During a recent IIHF Congress, not a

single delegate doubted the feasibility of Belarus' hosting of the event. The issue is no longer on the agenda — and will never return," he stresses.

The International Ice Hockey Federation has sent three commissions to conduct inspections. All, including the last (in November), noted that work had been completed ahead of schedule. Accommodation for tourists and officials has been a key issue, since around 100,000 are expected to arrive for the event. Comfortable yet inexpensive hotels are required. To avoid a repeat of what happened during Ukraine's hosting of the

European Football Championship, prices are to be tightly monitored to avoid artificial hikes; hotels will be prohibited from raising prices by more than 10 percent during the IIHF World Championship. Minsk can currently accommodate around 20,000, with guests welcomed by the Students' Village and university hostels, as well as traditional hotels. The academic year of 2014 is to be cut by a month or so to free up student accommodation.

Tickets are to go on sale worldwide next September, for individual matches and packages. Those planning to attend need only their ticket and passport, as vi-



sas for sports-fans are to be abolished — an unprecedented move. A standard tourist package will include a ticket, accommodation (ranging from a five star hotel to simple hostel bed), an excursion and souvenirs.

Work continues on improving roads and other infrastructure as well as catering options, while guides and taxi drivers are being encouraged to study foreign languages. One issue remains: the naming of the championship's symbol — a small auroch. A contest is soon to be announced, inviting ideas. The winner will be awarded a worthy prize.



Of course, the Turkish team is not unbeatable and, if successful, BATE will reach the 1/8 finals, playing the winner of the match between Napoli and Viktoria (Plzeň). Either would be a reasonable rival.

The Champions League 1/8 stage is certain to see true football giants taking part, ensuring fans a tournament to remember.