

Victory important as never before

Victoria Azarenko wins Premier series tennis tournament in Doha for second time, beating Serena Williams in finals

By Yegor Glebov

In the final singles match, Belarus' top tennis players beat American Serena Williams — 7:6 (8:6), 2:6, 6:3, in two hours 28 minutes. The first set proved intense, lasting an hour. Losing the first game to Serena's serve, Victoria then won the next three but could not break Serena's spirit. The set went to a tie-break, with Victoria tying twice — 5:5 and 6:6. Finally, the 23 year old Minsker took the set 8:6.

Azarenko opened the second set by storm, breaking her rival's serve and claiming two final points with delicate drop shots. Serena, 31, then bounced back to win two games and take the lead — 3:1. The experienced US athlete built on her dominant position, taking the second set — 6:2.

In the decisive set, Victoria Azarenko took three games in a row and Williams responded by winning her own serve, leaving the score at 1:3. Victoria claimed the next game and went on to bring the score to 6:3, winning the match.

Azarenko has lost to Serena Williams in 11 out of 12 matches to date.

On her way to the Doha final, Ms. Azarenko confidently defeated Switzerland's Romina Oprandi (seeded 62nd) — 6:2, 6:3, as well as American Christina McHale (seeded 44th)



Victoria Azarenko beside President of the Qatar Tennis Federation Nasser Al-Khelaifi

— 6:0, 6:0. She also claimed victory over Italian Sara Errani (seeded 7th) 6:2, 6:2 and Poland's Agnieszka Radwanska (seeded 4th) — 6:3, 6:3.

According to the Presidential

Press Service, the President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, congratulated the Belarusian tennis player on her victory in Doha by phone.

Despite her victory, Victoria Aza-

renko has lost her place as WTA top seed to Serena Williams. The American athlete has returned to first place in the WTA ratings after a break of two years.

Darya Domracheva returns to podium!

By Kirill Pirogov

Domracheva was a favourite at Nové Město, despite some disappointment in earlier rounds. However, her desire for the Crystal Globe remained strong. Having suffered 22 misses across six races, and the humiliation of finishing in the 5th dozen, Dasha was clearly determined to prove herself! Regardless of health, wind and fate, her mind was set.

Of course, the men's team has also seen a great deal of disappointment and even her colleagues on the women's team have failed to see much success; Nadezhda Skardino has done best, but can't seem to climb higher than 15th place.

Domracheva dispersed the gathering clouds by covering 12.5 km (and four firing points) with the quickest result of the day. At the first shooting range — from a prone position — she missed once and had to take a penalty loop. Another followed after the final shooting range. However, everyone seemed to be suffering the same inaccuracy, allowing her to take the lead with a fast ski. "No matter how low you may be, you can always climb back to the top. Anything can happen," she smiles.

Darya asserts that she's learnt something from this championship. With three more stages of the World Cup ahead, she could still come out on top. She notes, "Fans



Darya Domracheva on track

have the right to speculate. I tend not to follow the World Cup standings, preferring to simply concentrate on myself: my mistakes and how I can rectify them. I'll look at rankings after the last stage. Despite already having earned the title of world champion, I can't call this season successful. There's still work to do."

Theoretically, the Belarusian can still catch Berger's 283 points in the fight for the main trophy, although it's a long shot, as Berger remains on good form. However, Darya can fight for the Small Crystal Globe in the mass start, as she could easily win back 40 points over the remaining two events of the season. She believes in herself, so we too must believe in her!

Alexander Andrievsky: 'This match was the most dramatic of my coaching career'

By Igor Leshin

In a dramatic struggle, Dinamo Minsk has lost at home to Ufa's Salavat Yulaev, in the final match of the regular season, failing to reach the KHL Championship play-offs

The Minsk ice hockey team needed victory to reach the play-offs. The first period saw lots of action, although no real chance to score in the first 20 minutes. It ended with a penalty for Dinamo's Teemu Laine, who was forced to sit out in the next period. Salavat Yulaev took advantage of their numerical supremacy to open the score.

At the end of the second period, Salavat Yulaev's Stefan Ruzicka and Andrey Konev were sent off briefly with penalties, allowing Dinamo to play five against three for 20 seconds. They failed to score however.

In the middle of the third period, Ufa used a numerical advantage for the second time, scoring again. By the end, Dinamo Minsk had equalised, scoring twice within 24 seconds. In both cases, goalkeeper Lars Haugen was replaced with an extra attacker. However, when Haugen was replaced for a third time, the ri-



Unsuccessful game

vals delivered a puck into Dinamo's empty net.

"I've never seen such a match in my coaching career in terms of intensity and drama," noted Mr. Andrievsky — as quoted on the official site of Dinamo Minsk HC.

Dinamo Minsk now continues in the Cup of Hope — established not long before the end of the current regular championship. It will feature those teams failing to qualify for the Gagarin Cup.

BATE continues Euro season

By Dmitry Baranovsky

Grodno's Neman Stadium hosts first match of Europa League 1/16 finals, between champion of Belarus and Turkish Fenerbahçe

Any concerns about moving the Borisov home arena in Grodno were unjustified, since the pitch is no worse than that at Minsk Dynamo Stadium, although neither team managed to take full advantage of this fact.

The match began quite unexpectedly, with referee Alan Kelly sending off Raul Meireles in the 4th minute for knocking down Alexander Hleb. In fact, this hardly affected the game, as BATE failed to take advantage of their numerical superiority and the Turkish squad played hard, to make up for their disadvantage.

However, the hosts captured the initiative near the end of the first half; BATE made some attempts at goal and continued after half time, keeping their rival in their half of the field. Victor Goncharenko's team kept on the attack, with several long-range shots. Sadly, none met their mark.

Afterwards, Mr. Goncharenko noted that he'll be pushing BATE to play harder at the return game in Istanbul, scheduled for February 21st. However, climatic conditions and the home game for the Turks, at which they'll surely try to seize the day, won't make it easy for the Borisov squad. BATE remain optimistic, as Mr. Goncharenko emphasises. He asserts that there are two matches to play, so the team 'must concentrate on achieving the necessary results'.

Specifying medal reserves

Last year, the summer Olympiad was the major time for Belarusian athletes to prove themselves; sadly, it revealed weaknesses in their training, since only 38 percent of those 'earmarked' for medals saw success

In comparison, this figure stood at 49 percent for the Russian squad and 67 percent for those from the USA and China. How can we change the situation?

A recent meeting at the Sports and Tourism Ministry saw Belarus' Deputy Prime Minister, Anatoly Tozick, stress the need for a more effective training regime, alongside the identification of which sports most deserve state support.

He explained, "We need to look at our 426 children's sports schools and decide whether it's effective for each to focus on 12-14 disciplines. Several are working on rowing but perhaps we should concentrate energies and funds more specifically."

He notes that those with true talent can continue in their chosen sport at university level if they show the necessary mastery, leading to a place on the national team.