

Medals charm with their Olympic shine

22nd Winter Olympic Games in Sochi claim many new records even before official opening

By Dmitry Baranovsky

For example, the cost of preparing and realising the tournament, which exceeded \$15bn, also belongs to the category of records. Geographically, the Russians have also managed to surprise the world by organising the winter competitions in subtropical Sochi. However, these and many other nuances connected to the Olympics have already been discussed. Today, the ceremony of the opening of the Games, which was awesome in its grandeur, became history, and gave way to the main characters of any Olympics — the athletes, whose quantity is also a record. Over the course of the Games 98 sets of medals will be up for grabs, and among the contenders there are 26 Belarusian athletes.

The current composition of the Belarusian delegation is the smallest in the history of country's participation in the Olympics. But four athletes have already got on the Olympic podium before, and have a hope to do it again. The reality of this possibility has already been shown during these early days of the Games by Slovak biathlete Anastasiya Kuzmina and Norwegian Ole Einar Bjoerndalen. Kuzmina became the first female biathlete to win the Olympic gold twice, and defend her title in the sprint. Bjoerndalen repeated the record of the legendary Bjorn Daehlie and won his seventh Olympic medal — this one a gold. Alas, the Belarusians could not come close to the podium during the first days of the Games.

The 'Belarusian' part of the programme was opened by the skier Yelena Sannikova. In skiathlon, the woman was only 53rd, but Belarusian fans have not expected any medal hopes from her, nor from Sergey Dolidovich, who ended his skiathlon



Belarus' team at Olympiad opening



Darya Domracheva

in 34th place in the final standing. Even Dolidovich, the most experienced athlete in the team, called the début race a warm-up, after the finish, noting that he puts his emphasis on the marathon.

However, biathlon is quite another matter. Four years ago, at the Vancouver Olympics, the podium received two shooting skiers from Belarus. Sergey Novikov finished the individual race in second place, conceding only to the great Ole Einar Bjoerndalen, while Darya Domracheva was the third at a similar

distance. So, it is not surprising that hopes for medals are connected with this sport in Sochi. And if Novikov, for the last four years, failed to even come close to his Olympic result, Domracheva won regularly and came to the capital of the current Games as one of the favourites. Unfortunately, the complicated and unpredictable track of the Laura Sports Centre turned all predictions and hopes upside-down in the first few meters.

In the men's sprint neither Novikov, nor anyone else, could offer

any resistance to irrepressible Bjoerndalen. However, Sergey conceded, not only to the Norwegian, but also his young team-mate Vladimir Chepelin, who became the only Belarusian, who appeared in the list of thirty strongest athletes. However, the situation with the girls was different... Before the start of the Olympic sprint, none of the biathlon experts could recall the name of the winner of the Vancouver event, Anastasiya Kuzmina. Even four years ago, her victory was perceived as a sensation. It was hard to believe in the possibility of its recurrence. Nevertheless, it was the Slovak biathlete who appeared on the pedestal, and who was confidently ahead of all the original favourites, which left a desperate fight for the two remaining positions, in which competitors were separated by tenths, and even hundredths of a second. But in this 'crush' there was no place for Darya Domracheva. The Belarusian biathlete already lost her chance at the first shooting line. The first shot did not hit the target, adding a 150 metre penalty lap to the distance and, as it turned out, more than half a minute to her final result at the finish. Darya conceded 10.1 seconds to the bronze medal of Ukrainian, Vita Semerenko.

Greeting

To the members of the sports delegation of the Republic of Belarus at the 22nd Winter Olympic Games 2014 in Sochi (The Russian Federation)

Dear friends!

Twenty years have passed since the Republic of Belarus was first represented by an independent team at the Winter Olympics in Lillehammer, where Belarusian athletes won two silver medals, opening the tally of Olympic awards.

Courageous, determined and strong-willed people choose sport, and are able, in the course of consistent struggle, to continue the glorious traditions and protect the sport honour of our country.

I am convinced that you are the best representatives of Belarusian sport, able to show your will, skill and perseverance in achieving set goals at the Olympic venues.

Participation in the Olympics is a significant event, preceded by hard work and careful preparation of both athletes and the relevant organisations. Every detail was provided and done, now the only thing remaining is the effort by each of you to ensure a successful performance at the Olympic competition.

I sincerely wish you good luck and great victories for the glory of our country.

The President of the Republic of Belarus, The President of the National Olympic Committee of the Republic of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko.

After the finish, Darya did not hide her disappointment, "I am very sorry about my first inaccurate shot. Just at that moment of my prone shooting, the wind changed. Unfortunately, at the first shooting, I lost a lot of time. I had to work hard on the last lap, but too much time had been lost."

Meanwhile, Belarusian fans lay their medal hopes on more than just the biathletes. Let us recall that four years ago in Vancouver, the first 'gold' of the Winter Olympics was brought to us by the Belarusian freestyle skier, Alexey Grishin. And in previous Games, ski acrobats have invariably occupied pedestals since 1998. While only Dmitry Dashchinsky and Alexey Grishin from the current team, have managed to do this, Anton Kushnir has a serious chance of success. He became the owner of the Big Crystal Globe at the World Cup a year ago, and Alla Tsuper can easily create a surprise.

Results of the third Dakar

MAZ-SPORTavto team was pleased with the results which the Belarusian crews showed on rally raid Dakar-2014, held in South America

By Georgy Shablyuk

"We are happy with the team results. It has been the third year we have participated in Dakar. During the first year our best result was 31st place, the next year our best result was 21st place, while this year our best result is at the turn of the first and second, 10 places higher. We have progressed year on year at these competitions, rising ten places," said the head of the team MAZ-SPORTavto, Valery Kozlovsky, at a briefing.

The team gave itself the task to getting into the top 20. "One year ago, we were close to this result, and this time Sergey Vyazovich's crew took the 11th position. It is a more than worthy performance. Therefore, we can say that the team fulfilled its task. At some stages, our crew showed very good results, getting into the first ten. On one of the intermediate stages, the Vyazovich crew was even first," said Mr. Kozlovsky.

As he said, the team has serious potential for development. "The whole

season lies ahead of us, during which we should correct areas which impede our progress. Besides, the crew will also gain additional experience and I am sure that next year, the team will please fans with an even more persistent struggle against the leaders, and with even better results. I hope that success will not be long in coming," the Head of the team summed up.

The pilot of the MAZ-SPORTavto team, Sergey Vyazovich is happy with his crew's final 11th place. "We counted on a result close to top 10, but it is



Alexey Neverovich, Pavel Garanin, Sergey Vyazovich (from left to right)

always difficult to make plans before the start. We achieved a desirable result. However, I am sure that it is not the maximum we can achieve, and the team will aspire to rise higher in the league standings at future competitions. Quite often, we were in the top

10 of the best at separate stages of the rally, probably, we did not maximise our potential. But if we progress, as we have been doing it during these three years, at Dakar-2015, we will be serious competitors for the leadership of the race," noted the driver.