

# Tsuper is super!

Four years ago, Alla Tsuper retired with mixed feelings. Born in Ukrainian Rovno, she skied successfully for the Belarusian team for many years, yet failed to achieve significant heights. She won medals at World Cup rounds and came close to winning World Championships and, even, the Olympics; she narrowly missed out each time. Her disappointments finally led her to step down.

By Dmitry Komashko

She tells us, "I realised that I'd had enough. Moreover, on the eve of that season, I'd received hints that it was time I was going. My age wasn't to my advantage, and I needed to make room for younger athletes. In my heart, I was ready." Alla chose to devote herself to her family and gave birth to daughter Yelizaveta but, early this season, was asked if she might again try for prizes — and she agreed.

Alla's training began last May and, although she did her best, coach Nikolay Kozeko wasn't convinced that the experienced yet aging sportswoman could win an Olympic medal. Alla's performance at World Cup rounds confirmed his doubts and, on the eve of the Olympics (which close the season for ski acrobats), she was ranked 13th. She was yet to demonstrate the truly complicated jumps needed to bring success.

The Olympic qualification round brought few surprises, with Alla failing to join the finalists on her first attempt. Her second jump allowed her to narrowly qualify for the second stage (in last position, just 0.03 points ahead of her Chinese rival). Success seemed impossible, until she pulled off a performance worthy of shocking the best drama writers.

In the finals, Alla jumped first (for the second time in her life) and received clear results from the judges. Meanwhile, her rivals jumped poorly: double Olympic medallist Li Nina made a clumsy landing, while Olympic champion Lydia Lassila touched the slope, and



ALLA TSUPER

tournament favourite Xu Mengtao failed to demonstrate her true talent. Alla entered the super-finals — where Olympic medals were to be distributed. She was quickly in second place and then gave one last amazing jump, securing her gold. Our freestyler succeeded! She jumped so well that — after landing — everyone was convinced of her being an Olympic champion. Even Xu Mengtao — who jumped

last — failed to do better, touching the slope with her hand.

Alla smiles, "I returned with a desire to convince everyone that I could do well but I hardly imagined that I'd win gold! At my last Olympics, I felt capable and expected something significant but always lost my chance at the decisive moment. Probably, I was frustrated by pressure and responsibility. The Sochi Olympics are my fifth Games but I wasn't

thinking of a medal: I simply wished to perform well. As it has turned out, it is the secret of my success! I think my medal rewards my efforts and years devoted to freestyle."

Alla's gold is the fourth medal for our Belarusian team in Sochi. At this mid-point in the Games, it is our most successful winter Olympics in Belarusian history. However, more victories are expected. On Monday, our men struggle for free-

Gold jump of Belarusian freestyler

style medals; among them Alexey Grishin (the first Belarusian winter Olympics champion), Dmitry Dashchinsky (two medals so far) and Anton Kushnir (known as one of the world's best aerial ski jumpers). In the mass-start, Darya Domracheva is among the favourites and we have hopes for experienced Sergey Dolidovich. The Olympics continue and we hope will bring more pleasant surprises.

## Important secondary roles

Belarusian success in Sochi brings biathlon and freestyle jumping medals, and some worthy performances from other sportsmen



By Dmitry Baranovsky

Despite Belarus lacking mountains, it is seeing results

in alpine skiing events, having sent two Belarusians to the Sochi Olympiad. Sadly, Maria Shkanova fell and was obliged

to retire from her event. Meanwhile, Yuri Danilochkin's performance has allowed him to hold his head high among his peers.

In the men's biathlon, Yevgeny Abramenko and Vladimir Chepin have finished far from medals, as has former silver Olympic medallist Sergey Novikov (whose disappointment at Sochi has led him to announce his plan to retire at the end of the season).

Their desperate attempts to do well have been evident. Sadly, the same cannot be said of the short track, where our Belarusian sportsmen failed even to qualify for final rounds.

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