

Mikhail Grabovski: 'Let Ovechkin get ready'

At the end of ice training, the only Belarusian hockey player playing in the NHL, Mikhail Grabovski, did not hasten to go to his locker. When all the other hockey players had gone for a rest and with only Alexander Kitarov working on the ice under the personal direction of Eduard Zankovets, the MiG-84 flew and flew. "He decided to starve the journalists. He probably, wasn't ready to talk," a colleague assumed. But Grabovski, being a professional from top to toe, could not abandon his responsibilities.

By Yuri Bakerenko

The trainer said that I do not have enough strength. Therefore I work harder, skate more.

I have good feelings since my return. It is pleasant to come home and to train with guys with whom I had played earlier on the home ice. It is a little hard right after a flight, but I think that every day I will feel better and better.

With whom would you like to play in one line? Perhaps with the Kostitsyn brothers?

If we appear in one line, I will play with them with pleasure. Not only with the Kostitsyn brothers, but also with many other guys: Stepanov, Ugarov, Koltsov etc. Let the trainer decide. It does not make any difference to me.

Many people perceive you as a messiah. Does it put pressure on you?

It is not the first year I return to the national team, so I am used to it. Now, of course, I have the home championship, local fans and pressure, but all

this makes me stronger.

Do you have boldness?

Every hockey player dreams of playing at home in the presence of their own fans; all the more for me because I play far away from home. The forthcoming World Championship is very unusual and important for me. To tell the truth, I could not even fall asleep yesterday, because of the strong desire to appear on ice as quickly as possible.

Do you follow the play-offs in NHL or not, to avoid tormenting yourself?

Certainly, I follow. It is always necessary to watch how other teams play — it brings experience. Well, let the strongest win.

Has Glen Hanlon changed since the last time he trained the Belarusian national team? Perhaps he became more serious?

With age, we all become more serious as we gain more experience. Glen is not an exception. As a trainer, he has worked in many places, so he has become more serious. Although he is just as emotional as he used to be.

Is it comfortable working under the direction of this expert?

Glen is a Canadian trainer. It is very simple and comfortable working with him. I understand him without the need for translation, and receive great pleasure from the training process.

Is there any difference to be in the national team from when you were 25 and when you are 30?

Now that I am at home, I feel younger than I am. My relatives are nearby, my father brought me to training, as he did in my childhood.

Are you ready to play half an hour during a match?

Probably yes, I am ready. We will see. I know that Glen Hanlon trusts me. It is necessary to justify this trust.

Your wife and daughter have remained in the USA, whilst you have brought your son along. Why have you decided to split the kids?

It just happened this way. I thought that it would be hard for my wife to fly, while

remaining alone with two children is also hard. So, let the son to be in company of men.

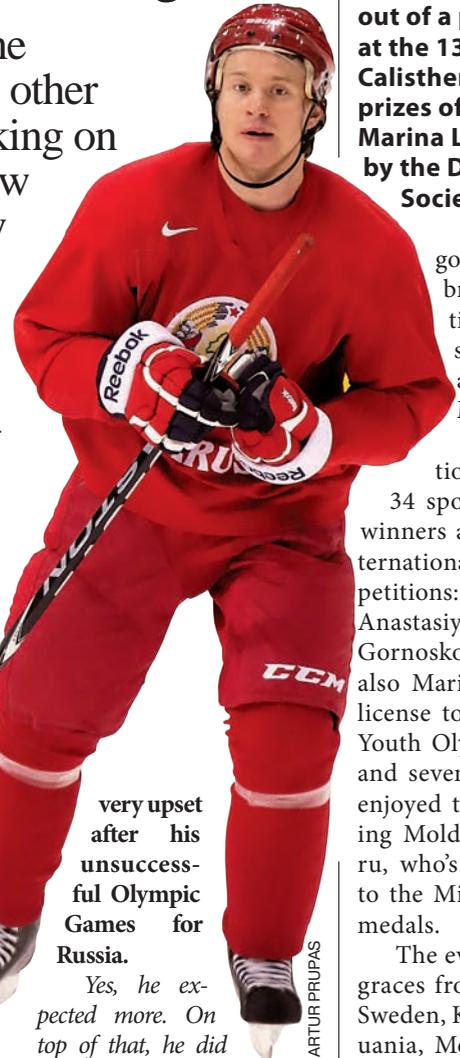
Have you invited friends from America to the World Championship?

Acquaintances will arrive, as well as relatives of my wife. Ovechkin and Kuznetsov will come and Chimera, Ward and Brouwer as part of the Canadian national team.

Do Canadians treat the World Championship as a second-rate tournament?

Well, no. For them it is nice to play for the national team. And those hockey players who do not play in the play-off, always participate with pleasure — except, perhaps for some superstars who are probably already somewhere in Las Vegas having a rest.

I imagine Ovechkin is



very upset after his unsuccessful Olympic Games for Russia.

Yes, he expected more. On top of that, he did not get to Washington for the play-offs. The season was not particularly successful for him; and for me too. However, he and I have now a possibility to change something, by playing well in the World Championship. We will have our last game in the group against the Russians. We will be ready for Ovechkin. But he will need to be ready for us too.

ARTUR PRUPAS

Holiday of beauty and grace

Belarusian team wins 25 out of a possible 40 medals at the 13th International Calisthenics Tournament for prizes of Olympic champion Marina Lobach — organised by the Dinamo Sporting Society

Belarusians won 12 gold, 10 silver and 3 bronze medals. In addition, young grace, Anastasiya Rybakova was awarded by a statuette of Marina Lobach.

This year, the national team comprised 34 sportswomen — including winners and prize holders of international and Republican competitions: Stefaniya Manakhova, Anastasiya Rybakova and Alina Gornosko. Among them was also Maria Trubach, who won a license to participate in the 2nd Youth Olympics. One Belarusian and seven European graces have enjoyed this right so far, including Moldova's, Nikoleta Dulgheru, who's been regularly coming to the Minsk tournament to win medals.

The event gathered around 80 graces from Belarus, Uzbekistan, Sweden, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Russia, Ukraine and Estonia. Apart from the major award — The Marina Lobach's registered statuette — they received medals and numerous other awards. As is traditional, the Presidential Sporting Club prepared presents for all gymnasts, coaches, team heads and judges. Among the encouragement prizes were the 'Smile', 'Grace', 'Inspiration', 'Hope', 'Virtuosity' and 'For Will-to-Win Spirit' nominations.

'My teammates already know about Belarus'

The 203cm-high defender, Oleg Yevenko, joins the Belarusian team on the eve of guest sparring matches against the Dutch

The 23 year old hockey player is playing his third season for Massachusetts University's NCAA Student League, although his agent, Mark Lapush, once admitted that Oleg was previously invited to join the NHL Highlanders. This season, Yevenko has already played 32 matches to make one assist, received 67 penalty minutes and demonstrated a minus 11 utility indicator. In addition, he was awarded the Winter Scholar-Athlete of the Year by the University, which recognised his successes both in studies and sports. In December, Oleg already playing for the team, making his debut at the Swiss Arosa Challenge tournament, but has so far only participated in official matches on a junior level.

Have you had time to talk to Hanlon?

Glen greeted me and



Oleg Yevenko and Alexey Kalyuzhny during training

invited to make myself at home. He told me that we'll discuss my role with the team later. Right now, I'm training.

Who has paired you?

I have had two different partners during my two training sessions: Andrey Karev and Nikolay Stasenko. I think it's too early to draw any conclusions from this fact.

What differences do you notice in the December and present teams?

When going to Switzerland, I actually came straight from the mall, straight to the puck. We had no training sessions then and only two matches were played. This time, I have the possibility of training properly under Hanlon's guidance. As regards the

line-ups, they are similar. The Arosa Challenge was attended by a team of 'fight-ready' hockey players.

Is the NCAA Student League hockey season over?

Yes. The Massachusetts University team crashed out in the first play-off round.

As I know, you were invited to join professional teams — including from the NHL. Don't you regret of your decision to stay with the Student League?

No.

Are receiving more proposals now?

Yes.

Can you tell us more?

No.

What are the most peculiar features of foreign student hockey?

It's very speedy but, regarding power fights, it's less vivid in comparison to the AHL or NHL. Northern

America's strongest leagues train at small grounds, while many colleges boast Olympic sized rinks. Clearly, these create different styles.

You've received 67 penalty minutes this season. Do you love fighting?

No! Any fights are prohibited in the student leagues. I've received several 'heavy' penalties for wrong final hits.

Have your Northern American friends questioned you about the Minsk's World Championship?

Of course. However, they were mostly interested in the routine aspects: where it would be held and who would be our rivals.

Do they know where Belarus is situated?

As I see they already know, because we have been studying together for three years now. Actually, many Americans call the Belaru-

sians and Ukrainians 'Russians', but the guys from my team know of Belarus.

Americans are now announcing the team that will be coming to Minsk. At the moment, it comprises four student hockey players. Do you know any of them?

I'd study the list more attentively, but I know for sure that Johnny Gaudreau will come. He represents a Boston college which shares a single league with the Massachusetts University. The guy is not tall — just 173cm — but he is a perfect player who attacks wonderfully.

Do you feel the atmosphere of the forthcoming holiday in Minsk?

Everything is fine! I've seen that the city is preparing. You boast a wonderful arena, with perfect ice. All our hockey players are aiming to win in our home matches.