

Russian triumph closes event

“The Russian national ice hockey team have come to Minsk to win gold”. This was told by the coaching staff even before the beginning of the tournament, and they began to prove their words from the first match — 9 victories and only 7 missed goals. It seemed that with such impressive figures, only the need to actually run the final prevented them from just taking champion title. However, in practice, Russia’s advantage didn’t look so unquestioned. Firstly, the Finns have already proven many times at this tournament that they are able to play, if not spectacularly, then very rationally and efficiently. Secondly, the Russians were playing against the ‘Suomi’ squad without Oleg Znarok. The coach, disqualified for an offensive gesture towards the Swedish assistant coach, Rikard Grönborg, was watching his team play from the sidelines. According to Mr. Znarok however, this circumstance only motivated his players more.

By Dmitry Baranovsky

The Russian squad are the world champions, achieving their tenth victory in a row in the final of the tournament that has now finished in Minsk. Oleg Znarok’s team has earned what they were said they would get in the Belarusian capital — gold medals.

Some saw either a successful turn of circumstances or fate in the fact that the last test on the Minsk ice was taken by the Russians and Finns. Several months ago, at the Sochi Olympics, it was the Finns who left the hosts empty handed, beating them in the quarterfinal. In practice, the final of the Minsk championship was rather objective, with the world’s two strongest teams taking part in it. Moreover, they were super-motivated after their meeting at the beginning of the current tournament. Therefore, despite the fact that after 60 minutes of play, the board displayed figures that were shocking to the Finns — 5:2, the Russians did have difficulties in gaining their gold.

It took rather a long time for Finland’s national team to ‘pick up speed’, but they finally began to demonstrate men’s and champions’ hockey on the Belarusian ice. The struggle was tough, and was interrupted by fist fights. Meanwhile, the Finns managed to not only equalize the score and ‘smooth’ the starting pressure of the Russians, but even go ahead, making the disqualified Russian head coach, Oleg Znarok very nervous as he watched the match from the VIP-box and dictated the actions of his team using a walkie-talkie.



BELTA

Russian national team hasn’t lost a single match at the World Championship in Minsk

“The Finns are not great provocateurs, but it seems that before the match they received a directive to ‘catch’ us and try to provoke silly removals. At first, we ‘were tricked’ by this, but then managed to switch back to the game again,” noted Artem Anisimov in the mix-zone.

As if predicting Artem Anisimov’s revelations in the mix-zone, Znarok wasn’t anxious too long. Alexander Ovechkin and Yevgeny Malkin required only ten minutes in order to overtake the Finns, who were trying to find a way to return their advantage on the ice. They failed! In the third period, the goals by Danis Zaripov and Victor Tikhonov established the final defeat of the Finnish squad. Only Ovechkin delivered the puck while playing in equal lines-up, causing *Erkka Westerlund* to lift his hands in dismay dur-

ing the press conference when answering the question about refereeing, “No comment. The game can’t be won from the penalty box.”

Nevertheless, before the final whistle, the Finns were trying to find an opportunity to reduce the gap, forcing the Russian players to admit after the end of the match, “Despite the score, we had to play at breaking point until the very last minute. This championship had already seen miraculous escapes.”

But this time, no miraculous escape happened, and the final signal of the Minsk Championship was met with an incredible roar from the stadium which didn’t stop until the Russian players and Oleg Znarok, who appeared unexpectedly on the ice, disappeared in the locker-room. One can’t doubt that the Russian holiday continued in the Belarusian capital

through the night, while the hospitality zone was already taking down the decorations near the Minsk-Arena. The World Championship is over, and has already occupied its worthy place in the history of world hockey.

Press conference

Erkka Westerlund, head coach of the national team of Finland:

Of course, I congratulate the Russian squad. They are a perfect team.

We saw the Russian coach on the ice during the award ceremony. Did he have the right to take part in the ceremony?

I don’t think about such things. I think about the game.

Is there’s a difference between the national team of Russia which you defeated in Sochi and the one which beat you here, in Minsk?

It’s difficult to answer that. The Russian team has received a lot of time to play in majority and used this circumstance, though we could also win even in this situation.

Can you assess the organisation of the World Championship in Minsk?

Everything was perfect! Starting with the transport and finishing with the conditions for training and matches.

This was your last match as the head coach of Finland’s national squad. What feelings do you have?

I received great pleasure. I’d like to thank the hockey players and the Ice Hockey Federation for this time and this opportunity.

Harijs Vitoliņš, assistant head coach of the national team of Russia:

The game was very difficult. For me it was like ‘snow in summer’: to accept the team

as the Head Coach in the final match. The match was very spectacular. The Finns played very actively and were fighting till the very end. Our players have done well, able to equalise the score and then to win this match.

What can you say about Finnish players today?

We expected that the Finns would play very actively. Although everyone was saying that the Finns will primarily concentrate on defence, they started very powerfully, but we were ready for this. Both teams have played worthily today.

How did you communicate with Znarok during the match?

He connected with his assistants and we advised with him what can be improved in the game. Some information was present constantly. However, the game was very quick and it was almost impossible to improve something through this way. For me it was new experience. It was necessary to concentrate more and to understand the changes.

What did you change at the moment when the Finns took the lead?

Ovechkin’s goal helped us greatly. No one even remembers when Alexander last scored from directly in front of the net. He usually scores his point somewhere on the side. Probably, at this moment, each player tried to find some reserves.

Which impressions do you have from the stands?

I haven’t ever seen anything similar at any other championship. I haven’t ever seen so many fans or so much support. It enabled us to feel like we were at home at every match. This was something incredible.

Ex-champions were satisfied with bronze

By Igor Grishin

Such matches in general are seldom played at half strength, but national teams of Sweden and the Czech Republic have both approached the battle for bronze at the World Championship very motivated and active

For the Scandinavians, the tournament has been unsuccessful. They arrived in Minsk as defending champions and therefore defeat in a ‘consolatory’ match for ‘bronze’ would be considered a real failure. The Czechs were also very upset by their results in the semi-final against Finland. Jaromír Jágr expected to finish his

farewell World Championship in the final, and the great Czech player did not plan to leave Minsk without awards. The match was further intriguing by the fact that Swedish team had to play without the assistant head coach. Rikard Grönborg was disqualified for foul language against head coach of the Russian national team, Oleg Znarok.

In a match for medals, the Scandinavians did not give any chances to the Czech hockey players, winning 3:0. It is important to note, that the activity of the Czechs was recognised at an after-match conference, even by the Head Coach of the Swedish team, Par Marts. From the first minutes, the Czechs actively put pressure on the

defensive formations of the Swedish team, twice outnumbering the contenders on the number of shots on goals. But in practice, this impressive statistic did not represent any serious threat. The overwhelming majority of shots were stopped by the defenders, while those which were on goal were easily blocked by Anders Nilsson, confirming his status of one of the best goalkeepers in the tournament. Even Jaromír Jágr was not able to save the situation. Carrying out, by his own admission, his last match as a part of the Czech Republic national team, the well-known forward participated in a number of dangerous moments near the net of Nilsson, but he really did not represent a seri-



Captain of the Swedish national squad, Joel Lundqvist

ous threat. In a mixed zone, Jaromír Jágr was the last player remaining, having spent almost an hour talking to the journalists who surrounded him, he did not look at all upset, having declared, that he and his partners are not ashamed of this tournament. The Swedes were also happy. They, unlike their contenders, attacked less often, but more powerfully, and in an organised way. Three times their actions brought success. However, if not

for Alexander Salák’s performance, the score could have been much more impressive. All these ‘ifs’ and ‘buts’, however, remain on the ice of the Minsk-Arena. The history books will display the names of the players of the Swedish national team, and they will be written in bronze letter. And it is necessary to note, that even with a very young squad, they made, in Minsk, a serious claim for future success.