

Remaining in third division

Belarusian men's tennis team fails to move up a division in Davis Cup for at least one more season

Belarus lost to Hungary in the Europe/Africa Zone Group II second round, with the match hosted by Godollo near Budapest. Belarusian national team first seed Vladimir Ignatik facing our rivals number two, Adam Kellner. Vladimir won eventually, after facing tough opposition, with a tie-break settling the score in the first set. The second ended in favour of the Belarusian again but Kellner, despite being on the edge of defeat, demonstrated ardent resistance. At a certain moment, both players seemed to have an absolutely equal chance and the Hungarian snatched the third set. Still, Ignatik recovered from this small loss and, doubling his efforts, claimed the decisive set.

The next match was more sedate, with Hungarian Attila Balázs easily defeating Sergey Betov, who had won not a single point in his previous single matches for the national squad. Sergey woke up in the third set but still lost.

Later, Max Mirny and Vladimir Ignatik faced Kornel Bardoczky and Marton Fucsovics. Tennis fans were on the edge of their seats after two of the three sets ended in tie-break. Belarus was losing but managed to break service and then win the fourth set with clear advantage.

To earn overall team victory, one more singles match was to settle everything. In the next match, physical and psychological weariness affected Ignatik's performance (he lost two tie-breaks) in his match against Attila Balázs, leading to failure. With the score at 2:2, Sergey Betov and Adam Kellner crossed rackets but the Belarusian failed to pose a serious threat to the opponent, losing this match.

BATE launches new European Cup season

Belarus' best football club of recent years plays its first match of the second UEFA Champions' League qualifying round, against Northern Irish Linfield, in Belfast

By Yuri Karpenko

Northern Irish footballers are yet to make a real impression in Europe, with Linfield occupying a modest 353rd position in the UEFA club ratings (against Borisov BATE's 83rd place). Meanwhile, the country's national team was in the top thirty of the FIFA ratings just two years ago. The difference is easily explained. The Northern Irish championship boasts only semi-professional status, with no professional clubs participating. Young footballers tend to move to England as soon as possible, with the most talented joining the football academies of grand clubs. For many, playing with the 3th or 4th English division is also possible.

Linfield is also a semi-professional team, playing under the slogan 'Fortune Favours the Brave' and does tend to enjoy success at home matches, having won the Northern Irish League 50 times. It's hardly possible to find another European club with so many home match victories. Despite their 125 year history and many titles, they presented only a modest threat to BATE. Nevertheless, the Borisov team had their work cut out for them.

In the fifth minute, halfback Daryl Fordyce headed a goal into the net, matched by Renan Bressan



Match — played in Belfast — enjoys equal fight, with many high spots

in the 38th minute, with a penalty (a Linfield player used his hand to deflect Maxim Skavysh's strike). The match eventually ended with a 1:1 draw.

BATE head coach Victor Goncharenko admitted after the match that he had not expected such me-

diocre play from his squad. "I was surprised by their weak performance. We hoped to win and should have done. Before coming to Northern Ireland, the team were playing well, being in good shape. It's unclear why we performed so badly," he asserts. He promises

that, in the return match, BATE will make up for its mistakes, winning a place in the Champions' League's next round. "I'm convinced that we'll play much better in Borisov than we did in Belfast. We have the chance to strengthen our game."

New rally routes await racers

Nine Belarusian racing crews aim to take part in first Friendship Cup

The new international event, organised jointly by the rally committees of Russia, Belarus and Ukraine, was first mentioned last November, during the Braslav Rally. At that time, representatives

of the three states' automobile sports federations' rally committees achieved a preliminary agreement on the establishment of this rally. The idea is not bad actually. The new event will see each country host a race within the framework of their national events. This kicks off

at the Kievskaya Rus Rally, in Ukraine, in July, with Russia's Pskov Rally continuing in September. The December Christmas Rally (a stage of Braslav Rally Challenge), in Belarus, will complete the series.

The new Friendship Cup won't involve any extra cost

or effort since existing local competitions are hosting the event. Crews can include foreign drivers where licenses are granted. One Belarusian crew has a Lithuanian racer, Darius Biesevičius, who was granted a Belarusian license to take part in the local championship earlier this year.

Fifth Games for Vladimir Samsonov



Vladimir Samsonov

Belarusian ping pong team leader may take part in fifth Olympics, although no medals are expected from him at London Games

"Samsonov may appear among the medallists at the Olympics," explains the head coach of the Belarusian national squad, Alexander Petkevich. "However, it's more likely that a medal will be good fortune. We don't foresee medals for him at the next Olympics — as anticipated since the Atlanta Games in 1996. Sadly, he's won no Olympic medal so far. In 2000, Samsonov went to the Sydney Olympics topping the world table tennis ratings but

the reality is that China leads in modern table tennis, performing as part of their own national team and playing also for other nations. We aren't one hundred percent sure that Vladimir will claim victory at the Games in London, although he's ranked among the top eight worldwide at present. His target for the coming year is to keep this result?"

In all, six Belarusian table tennis players are training for the London 2012 event: Vladimir Samsonov and Victoria Pavlovich already have their Olympic tickets while Yevgeny Shchetinin, Vitaly Nekhvedovich, Veronika Pavlovich and Alexandra Privalova continue their struggle to earn places.

At the end of October, Minsk ping pong fans will be able to watch leading world stars at Minsk's Palace of Sports. The Europe-Asia match (featuring men only) will see the top five players from each continent battling for supremacy, with only one athlete from any single nation performing.

World Cup recognition but no medal

By Yuri Kovalev

Legendary Belarusian rower Yekaterina Karsten claims 2011 World Academic Rowing Cup for women

Though the famed Belarusian failed to take the prestigious trophy in Lucerne, finishing fourth in the final race of the third stage, fans remain happy, knowing that the main start of the season — the World Championship — lies ahead.

Before the final women's single rowing race at Lake Rotsee, a strong wind began to blow, placing the athletes under great stress. However, New Zealand's Emma Twigg



Yekaterina Karsten competes in rowing race

seemed able to ignore the unfavourable weather conditions, retaining her lead from the beginning of the race. Karsten joined Mirka Knapkova of the Czech Republic close behind daring Emma, with Xiuyun Zhang of China

sneaking ahead to claim third place near the finish. Twigg snatched her first gold medal, with Karsten too late to employ her usual spurt near the end. It is the first time since 1999 that our 'Yekaterina the Great' has returned medal-

less from an international event. Perhaps it's a 'trick' to divert her opponents' attention before the coming World Championship — to be hosted by Bled, Slovenia. Places at the London Olympics will be the main goal of the event.

As for the other Belarusian crews, pair Yulia Bichik and Tatiana Kukhta are also doing well, having won bronze medals at the World Cup rounds in Munich and Hamburg. Fans were optimistic but the women failed to reach the finals. In the consolatory race, they produced a beautiful win over American and Italian rowers, but this was too late to change anything.