

Rehearsals at various levels

By Yuri Karpenko

Three Belarusian football teams play four friendly matches in Turkey

The national team has played in Antalya against Kazakhstan's major squad, which was defeated in home and away matches by Bernd Stange trainees in the previous selection round for the 2010 World Championship. The current FIFA World Rankings are 36th and 137th respectively, which didn't envisage a very difficult struggle, but the match ended in a 1:1 draw. The impressive Belarusian team's territorial and playing advantages failed to bring a more victorious conclusion.

The game was one of the last before the forthcoming away match (on March 26th) against the Albanians as part of the 2012 European Championship selection round.

Meanwhile, the country's junior team is training for the 2011 European Championship finals. It has played two matches in Antalya, against Turkey's second team, losing both times — 0:2 and 0:1. However, the head coach of the Belarusian junior team, Georgy Kondratiev, sees benefits even in these defeats, since we did well in the initial matches of the new season. Our opponents were not our peers, but reserve players from the Turkish national team. The new junior squad has also played a friendly match in Belek, against their peers from Moldova, which ended in a 1:1 draw.

Targeting medals in Khanty-Mansiysk

Two World Cup rounds in USA are final rehearsal for biathletes before approaching World Championship

By Nikolay Dmitriev

On March 3rd, the competition for major biathlete awards will be launched in Khanty-Mansiysk. Darya Domracheva of Belarus is sure to take part, being on perfect form, as she proved during the pursuit race in Presque Isle, finishing third despite starting in 11th place. She also won a silver medal in the sprint in Austrian Hochfilzen and four bronze medals: in the sprint in Östersund, in the pursuit race in Hochfilzen and in the mass start in Antholz and Fort Kent. Unfortunately, she is yet to claim a gold medal. Ms. Domracheva, born in Minsk, spent most of her adolescence in Khanty-Mansiysk, beginning skiing there. Its track is only marginally less familiar to her than her native track at Raubichi Sports Complex.

Other Belarusian athletes also did well in the USA. Lyudmila Ka-



Darya Domracheva (leading the race) is in good shape for forthcoming World Championship

linchik, Nadezhda Skardino and Nadezhda Pisareva (a national team debutante, who stayed at home) were successful in the relay race. Therefore, they are likely to set off

for Siberia in good spirits.

Sergey Novikov, a silver medalist at the Winter Olympic Games in Vancouver, also improved in Presque Isle. Rushed pre-season

training prevented him from showing his traditional speed but he is gradually improving and may yet manage to repeat his Canadian success.

Successful return to tennis

By Dmitry Komashko

Max Mirny and Vladimir Volchkov once pleased Belarusian fans with dynamic matches, reaching the Davis Cup semi-finals. Now, it's the women's time to delight us

Audiences have long supported our women's tennis, with our squad participating in the Fed Cup (an analogue of Davis Cup) since 1994. In 1999, Natalia Zvereva and Olga Barabanshchikova even joined World Group II but our success was short lived. Zvereva was first to leave, followed by Barabanshchikova some time later. Our women returned to the Europe/Africa Zone Group I for a long period but couldn't manage a higher ranking, although Victoria Azarenko was the new trump card, overcoming all obstacles. She has taken the path to the tennis elite almost alone. Sadly, in recent years, despite being the 8th seed worldwide, she has failed to reach the Cup in optimal form. Meanwhile, without Victoria, the efforts of Olga Govortsova, Tatiana Puchek, Yekaterina Degolevich and Darya Kustova have not been sufficient to reach beyond the Europe/Africa Zone Group.

The situation looked ideal in Israel's Eilat, with Victoria Azarenko, Olga Govortsova, Darya Kustova and Tatiana Puchek representing Belarus. They smashed Austria, Croatia and Greece (each 3:0), reaching the semi-finals of the Fed Cup's Europe/Africa Zone Group I. There, they confidently defeated Poland 2:0, with the historic struggle begun by Olga Govortsova, who

defeated Magda Linette 7:6, 7:6. Victoria Azarenko then beat the world's tenth seed, Agnieszka Radwańska, 7:5, 7:5. Interestingly, the Polish tennis player led in the second set (4:2) but the Belarusian then equalised with a score of 5:5. She broke her opponent's serve, then claimed victory with an ace.

(led by Kaia Kanepi) stopped Belarus reaching World Group II play-offs, although it was soon knocked out itself. This does not mean that the Estonian team is weak however. Having smashed Israel and Argentina, they approached the elite World Division, but were defeated by the Belgians, led by Kim Clijsters.



Victoria Azarenko is team leader

Belarus last fought for a place in World Group II in 2005 (losing to Slovenia — 1:2). We hope, this time, our girls will be more successful. A draw for the play-offs (where the best teams from the Europe/Africa Zone Group will play against those with the worst results from World Group II for a place with the elite) has been to the Belarusians' favour. Govortsova and Azarenko are to play their April match in Minsk, against the Estonians, who are viewed as less problematic than the Swiss or Slovenians, who will play against other teams.

On the other hand, despite having won two out of three recent matches, Belarus last defeated Estonia in 2006. Three years ago, Estonia

The Belarusians are aiming for success. Speaking of her match three years ago, Victoria stresses that health hampered her play, leaving her hardly able to finish the match. With this in mind, she is optimistic about the forthcoming match. She writes on her Twitter and Facebook pages: 'I can't express how happy we are with our win and moving on from the group. I'm proud of my team and country. Go Belarus! I enjoyed the match against Radwańska. This was a high level match, seeing much struggle. We won, which is the important thing! I'm pleased to see us in the play-offs. It's a huge achievement for Belarus.'

Let's hope that more prominent success lies ahead for Belarus.



Anton Kushnir (R) climbs World Championship podium for first time

World level freestyle

By Dmitry Komarov

World's best freestyle skiers gather at Raubichi Sports Complex (near Minsk) to take part in this season's last World Cup round and to battle for third most important trophy in aerial skiing (after World Championship and Olympiad): the Crystal Globe

This year, everyone has been following the performances of Belarusian athletes with anticipation, since they have regularly delighted us with awards in previous years. They aren't disappointing us, bringing good news again from the World Championship in US Deer Valley.

Over the past two years, Anton Kushnir has transformed from a shy newcomer to a world freestyle leader. This season, our team is lacking Olympic champion Alexey Grishin (on holiday) and Dmitry Dashchinsky (recovering from injury)

so Kushnir, the 2010 Crystal Globe winner, is the favourite. "The World Championship gave me a chance to make up for my failure at the Olympic Games, where I fell during the qualification round. Unexpectedly for everyone, I was left without a medal and even without a ticket to the finals," notes Mr. Kushnir. His opportunity to avenge his misfortune was a success.

Despite Anton having failed to repeat last year's result, when he won a World Cup round at Deer Valley, his bronze is the first medal brought from a World Championship by this young, yet successful, freestyle skier. Warren Shouldice of Canada won gold and Qi Guangpu of China was awarded silver; both belong to the category of athletes to whom it is no shame to lose. Both freestyle skiers are now in Minsk, where Anton Kushnir is likely to take beautiful revenge in front of his home fans.