

Belarusian premiere of world level freestyle is quite a success

By Yuri Karpenko

Fans have awaited the arrival of the world's top aerial skiers in Belarus since the mid-1990s, when Belarus first entered the world elite of this sport. The recent event in Raubichi was an historical event for Belarusian freestyle. Over the last 15 years, our skiers' mastery has been admired in the USA and Canada, Australia and China, Switzerland and France, Austria and the Czech Republic. However, Belarusian fans have been obliged to follow their heroes' performance at world cups, world championships and at the Olympic Games on TV. At last, our titled countrymen and their opponents were demonstrating their astonishing feats in Belarus, on the revamped Raubichi Sports Complex slope, which hosted the final stage of the World Freestyle Cup. The winners were selected, alongside Small Crystal Globe laureates.

The famous Belarusian winter centre has hosted the Biathlon World Championship three times, and has once hosted a World Cup ski racing stage. Young freestyle athletes regularly use the slope, training

mostly for the Continental Cup, but, until recently, we couldn't organise a world level tournament, as the existing slope wasn't suitable for triple jumps.

The absence of the necessary conditions at home meant that our main team had to largely train abroad but the situation changed last year. Head coach Nikolay Kozeko was delighted to see his squad win medals at all the world cups. Meanwhile, Anton Kushnir performed especially well, claiming the Small and Big Crystal Globe.

The latter had never before

been won by a Belarusian.

In addition, Alexey Grishin caused a stir at the Olympics in Vancouver, becoming the first Belarusian to win a Winter Olympic Games gold. These achievements were catalysts, accelerating the decision to construct a summer freestyle centre in Minsk and modernise the winter slope at Raubichi. As a result, Belarus received the right to host the final of the 2011 World Freestyle Cup.

One of the event's fa-

vourites was Anton Kushnir, although he was only in with a slim chance of winning the overall standings for aerial skiing. Qi Guangpu of China needed to completely fail his jump, earning a score of nil, to be shifted from first place. However, our Belarusian athletes didn't disappoint the audience. Experienced Dmitry Dashchinsky (recovering from injury) and Alexey Grishin were missing, yet our Belarusians still managed to win two thirds of the medals.

Young Denis Osipov came third, with Kushnir taking gold after performing two perfect jumps.

Stanislav Kravchuk of Ukraine claimed silver.

Sadly, even these victories in the two final rounds of the World Cup weren't enough to allow Kushnir to repeat last year's success, to claim the Small Crystal Globe. Instead, the trophy went to Qi Guangpu, whose sixth place at the 'Belarusian' stage was enough for his win. Anton Kushnir came second. Although he performed poorly during the Chinese rounds, he had managed to win two gold medals and a bronze at the next three World Cup events and also



Prize holders of overall ranking at World Freestyle Cup pleased with their performance

took bronze at the World Championship in the US Deer Valley.

In the women's tournaments, Chinese Shuang Cheng won, followed by American Ashley Caldwell and Fanyu Kong of China. Belarusian Anna Guskova came eighth. The victory in Raubichi enabled Shuang Cheng to push China's Mengtao Xu (absent from the event in Belarus) from first place overall. She took the Small Crystal Globe as a result. Belarus' top female ski-jumper, Alla Tsuper, was absent through injury,

finishing 11th overall.

Belarus has long secured a position among the top twenty sporting countries in ski jumping, as noted by the President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, after the final round of the World Freestyle Cup in Raubichi. The Head of State attended the event and took part in the award ceremony. Mr. Lukashenko underlines that Belarus has been recently hosting the most prestigious events at international level. "If we didn't have Olympic and world champi-

ons, we wouldn't host such competitions," notes the Belarusian President. According to him, the organising of the final stage of the international freestyle competition again proves the authority of the domestic school in this sport. The Belarusian leader says that Belarus is a country which enjoys sport and creates good conditions for training professionals and amateurs. Money invested in sport is returned amply, as proven by the good performances of Belarusian sportsmen.

We could have won

BATE Borisov lets victory slip away in last minutes of first match against Paris Saint-Germain during Europa League 1/16 finals

By Yuri Kovalev

It is the first time that the Belarusian team has gone so far in its European Cup achievements. While this is pleasing, BATE is no match for PSG in terms of physical and playing readiness. This can be easily explained, since it's currently off-season in Belarus, while the French national championship is half way through its matches. Moreover, BATE Borisov cannot match PSG's level of mastery. The latter boasts an impressive list of achievements in European cups compared to the Belarusian team. BATE's highest achievement to date has been participation in the 2008 UEFA Champions League Group Stage. Meanwhile, the Parisian football players won the UEFA Cup Winners' Cup in 1996 and the

UEFA Intertoto Cup in 2002.

BATE, which began the season unusually early, at first led 2:0 in the home match, yet had to be satisfied with a draw. Our guests were more



Match in Minsk held in tough weather conditions

pleased, since their two goals had been scored in an away match. "As I said at the pre-match conference, in order to preserve a good chance of going through to the next round, we needed to score," reminded An-

toine Kombouare, PSG's coach, who watched the match from a guest box because of disqualification. "We've done this twice. However, I believe that the return match will be very difficult for us."

BATE coach Victor Goncharenko noted, "The result didn't disappoint us. I'm pleased that we strengthened our efforts in the second half. Overall, we played well." Nevertheless, the home draw has not increased our chance of reaching the 1/8 finals. To move forward, the Borisov players need to show heroism. These Belarusian football leaders have a good example before them. "In Paris, we'll try to play as the national squad, which defeated the French in September. Nothing's impossible; I do believe we can win," underlines Mr. Goncharenko.

Jubilee brings medals for hosts

By Kirill Pirogov

Minsk's Palace of Sports hosts Open Sambo Championship for prizes of the President of Belarus

The 15th jubilee tournament for the self-defence art of sambo gathered over 200 wrestlers: from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, Germany, Greece, Georgia, Italy, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Morocco, Moldova, Russia, Romania, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and South Korea — with few participating for the first time. In recent years, the event has significantly jumped in the ratings and, since 2008, has enjoyed the status of being a World Cup round.

The Russians and Belarusians were viewed as favourites, with the event recognised as one of the most important of the season before the qualifications for the world and European championships begin. The Belarusian team was strong, with only famous Andrey Kazusenok absent (resting after a recent judo

tournament). Our supremacy was proven by the tournament's results, with 14 medals claimed. There were five gold medals — taken by Andrey Kurlypo (under 52kg), Igor Sedoy (62kg), Stepan Popov (74kg), Magomed Abdulganilov (82kg) and Alexander Vakhovyak (over 100kg). A further five silver and four bronze were forthcoming, earning us first place over all, followed by Russia and Kazakhstan.

The Head of the Belarusian Sambo Federation, Vladimir Yaprntsev, noted after the tournament that he hopes to see sambo join the Olympic programme at some future date. "Sambo is already included in the programme of the next Universiade, in Kazan, and at the military world championships. Sambo demonstrations are to be organised for the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi — which is already an achievement. After the 1988 Games in Seoul, taekwondo received Olympic status and judo joined the Olympic family after the Tokyo Olympics in 1964. Anything is possible," stresses Mr. Yaprntsev.