

## New era in football history

By Kirill Karin

### National mini-football team of Belarus to participate in top tournament finals for the first time

The qualification round, held in Kaunas, Lithuania, has seen Valery Dosko's trainees placed second in their group, which secures them a ticket to the finals. In the first match, Belarus met the hosts, crushing them 6:0. The Lithuanian footballers managed to keep their goal safe for ten minutes before yielding to their guests' advantage. Belarus scored two goals in the first half and four in the second, with Alexander Komarov displaying a fantastic double kick.

In the second match, Belarus lost to all-time favourite Italy — 0:3, although the score stood at 0:0 until the later half, when the formidable rival found new reserves of energy. In order to finish second in the group (and gain a place in the finals) Belarus needed to beat Georgia, which they did — 2:0.

Belarus will be playing 11 other teams in the finals of the 6th European Championship — Hungary (the hosting team), Ukraine, Spain, the Czech Republic, Italy, Belgium, Serbia, Portugal, Azerbaijan, Russia and Slovenia. The championship will be held in 2010 in Hungarian Debrecen and Budapest.

# White Wolf returns

Former world professional super-heavyweight boxing champion, Sergey Lyakhovich of Belarus, is back after suffering a complicated shoulder injury that prevented him from battling Nikolay Valuev at full strength in February 2008. Now, he dreams of fighting one of the Klitschko brothers

By Yuri Karpenko

The prominent boxer has recently trained at Minsk's Olymp Sports Complex. While Sergey (nicknamed White Wolf) was busy, his manager Ivaylo Gotsev and the Deputy Head of Belarus' Professional Boxing Federation and national boxing team senior coach Gadzhimurad Abdulabekov were answering journalists' questions. Gotsev tells us that his team aims to organise a rating match and a match for the intercontinental championship title between Sergey Lyakhovich and James Toney of the USA. A preliminary agreement has been reached with Toney's manager to hold the match in Minsk in mid-May at the Palace of Sports. Seven or eight other professional rating matches would also be arranged for the same evening. Of course, considerable sums of money are required for such a large-scale event, with TV rights, a prize fund, and sparring partners for White Wolf's training sessions requiring investment and organisation. Once all has been arranged, Lyakhovich will return to the USA to hold a joint press conference with Toney and his representatives in the States. A similar meeting with reporters will be organised in Minsk before the big fight.

Lyakhovich's achievements in the professional boxing ring are well known, as are those of his opponent James Toney, 40 (nicknamed Lights Out). He is a legendary figure in professional boxing circles and a five-time winner of



ALEXANDER RUIZHECHKA

Sergey Lyakhovich has recovered from injury and now aims for world boxing heights

champions' belts in three weight categories (under different boxing federations). He has boxed famous Evander Holyfield and other giants of world boxing with success. Toney has even been named top boxer of the planet by the *Ring* magazine. He has fought 82 matches — winning 73 (43 by knockout) — making him a formidable rival for Lyakhovich. The Belarusian is keen to begin his return to world boxing with a win over Toney, enabling him to climb

the ratings and bid for the championship title.

Sergey lost his WBO world champion title in November 2006, having lost at the last second to Shannon Briggs of the USA. In February 2008, the Belarusian injured his shoulder at the start of a match against Nikolay Valuev. The match lasted for 12 rounds, with Sergey trying unsuccessfully to box with one hand. His is now fighting fit again. "My operation in Germany

went well and I've had physiotherapy at one of the best medical recovery centres in the USA, in Arizona. I've trained a lot in the past year and now feel much better — more confident," he confesses to journalists. He has vowed to avenge last year's defeat by Valuev while pitting himself against one of the Klitschko brothers. Mentioning his severed relationship with promoter Don King, he notes, "It was good experience and I learned a lot from him."

## First time in top ten

Major WTA event with \$4.5m prize fund, held in America's Indian Wells, opens bright page in history of national tennis

By Yuri Kovalev

19-year-old Victoria Azarenko is the second Belarusian female tennis player to enter the top ten of the world tennis ratings; in the late 1980s, Natasha Zvereva was ranked fifth. Meanwhile, Victoria is the youngest Belarusian to reach the top ten.

In the recently released WTA (Women Tennis Association) ratings, Azarenko was placed 10th in the singles and doubles. In Indian Wells, Victoria outstripped several strong opponents — including second seed Dinara Safina of Russia. In the semi-finals, she lost to Vera Zvonareva of Russia, who went on to win the tournament.

Zvonareva and Azarenko won the doubles, although their path to the trophy was not an easy one. In the sec-

ond round, they fought hard to beat Australia's Samantha Stosur and Renee Stubbs. After two sets, the score was equal, leaving Victoria and Vera to battle for the tie-break. They also faced a challenge in meeting Gisela Dulko of Argentina and Shahar Peer of Israel. By the end of the first set, Azarenko and Zvonareva were winning most of the points and, at the start of the second set, they broke Dulko's serve. They soon lost their advantage though and their opponents managed to win six games out of the next eight — and the set, as a result. In the decisive tie-break, Victoria and Vera led 6:5 and managed to stop their rivals taking a single point. For Azarenko, this is her third doubles title since Tashkent; in 2006, she paired with Tatiana Puchek to win. Her latest success was



REUTERS

Indian Wells winners — Azarenko and Zvonareva

in Memphis this year, playing with Caroline Wozniacki.

"It was our second tournament," noted Victoria. "We decided to play together in the Grand Slam and some other big events. Winning a title is the icing on the cake and this victory is the most important of my career; I will always remember it. Moreover, it was earned in an equal match against strong opponents."

In the singles semi-finals, Azarenko opposed Zvonareva. She was in great physical shape from her pre-season

training and was so eager to reach the finals that she appeared a little anxious. In contrast, Vera was more composed. Zvonareva may not have played her best tennis but she kept focused and secured a well-deserved win.

Indian Wells also brought success to Max Mirny, playing with Andy Ram of Israel. They reached the finals, having defeated favourites Mike and Bob Brian from the USA. Sadly, in the final match, Americans Andy Roddick and Mardi Fish beat the Belarusian-Israeli pair.

## Working with national team and Dynamo

By Kirill Pirogov

### Head coach of national ice hockey team to head Dynamo Minsk next season

After Hanlon's Jokerit (Finland) dropped out of the national championship play-offs, the Canadian specialist arrived to start training the Belarusian national team at Minsk's Palace of Sports. His contract has been agreed with the Belarusian Ice Hockey Federation.

Glen Hanlon will be assisted by experienced 56-year-old North American Dave Lewis, who used to coach NHL clubs Detroit and Boston. Vladimir Tsyplakov is also included on the coaching staff and, not so long ago, Canadian Sean Simpson, 40, was appointed Dynamo's Deputy

General Director. His major responsibility will be to select players; for the last four years, he has been involved in scouting for the NHL's Toronto club.

Glen Hanlon headed the national team of Belarus at the 2005 and 2006 world championships. In 2006, in Riga, the Belarusian team was placed sixth, its highest placement to date. However, Hanlon was then obliged to return to Washington, since his employers opposed the idea of his occupying two coaching positions simultaneously. Last season, he was fired from the squad and accepted an offer from Jokerit Helsinki; together, they were placed fourth at the national championship but were knocked out of the play-off stage by Kärpät, last year's champion.