

SPORTS: ICE-DOPING TIME

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Summary

In 2013 the systematic degradation of Belarusian sports continued, which was most vivid in the mass and most popular kinds of sports – soccer, hockey, track and field athletics, and also in the traditional Olympic disciplines – cycling, boxing, weight-lifting. The national ice hockey team lost the qualification tournament and failed to get to the Olympic Games in Sochi. The football national team took the last place in the qualifying group tournament at the 2014 World Cup. At the World Forum in Moscow athletes remained without medals as it had happened at the London Olympic Games 2012 and showed the worst performance during *two* decades.

Medal achievements in the Olympic disciplines were as poor as ever. In gymnastics and wrestling where the pupils of national sports schools used to be stars, the front of the scene was taken by the athletes who had arrived to Belarus from CIS countries. The disbalance in sports policy in favor of ice hockey led to the fact that the two-million capital remained without football stadiums for international matches.

All the mentioned above is an indicator of the low efficiency of the sports sector which in 2013 again underwent destructive reforming: according to Presidential Decree No. 168 sports and tourism departments in cities of regional subordination and in the regions were incorporated into the education departments.

Trends:

- Single progress of superstars against the systematic degradation of popular sports;
- Disbalance in the development of sports materials and technical recourses;
- Inefficient work of the branch in the preparation of a sports reserve;
- Continuation of a specific 'reforming' of the branch which aggravates problems of mass sports;
- Further development of sports TV and Internet broadcasting.

Flashes are not yet flame

Tennis player Victoria Azarenka had a good season. In Melbourne she won the Australia Open second in a row, having overcome the Chinese player Na Li in the final – 4:6, 6:4, 6:3. Three times in the season Victoria played with an American tennis legend, Serena Williams, and won twice: in the finals of

tournaments in Doha and Cincinnati – 7:6, 2:6, 6:3 and 2:6, 6:2, 7:6. Their battle over the title of the USA champion became a decoration of the tournament. However the home player got the title – 5:7, 7:6, 1:6. The Belarusian finished the year as the World No. 2.

Handball player Siarhei Rutenka, the holder of the record contract with the Spanish ‘Barcelona’ continues to be at the summit of his fame. The captain of the national team of Belarus was called by the International federation the best inside left in the history of handball. The *PRESSBOL* newspaper named Rutenka “The person of the year”. Biathlonist Darya Domracheva again came second in the World Cup for biathlon, and at the World Forum she won gold in mass start.

Rhythmic sportive gymnasts won the Olympic gold in group exercises. The winners are Maryna Hancharova, Hanna Dudziankova, Marya Katjak, Yana Lukavec, Aliaksandra Narkevich, Valeryja Pishchelina. The previous victory of Belarusians in this discipline was 15 years ago. All these years the Belarusians trained by Tatiana Nenashava got on the podium but settled for silver or bronze awards, allowing the Russians trained by Irina Viner to come first.

The Silver medal of a female trio in archery came as a surprise. Hanna Marusava, Ekaterina Timofeyeva and Alena Tolkach on the way to the World Cup Final consistently ‘shot down’ their British, German and Danish competitors. In the final the Belarusians lost only 6 points to the archers from South Korea, leaders in this sport. A perspective duo of kayakers, Pavel Miadzvedzeu and Aleh Yurenia, also got silver medals.

Among bronze medalists are rhythmic gymnast Melitina Staniouta, weightlifter Dzina Sazanavets, female kayak fours (M. Tyshkevich, N. Papok, O. Khudzenka, M. Litvinchuk), double scull (Y. Bichyk, E. Karsten), wrestlers Javid Hamzatau and Ali Shabanau. Nevertheless, in total the number of awards won in the Olympics by the Belarusian athletes was the worst result ever: 10 medals, out of which only *two* medals were gold. The table of the achievements of the Belarusian athletes illustrates well their way on the downward path in the World Cups of 2003–2013 (see table 1). Apparently, during a decade the number of prizes decreased almost threefold:

in 2003 – 28 medals, in 2013 – 10 medals. And gold is won three times less.

Table 1. World Cups, 2003–2013

	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
2003	5	9	14	28
2005	5	5	9	19
2007	6	6	4	16
2009	4	4	4	12
2011	4	7	8	19
2013	2	2	6	10

Olympic icing

The ice hockey national team of Belarus failed to get to the Sochi Olympic Games (2014). At the qualification tournament of four national teams in Denmark the Belarusians ranked second to the Slovenian team (2:4). The subsequent victories over Denmark (3:2) and Ukraine (6:0) were useless because the Slovenes won against all, and doors were open only for one. The failure in a sport which has a priority financing, was a natural result of thoughtless expenditure and long-term counterproductive decisions.

In 1995 the Belarusian Ice Hockey Federation (BIHA) initiated the creation of the Eastern European Hockey League (EEHL) which existed until 2004. Initially it included teams from Belarus, Latvia, Lithuania, Ukraine, and sometimes Russian and Estonian teams joined. Together with the competitions for professionals there were tournaments for children and youngsters in *seven* age groups. The branched system of competitions stimulated the professional development of young hockey players.

When ice hockey palaces started sprouting in the country like mushrooms after the summer rain, in Belarus the number of teams increased. BIHA actually ruined EEHL to please the Belarusian Open Championship where the number of foreign clubs progressively decreased. Gradually the former interstate competitions of young hockey players also came to naught. Instead the Belarusian teams at the cost of budgetary funds

bought in tens of naturalized Russian players. During a decade there were almost 200 brought in here! This means that this very number of places in clubs could have been taken by pupils of local sports schools.

In 2009 after several unsuccessful matches the chairman of BIHA Vladimir Naumov made the head coach, the Canadian Glen Hanlon, who twice, in 2006 and 2009, led the Belarusian national ice hockey team to the top eight of the world, leave his post. At that very time Minsk Dinamo entered The Kontinental Hockey League (KHL), for the maintenance of the club annually it was allocated about USD 20–25 million. But there were few Belarusian hockey players in the team, and the money was just wasted. All this had an extremely negative impact on the Belarusian ice hockey.

Being not better off than before in the run-up to the Minsk World Cup 2014, the Belarusian management for the third time invited Glen Hanlon. For 170,000 USD a year he prepares the national team for the World Cup and advises coaches of the youth and junior national teams. As early as in 2004 the national team of Belarus rose from the first division to elite (in elite sixteen national teams compete). Its achievements in the World Cups after that event are presented in table 2.

Table 2. The national team of Belarus at Ice Hockey World Championships, 2005–2013

Year	Placement
2005	10
2006	6
2007	11
2008	9
2009	8
2010	10
2011	14
2012	14
2013	14

Changes also happened to Ice Hockey Club ‘*Dinamo-Minsk*’ CJSC. The team wasted huge amounts of money by Belarusian

standards, which were put into Canadians, Americans, Swedes, Finns, Czechs, Slovaks, but it brought no sports results. The head of the supervisory board of the club, Major General Yury Borodich, was replaced by Lieutenant General Enver Bariev, the former Minister of Emergencies. One more essential innovation is a reduction of the club payslip and transition to a legionary formula '6+1'. From now on in '*Dinamo*' there should not be more than six field players and one goalkeeper from other countries.

The key event of the preparation for the World Ice Hockey Championship in Minsk was the launching of the Čyžouka-Arena sports complex, which was opened with a delay on December 25 by the chairman of Minsk City Executive Board Nikolay Ladutko. The complex consists of two skating rinks, the grandstands of the main skating rink seats 8800 people, and the training rink seats about 800. Also, there is a hall for basketball, volleyball, handball. The whole complex belongs to the hockey club '*Yunost*' (Minsk).

In the process of construction of Čyžouka Arena a large number of building materials were stolen. As a result, some criminal cases were initiated; the director general of the ice hockey club '*Youth*' Eduard Zotov was dismissed and arrested.

Football desert

The national team trained by Georgi Kondratiev at seemingly quite a good game was at the bottom of the table in their qualifying group at the 2014 World Cup in Brazil. It is paradoxical, but the Belarusians played their best match against the world and Europe champions – the Spanish team, having a minimum gap in score in Seville (1:2). Before this, our national team had had unsuccessful matches with France (home match) – 2:4 and Finland – 0:1 (away match) and 1:1 (home match). These teams, as well as the national team of Georgia outstripped the Belarusian team.

After five years of successful performances at the European tournaments FC *BATE Barysau* already in the beginning yielded to FC Shakhter Karagandy and failed to get either to the UEFA Champions League or to the UEFA Europa League. In the latter the FC Minsk came in full force unexpectedly and made the

playoffs after victories over the Maltese 'Valletta' and Scottish St. Johnstone F. C. However the Belarusians did not manage to beat the Belgian Standard Liège.

In the national championship a new two-stage formula of draw was tested for the first time, which at once aggravated the fight for medals. From the very beginning FC *Shakhter* Salihorsk was the leader, but at the very finish it sharply lost ground and FC *BATE Barysau* came forward as usual. However the champions lost seven times in the tournament, which did not happen to them long ago.

A real scandal burst when it became clear that no stadium of two-million Minsk can host official international matches. The biggest stadium of the country, '*Dinamo*', is closed for renovation. The *Traktor stadium* once and for all fell into disrepair. In 2007 the Minsk City Executive Board signed a contract with the owner of the Lithuanian company UBIG Vladimir Romanov who promised to build a sports entertainment complex at its place.

However it was just idle promises. In the summer of 2013 the contract was canceled, and the stadium again went to the city. FC '*Dinamo-Minsk*' closed its cozy little stadium for renovation in Kurasouščyna, and the Torpedo stadium looks wretched. Therefore capital FCs '*Dinamo*' and '*Minsk*', and also the national team met their rivals in Brest, Hrodna, Homiel and Žodzina. Meanwhile in Barysau the construction of FC *BATE stadium* comes to an end.

Blow to roots

The terms *debureaucratization* and *optimization* should cause positive associations, but most likely not in our case. On April 12, 2013 the presidential decree No. 168 "*On some measures for optimization of the system of governmental bodies and other state organizations, and also of the number of their workers*" was issued. According to the decree in the cities of regional subordination and the regions the sports departments were abolished, and the workers who were not made redundant were co-opted into the education departments.

In the budgetary financing system the route of finance depends on the name of the department. Earlier it was logi-

cal: from sports and tourism regional departments to the local departments of the same title. Now money from these departments goes to chiefs of the departments of education, sports and tourism. And they first of all allocate funds for the needs of kindergartens, day nurseries, and high schools. And there is no way to blame them: for they will be ask about this first of all. Whereas whether some team will stand for the region in a regional cross-country or local tournament on soccer – is number ten on the priority list. The financing of sport schools for children and young people took a beating too. Sports experts started leaving the decaying branch in large numbers.

The decree prepared by the governmental officials, did not pass the examination of the profile departments and became an apple of discord between the Assistant to the President for physical culture, sports and tourism Maxim Ryzhankou and the management of the Presidential Administration and the Cabinet. Mr. Ryzhankou lost this fight. But the real defeat is ahead: the crushing blow is delivered to children and youth sports and mass sports. And it is done when the reserve preparation in the majority of sports has sharply worsened. Track and field athletics digest the hard consequences. At the World Cup in Moscow out of 27 Belarusian athletes only the long jumper Olga Sudareva got into the eight of finalists. Earlier in this most ‘medal-rich’ Olympic sport the Belarusians got up to seven medals, and the number of finalists reached fifteen.

On the threshold of the home track cycling World Cup the national team of Belarus fell apart: its leader Olga Panarina refused to participate, having referred to illness. One more titled racer Tatyana Sharakova was disqualified for a positive doping test in the 2012 European championship.

Conclusion

A year ago the similar review came to the end with the phrase: “The reform will be put into practice in conditions of severe budget constraints that will definitely affect the process”.¹

¹ Tasman B. Sports: Olympic failure and overall regression // *Belarusian Yearbook 2012*. Minsk, 2013. P. 232.

Unfortunately the forecast came true. The economic crisis provoked the declaration of the *Year of Thrift*. It had its impact on the essential reduction of expenses in branches of the non-productive sphere, including such an expensive and corrupted branch as sports. However, reduction started not from the top of the pyramid but from its bottom. The tool of sequestering was the above-mentioned decree No. 168.

Following the results of the London Olympic Games 2012, Alexander Lukashenko dismissed the minister of sports and tourism Kachan and the assistant for sports Zaichkov. Their posts were taken by the general of the Ministry of Emergencies Shamko, the general and frontier guard Rachkouski and the diplomat Ryzhankou. Practice showed that there is no unity of actions in this trio.

The most burning issue still remains a reserve preparation. Reduction of financing influenced negatively the calendar of competitions for children and young people, financing of trips for educational and training camps and competitions.

The other important issue is doping. During 2013 about 35 Belarusian athletes were disqualified for using forbidden substances. For this reason weight lifter Ekaterina Shkuratava and a cyclist Tatyana Sharakova lost awards of the World Cup and the Europe Cup. The world champion and champion of Europe in shot-put Andrey Mikhnevich got a lifelong disqualification for a repeated violation. The situation in this sphere does not change for the better.

In the majority of sports the material base became outdated and its updating lags behind time requirements. In the same range of problems is the aging of trainers and their low qualification. The branch has an acute shortage of experts in sports medicine.

One of the rare positive events of the year is the launching of the national sports channel (since October 21), and also the organization of systematic Internet broadcasting of matches of the soccer national championship.