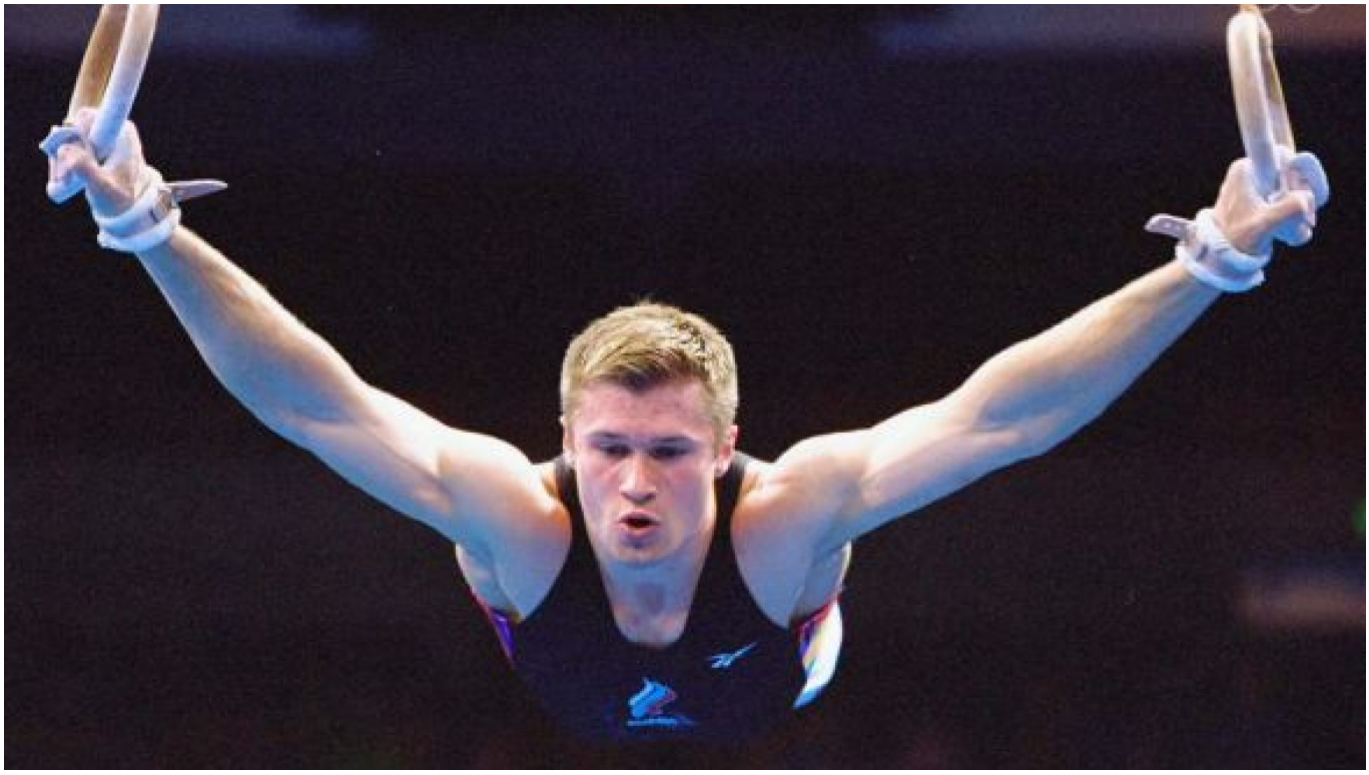
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Alexei Nemov Works to Revive Russian Sports

By D. Garrison Golubock

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Alexei Nemov competing on the rings at the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games. **Jed Jacobsohn**

At the Sydney Olympic Games in 2000, gymnast Alexei Nemov captured the world's attention when he won the all-around gold medal as well as gold for the high bar, expanding on his performance in the '96 games in Atlanta that saw him win gold for the vault. Nemov's legendary career as an Olympian gymnast helped preserve the reputation of the Russian team, which suffered from a decline in funding after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Nemov's days of competition are now behind him, yet the former Olympian remains highly active, currently working as editor of the magazine "Bolshoi Sport" and acting as the only Russian member of the Laureus World Sports Academy, a charitable organization focused on encouraging sports for disadvantaged youth around the world. As part of his work with the academy, Nemov will be hosting an event in Moscow on Oct. 31 to discuss charitable works in Russia and the upcoming Sochi Olympics. German tennis star Boris Becker and other academy members have already confirmed that they will attend. The Moscow Times spoke

with Nemov recently and asked about his thoughts on sports in Russia and the upcoming Sochi Olympics.

Q: Can you tell us a little bit about your work as editor of "Bolshoi Sport"? When did you start to work as an editor?

A: Well, I started working as the chief editor in July. Since then, I've managed to arrange interviews with Alina Kabayeva and Fyodor Emelianenko, and we're planning an interview with Yevgeny Plyushchenko and Nikolai Valuev. I'm trying to get as many of our famous sportsmen and women as possible, and to discuss with them the upcoming Olympic Games.

Q: And why did you decide to work as an editor?

A: Well, I became a member of the Laureus Academy in 2010. This was a very prestigious and honorable event for me; this is a company that propagandizes sport and that does charitable works as well as selecting the best men and women of sports with the participation of celebrities from all over the world. It is a very worthy organization, and I accepted their offer to become a member of their academy. The company decided to expand in Russia and proposed that I participate in the "Bolshoi Sport" magazine as an editor as a promotion for the academy. I think that this is a proper, educated decision, and for me it's something new and different, even if it is a little strange.

Q: Can you talk a little bit about your participation in the Laureus Academy and the activities of this organization?

A: The main activity of the organization is charity. We go to countries where children don't have any way to play sports, and famous athletes lead master classes and play soccer with the kids, Vitaly Klitschko teaches boxing master classes. We try to encourage underprivileged children to play sports, whether professionally or on an amateur level, but to give them an opportunity to feel together, that they should do some kind of exercises, play basketball or football, this is the main activity of Laureus. The second, no less important goal of the organization is awarding the best athletes in the world and making them part of the academy.

Q: And, at present, you are the only Russian member of the academy?

A: The only member of the academy from the Russian Federation, yes. I would like to see more of my countrymen in the academy, like Sergei Bubka for example. Here in Russia we will soon be organizing an event for the Laureus Academy.

Q: Do you still do sports of any kind?

A: No, I've become an ordinary person, but, of course, I continue to keep in shape.

Q: What do you think of the Russian gymnastics team this year? How will they do in the upcoming Olympics?

A: Well, you know we had the European Championships and they won six gold medals, they are all very strong athletes, but the world championships will be in October and November and this will show just how ready our team really is. Work continues, and no one has stopped working, but when the championship comes we'll see how they do. But I think we'll be in the

top three at least.

Q: Do you think that the Russian gymnastics team has changed greatly since when you were a gymnast?

A: I think that it's more that the rules that have changed. Every four years, after every Olympics, the rules of gymnastics always change. Of course, gymnasts always have to work within the rules that exist at the time in the international arena. So, I worked with certain elements when I was a gymnast, and when gymnasts compete now they're already doing different exercises. But the school of gymnastics is much the same is it was.

Q: What do you think of sports education in Russia today? Can you compare it to sports education during the Soviet Union, when you became an athlete?

A: Of course, this is something we are moving towards. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, we definitely lost the athletic structures that we had previously had, the system was completely shattered. And now we are trying to create it again and put it all back together. You know, it's very difficult, but we are trying to do it. We're holding tournaments with people like Alexander Popov, Alexander Karelin, attracting the youth to sports, because the youth recognize these names and they start to work out. We're trying to propagandize the kinds of sports that we once had in the Soviet Union.

Q: It seems that these Olympic Games in Sochi have become the most expensive in history. Do you think this is a good investment for the Russian Federation?

A: I think we have a very good financial basis for accepting and holding these Olympic Games in Sochi so that they would be unforgettable and also good for the local infrastructure, creating new roads, homes, etc. This is all connected, and, of course, the influence that this project brings is necessary for our country. We'll also be having the soccer championship, and this will all help to attract Russian youth to sports.

Q: There has been a lot of controversy of late regarding the recently passed Russian law forbidding homosexual propaganda; a lot of people overseas say that foreign athletes should boycott the Sochi Olympics. What do you think of this situation?

A: Well, I think sexuality is the private business of each individual. You know, personally I'm not against homosexuality, but I think that for us, in this country, it isn't anything to be making parades about. For foreign athletes, I don't think it will be a problem — the law is about propaganda, about parades in the streets. Again, it's a personal matter.

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