



#ZusammenUnschlagbar
#UnbeatableTogether



Editorial

Keep fighting and never give up!

The Ukrainian team had a complicated preparation for the Special Olympics World Games. But the motivation of the athletes and the joy of being in Berlin are enormous

Sport provides many moments of joy. Anna Sapon raises both arms after winning the rally. Together with her mixed partner Stepan Syniukov, they are playing against a pair from Macau. As the game progresses, it goes back and forth. Sometimes the Chinese pair are ahead. And then the Ukrainians score several points in a row. Coach Anton Lunhor nervously fidgets on his chair on the sidelines. Between rallies, he gives his players tips. In the end, his mixed double team came out on top with a score of 15:12. And Anna Sapon is beaming. "We want to win the whole competition. We have quite a good chance," she said confidently.

Anna Sapon trains in a sports hall in Kiev together with her partner Syniukov. Lunhor joined them about six months ago. "We are happy to have him and would like to continue training with him," said Syniukov. Lunhor is an active badminton player himself. He won regional tournaments and also participated in the Universiade, the World University Games. He sees the progress his protégé are making. But he also doesn't turn a blind eye to the problems. "In the past, athletes were able to train several times a week. Now, in preparation for the Special Olympics World Games, this was possible only once a week. The reason is that there are few slots for a niche sport like badminton," he explained.

Many sports facilities in the country have also been destroyed by the war. "Large centers with numerous top athletes such as Lokomotiv Kharkiv and also an academy in the Luhansk district fall into this category," said Lunhor. And those sports facilities that are still intact are being overcrowded by many other sports. The preparation of the Ukrainian delegation was therefore far from optimal.

WITH FUNDING FROM



PREMIUM PARTNERS



PARTNERS





#ZusammenUnschlagbar
#UnbeatableTogether



Many athletes were also directly affected by the war. “We had to hide from Russian attacks with missiles and planes several times,” said Kateryna Hryshchenko, a table tennis player from Uman in the center of Ukraine. As she tries to describe what she has experienced, her hand begins to shake, and she breaks off in mid-sentence. She is competing in the singles event at the Special Olympics World Games. She was also very much looking forward to the mixed event with her partner Andrii Maliuha, who is also from Uman. He tells us that he has had to hide several times and seen victims of the attacks with his own eyes. Uman is far from the current front line. But even there, the war always seems to catch up with the people there.

“A problem for many people with limitations is that so many specialists have left the country. The care infrastructure was actually quite good before the war. But now there is a serious lack of skilled personnel,” said Lunhor. But the athletes are not deterred by this. They want to represent their country well in Berlin. “I want to win and hear our anthem at the awards ceremony,” said Syniukov. When asked spontaneously, he also immediately sings the anthem. The pair also emphasize that their teammates from table tennis also want to win. Hryshchenko and Maliuha often train together. “It’s a big sports club. There’s at least a hundred athletes – all with some kind of limitation,” said Maliuha describing the training facility. There, the two mixed partners often play against each other. “Sometimes he wins, and sometimes I win,” said Hryshchenko smiling.

But now they can’t show off their skills in the mixed competition in Berlin. Their registration did not reach the organizers. Of course, this saddens them both very much. That’s why Hryshchenko initially did not want to talk to the editors of the World Games. “I was simply in a bad mood,” said Hryshchenko later as he explained why she refused comment. But then she opened up. She has been playing table tennis since she was a child. “My mother got me into sports,” said the now 34-year-old. Table tennis has a big place in her life. “I also teach table tennis to many other people – young and old,” she said. She sees herself as a kind of trainer. And when asked for a message for Berlin, the host of the World Games, she says in a firm voice: “I want to tell everyone that the most important thing is to always keep fighting and never give up.” Her sport in Berlin

WWW.BERLIN2023.ORG/EN

WITH FUNDING FROM



Federal Ministry
of the Interior
and Community



Co-funded by
the European Union



PREMIUM PARTNERS



PARTNERS





#ZusammenUnschlagbar
#UnbeatableTogether

and the struggle of her compatriots back home suddenly became very close again. Fighting and not giving up applies both in Berlin and back in Ukraine.

Text: Tom Mustroph

WITH FUNDING FROM



PREMIUM PARTNERS



PARTNERS

