

*The interview with Piotr Graban
- new coach of IBB Polonia London VC*

To win everything possible

The current Champions of England, IBB Polonia London, for the first time in their history will take their place in the CEV Challenge Cup. Under the supervision of the new coach, they will also defend their title of the Super 8 Champions and the National Cup. Piotr Graban, known to all volleyball fans from his work recently at Atom Trefl Sopot, has replaced Vangelis Koutouleas; reports Katarzyna Strag.

It's almost a whole month since you arrived in London; have you settled in and managed to do any site-seeing?

I think so. Firstly I had a small issue with local transportation, but quickly learned how the system operates, and now I travel around like a Londoner! In addition, the locals are very friendly and so I feel positive about my experience here.

Have the adaptations to an English team gone smoothly? Is the situation here very different o Poland in volleyball terms?

The League in which I had the privilege of coaching is one of the best in the world"

confirmed Graban, "It's a little different here in London, but I'm sure I can adapt to it. The main thing is, that volleyball players are very adaptable and used to change. I'm confident that before long, we will all be operating at a higher level and the results of this work will be seen fairly soon.

Have all the players returned from their summer breaks?

Two of our players are still not back as they are competing on the beach tour very successfully. The final event will take place on the 9th September and as a result are unlikely to attend pre-season training games in Poland. The rest of the team is in place and I am happy with what I have seen.

So the squad is more or less in place; are you still looking for more players?

Yes, we are close to finalising the group, however if there is someone out there of the appropriate level, we will look at them and see where we can use them. We invite such players to trainings to check their skills. We currently have 12 strong players, but the best scenario would be to increase it to 14" this will be how the team looks when the beach players return.

With such a squad, it should be possible to repeat last season's successes shouldn't it? What are the aims of the team for the coming season?

It is hard for me to say at the moment, It's obvious that everyone wants to win everything

possible, to win everything in England and to accomplish something in Europe that nobody has ever achieved in this country. it's not going to be easy; a large portion of the team has been changed . I have arrived with my ideas and methods and started to introduce different defensive and attacking systems. We certainly need some time to get it all running smoothly. I'm very impressed with the skill set of the players and the effort that they put into each training. next month I will have the chance to start to look at the Super 8 league and to check out their competitive levels. At the moment, things are progressing very well and I am very optimistic.

This will be a historic time for IBB Polonia London as they start to compete in Europe; you have that experience for sure. will that be a help to you to prepare for this competition?

Yes it will; I have won the Champion's League for women as one of a team of coaches. Now we will take part in the CEV Challenge Cup I think that the Committee made the correct decision to take part in this event. English clubs are not yet strong enough to compete in the Champion's League, but at this level I think there is a chance of some positive results. With this in mind, I have a plan to introduce 2 or 3 new ideas that we won't be using in the domestic league. Currently we are working on the basics of ball control. I don't want to confuse the players with too many new ideas,

but in time they will form part of our training plans. recently in 6 on 6 scrimmage situations, the players have started to look good. soon we will start to develop systems that once in place will be hard for any one else in our league to compete with.

Do you feel pressure to achieve the same as last season?

I think the biggest pressure I feel is from myself. Nobody in the club has placed any undue stress on me that we must win anything. I aim for perfection and I want the best for the club.

The players adore the fans and their support; is the felling the same from the coach?

That's a tough question: We know we play better in front of a large audience, especially when they are your own supporters; when they support the opposition it's harder. You feel the applause,

the chanting, the shouting, but I am focussed on the match. I appreciate what they bring during games and enjoy exchanging thoughts with them after the game. I'm pleased we have the fans and am happy they will be coming to support us. I can add my own invitation for them to come to all of our matches and support us. i'd like the relationships between team and fans to become even stronger. Maybe the club will organise an event for the players and fans; currently however we must prepare for the season.

The Olympic Games in rio were a huge sporting event, and volleyball emerged, once again, as a top event to watch. Did you get a chance to watch?

Of course. I didn't get to see every game, but I see what I can and draw my own conclusions from the teams and results and try to incorporate the ideas into our club.

Do you think any of our players at IBB Polonia London could ever make it into the Polish Olympic team?

I think there is a greater chance of getting into the GB team in the next Olympics. After all, a number of the players have already been in their National team. I wish the players all the best, but I am a realist. I will make the best players out of them that I can, and if they take it to the next level; well that is their choice.

Do you think someone like Antiga would ever coach in London?

Who knows, best of all that coaches are developed domestically. I'm starting to build my own career here. In about 5-7 years I would like to be the coach of a National Team: best of all the Polish team. If not, I will try elsewhere. we will see.

