

New doping allegations against Russia ahead of summer Olympics

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The *New York Times* on Thursday posted an extensive article alleging that the Russian Ministry of Sports and the country's internal intelligence service, the FSB, organized the systematic doping of Russian athletes, including at least 15 medal winners, at the 2014 Winter Olympics in the Black Sea resort town of Sochi.

The article appeared as the front-page lead story in the newspaper's printed edition on Friday. It was accompanied by a separate article by "Sports of the Times" columnist Juliet Macur calling for Russia to be banned from this summer's Olympic games in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

The charges in the article are based entirely on interviews conducted by the *Times* with Dr. Grigory Rodchenkov, who headed the Russian Sports Ministry's anti-doping lab from 2005 until he was forced to resign at the end of 2015 following the release of a 325-page report by the World Anti-Doping Agency. The WADA report charged the Russian government with sponsoring the doping of Russian athletes at the 2012 summer games in London.

Following the release of that report, the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) placed the Russian track and field federation under provisional suspension. The IAAF Council is expected to decide on Russia's eligibility to participate in the Rio Olympics at a meeting next month.

Rodchenkov left Russia at the beginning of 2016 with the assistance of Bryan Fogel, an American filmmaker who is working on a documentary on doping in international sport that is expected to be released in September. Fogel, who arranged for Rodchenkov to settle in Los Angeles, was the go-between in setting up the interviews with the *Times*.

In statements on Thursday and Friday, Russian

officials denied the allegations by the *Times* of government-organized use of performance-enhancing drugs at the Sochi Games, and several of the athletes named in the article denounced the allegations and declared their innocence.

The *Times* article cites Rodchenkov as saying that he used the lab he headed in Sochi, which handled the testing of thousands of Olympians at the games, to conceal the use by dozens of Russian competitors of a three-drug cocktail of banned substances he had developed and used in the London summer games and was administering while the Sochi Winter games were in progress. The article alleges that Russian anti-doping experts and FSB agents secretly replaced urine samples tainted by the drugs with clean urine collected months earlier. It cites Rodchenkov as saying the FSB somehow developed a method to break into the supposedly tamperproof bottles long used at international competitions.

As many as 100 dirty urine samples were discarded in the course of the winter games, according to the article.

The *Times* acknowledged in the article that it had no independent verification of Rodchenkov's story. Nevertheless, the newspaper's sports commentator, Juliet Macur, wrote: "If that isn't enough reason to deem Russian athletes a risk to the credibility of the Olympics, and reason enough to bar them from competing in this summer's Rio Games, I don't know what is. In fact, there are enough red flags that Olympic officials should consider barring the Russians from the 2018 Winter Games too... Russia has gone rogue. No more proof is needed."

Referring to the unexpected deaths last February of two former anti-doping officials who had worked with Rodchenkov, Macur went so far as to suggest, without any evidence, that the Russian government had

murdered them. She wrote: “There’s no telling what it will do—or, given the unexpected deaths of two high-ranking Russian antidoping officials within two weeks of each other, what it will not do—to make this all go away.”

The International Olympic Committee on Thursday called Rodchenkov’s account “very detailed and very worrying.” A spokesperson called on the World Anti-Doping Agency to investigate the charges “immediately.”

At stake is not only Russia’s participation in this summer’s games in Rio, but potentially its status as host of the 2018 World Cup.

Russian athletes won 33 medals at Sochi, including 13 gold medals, ten more than at the previous Winter Olympics in Vancouver. The Russian team far outdid the US, its closest competitor. Russian President Vladimir Putin personally oversaw much of the preparation for the games. His government allocated large sums to refurbish Sochi despite mounting economic and financial problems. Under conditions of increasing pressure from the United States in the run-up to the Western-backed right-wing coup that overthrew a pro-Russian government in Ukraine, Putin, seeking to whip up Russian nationalism, hailed the success of the Russian Olympic team as proof of Russia’s reemergence as a world power.

It is entirely possible that the right-wing nationalist government of Putin has overseen a program of doping in an effort to promote the interests of the corrupt and semi-criminal capitalist oligarchy it represents. It is also clear that the *Times*, in presenting Rodchenkov’s account as fact without any independent substantiation and prior to any investigation, is promoting the reactionary geopolitical agenda of the United States, which wants to use the upcoming Olympics as another means of pressuring Russia, destabilizing its government, and justifying a further militarization of Eastern Europe.

Doping is pervasive in international sport, and sanctimonious claims by the *Times* that Russia is guilty of “undermining the integrity of one of the world’s most prestigious sporting events” are rife with hypocrisy. In every country, including the US, athletes are placed under tremendous pressure by the government and corporate sponsors to bend or break the rules in order to deliver medals. The US is, after all,

the home of Lance Armstrong, whose elaborate doping regimen lasted for some 15 years and was systematically covered up by US authorities.

The *Times* itself, in a March 29 article on doping in international sports, wrote: “Russians appear to be among the worst and perhaps the most systemic dopers. By no means, however, are they the sole offenders. Six Australian cross-country skiers and biathletes were caught doping at the Olympics in Turin in 2006 and barred for life. Swedes, Latvians, Poles and Germans were caught at the Winter Olympics in Sochi in 2014. In 1987, a top American Nordic-combined skier, Kerry Lynch, was caught blood-doping with the approval of his coach, Jim Page.

“Page was suspended but later became a managing director at the United States Olympic Committee.”



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