

Russian athletes to participate in summer Olympics under discriminatory regime

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The Executive Board of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) decided on Sunday not to disqualify the entire Russian contingent from participation in the 2016 Summer Olympic Games, which are set to open on August 5 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. This follows a July 18 recommendation by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) to ban all Russian athletes from the event, as well as a decision by the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) on July 21 upholding a prior decision of the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) to disqualify the Russian track and field team from the 2016 Olympics.

Despite allowing Russia to participate in the games, the IOC is placing onerous anti-doping requirements on all the country's athletes, who will be treated in a discriminatory manner relative to those from other nations. In particular, the IOC has reiterated its position that it is junking "the 'presumption of innocence' of athletes from Russia with regard to doping." In other words, Russian athletes are presumed to be guilty of doping and must demonstrate that they are not guilty in order to take part in the Olympics.

In order to do this, the IOC established the following standards for all Russian athletes: (1) Each athlete must be individually evaluated by the International Federation (IF) that regulates his or her respective sport; (2) No Russian athlete may participate in the 2016 games if he or she has ever been sanctioned for doping, even if he or she has already served the sanction; (3) Russian athletes must obtain additional approval from the CAS; and (4) Russian athletes accepted by the IOC "will be subject to a rigorous additional out-of-competition testing programme in coordination with the relevant IF and WADA."

It is unclear how many of the hundreds of Russian athletes in question, if any, will be able to meet these

standards by August 5. At the very least, the rigorous testing regime will likely occupy considerable time which the athletes would otherwise spend training for competition. While pulling back from a full-on collision with the Russian government over the Olympics, the IOC has established a legalistic basis for a new round of witch-hunting against Russian athletes and anti-Russian hate-mongering by international media outlets and politicians.

The response of Russian authorities to the doping allegation has been restrained. Russian Minister of Sport Vitaly Mutko, who himself has been implicated by WADA in the doping scandal, hailed the IOC decision. "The decision taken by the IOC was well-considered, and, in this case, based on the report of the WADA independent commission, it is objective and made in the interests of world sport and the unity of the Olympic family. We are grateful to the IOC for such a decision," Mutko told Russian news agency R-Sport.

On Friday, Russian President Vladimir Putin called for close cooperation with WADA and the IOC disciplinary commission, and for the creation of an independent anti-doping commission in Russia that is to involve the participation of foreign sports functionaries.

For its part, WADA attacked the IOC for failing to adopt its recommendation for a blanket ban. It has been joined by a chorus of media commentators denouncing the IOC for allowing Russia to participate in the Olympics at all.

WADA's recommendation to disqualify Russian athletes is based on a July 18 Independent Person Report by Professor Richard McLaren of Western University Law School in Ontario, Canada. The report revolves around the claims of Dr. Grigory Rodchenkov, who between 2006 and 2015, headed the Moscow Anti-

Doping Center, which tested athletes for the use of banned, performance-enhancing drugs.

Rodchenkov is the brother of former world champion runner Marina Rodchenkova, who was sentenced to probation in Russia in 2013 for crimes involving the use of anabolic steroids. The WADA recommended that Rodchenkov's Moscow Anti-Doping Center lose its accreditation in December 2013, and in November 2015, it issued a report accusing the laboratory of destroying athletes' urine samples.

In January this year, Rodchenkov fled to the United States, and in May, the *New York Times* published an exposé in which he claimed to have run an elaborate system for the doping of Russian athletes and its cover-up. He insists that doping accounted for Russian athletes' victories in the 2014 Winter Olympic Games in Sochi, Russia.

McLaren's 103-page report asserts that the author's team "conducted a number of witness interviews and reviewed thousands of documents, employed cyber analysis, conducted cyber and forensic analysis of hard drives, urine sample collection bottles and laboratory analysis of individual athlete samples."

However, the only witness named and quoted specifically is Dr. Rodchenkov; very few of the documents examined are named, cited, or described in any detail; none of the athletes implicated are named individually; no more specific information is given about the referenced "digital evidence retrieved from various hard drives and other sources," and the results of the data analysis are presented in the most general manner as statistics. The report acknowledges that no Russian government officials or individuals living in Russia were interviewed.

According to McLaren, the Russian doping program is dictated by policy coming from the highest levels of the Russian state and involves the connivance of the Russian intelligence agency FSB. McLaren explained to Russian media network *RT*, "The evidence of government connections comes from the electronic data, the revived electronic files that were deleted and other similar sources. It demonstrates e-mail communications, other types of communications, how the system worked right up to the Minister of Sport."

However, the evidence contained in the report has not been made public. "We have all of this evidence locked up. Some of it was provided by way of confidential

arrangements. We have not published it but we certainly have it. And we are not going to publish it," stated McLaren.

It is entirely possible that Russian athletes have engaged in doping with the aid of the government. As repeated sports scandals have revealed, the use of performance-enhancing drugs is hardly an unknown practice among the world's athletes. Top American cyclist Lance Armstrong effectively ran a mini-Mafia doping operation for years, for instance. The history of the Olympics is riddled with ignominious stories of athletes' drug use.

The calls to ban Russia from participating in the Olympics and the discriminatory conditions being placed on Russian athletes during this year's summer games is part of a larger political strategy—not confined to the sports world—of singling out the Russian government and Russian society as a whole for punitive treatment. The current campaign of vilification and shaming of Russian athletes, which goes much further than the anti-Russian media hysteria which accompanied the 2014 Winter Olympics held in Sochi, Russia, is a key propaganda element of the drive to war against Russia led by the United States.



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