

# Smearing Russia: The Privilege of Exclusive Blame, Russian Athletics and the Anti-Doping Sports Establishment

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*When the International Olympic Committee gets judgmental about a country, we know the moral ride ahead is going to be an odd one. Strange sight, indeed, to have such remarks that Russia deserves special sanction in allegations of mass doping violations in their athletics. Why the conspicuous absentees?*

The anti-doping agency got cracking after the beavering efforts of a German documentary alleging mass instances of doping in Russian sport. The point of Hajo Seppelt's work, however, was not to saddle exclusive blame on any one country, even if the Russian case study proved ominous. It showed, among other things, that the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) had failed to chase up suspicious tests. Target the doping phenomenon, Seppelt seemed to be saying. Excluding the athletics of a particular state? Distinctly not.

Instead, the IAAF's president, Sebastian Coe, responded with volcanic fury when the documentary aired in 2014, suggesting that the allegations were nothing short of a declaration of war on his sport. After 11 months, the tune had changed.

The 325-page report by former Wada (World Anti-Doping Agency) president Dick Pound did anything but admit to a universal problem, limiting itself to Russian athletics which supposedly "sabotaged" the London 2012 Olympics. Two years later, at the Sochi Winter Olympics, there were suggestions of FSB involvement working undercover with lab technicians. In Pound's own words, it was "hard to imagine what the Russian state interest in athlete's urine would be."

Published on Monday, the report "identified systemic failures within the IAAF and Russia" in fulfilling effective anti-doping programs. Specific athletes were also pointed out as being violators, including the 800m Olympic champion Mariya Savinova. Life-bans were also suggested for four other athletes. It further recommended a ban on all Russian athletes taking part in IAAF-backed events, including the European and World championships, and the Olympics themselves.

Pound did admit at the press conference to there being a broader problem, while heaping praise upon Seppelt's efforts and those of Russian whistleblowers behind the unearthing of extortion, bribery and cover-ups. For all of that, a good deal of hand washing was also taking

place. For one, it betrayed deep structural problems in the administration of world athletics. Pointing hefty fingers at Russia did not get away from the fact that Wada itself has proven to be a miserable policing agent in this regard. National governments and the IOC must also be drawn in.

Coe certainly does not come out well in this. He had been Lamine Diack's deputy, a person he expressed "great admiration" for. Could Coe have been truly ignorant about various payments to Diack for purportedly coving up doping violations? The scandals right at the heart of the IAAF establishment certainly suggest a cover-up of enormous proportions.

The Russian case is certainly not pretty. The celebrated Wada-accredited Moscow laboratory supposedly behind combating doping measures seemed to have done its best to frustrate them. The head of the lab, Grigory Rodchenko, admitted to destroying 1,417 samples in December last year prior to the visit of Wada officials. This destruction was accompanied by cash payments for concealment.

The Russian Sports Ministry late on November 9 did issue a statement in response to the report, admitting to a lack of surprise at "most of the points". "We are fully aware of the problems in the All-Russia Athletic Federation (ARAF) and we have undertaken measures to remedy the situation: there is a new president in ARAF, a new head coach, and they are currently rejuvenating the coaching staff."

The white as snow indignation has been nothing short of righteous, and the specifics of naming Russia over any other country smacks of a particularly pungent political flavour. One need only go through a slew of statements to that effect. Ever at the forefront are Australian sporting bodies, which still see the betrayals of the Cold War of the Eastern bloc countries in limiting their medal tallies.

The theme of being robbed of medals is certainly exemplified by such figures as Australian Olympic walker Jared Tallent. "It has been hard to go to training every day knowing that you have been robbed of an Olympic medal."

Athletics Australia chief executive, Phil Jones, is fairly typical of this sentiment. "I think given the time between now and the Rio Olympics, it's very difficult to see that their house is going to be demonstrably in order by the middle of next year" (ABC, Nov 10). To Jones' credit, however, he did concede that, "It would be very surprising if Russia was an island in this regard [of doping incidents]."

Getting stroppy over one state in this regard is not only missing the point but invalidating the premise of control altogether. The athletics sporting establishment has been crudely revealed to be sponsor, colluder and bumbler on the subject of corruption and drugs in the sport. The lure of victory and prestige in the sporting arena remains so powerful it is bound to degrade the very premise of clean competition. Success, at all costs.

Wada's own statistics from 2013 show extensive doping cases in Turkey (188), France (108), India (95) and Belgium (94). They are certainly not set for the chop. Much of this remains a dirty rotten business, but settling old scores with what Pound sees as a residual "Soviet" mentality hardly deals with the issue of global mass doping, the greatest symptom of professional sports.

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