

The Olympics as a Tool of the New Cold War

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The 6th [Fundamental Principle of Olympism](#) (non-discrimination of any kind, including nationality and political opinion) seems to be forgotten long ago. In ancient Greece the competition of best athletes was able to halt a war and serve as a bridge of understanding between two recent foes. But in the twentieth century the Olympics have become a political weapon. Back in 1980 the US and its allies boycotted the games in Moscow as a protest against the Soviet troops that entered Afghanistan at the request of that country's legitimate government (in contrast, the [1936 Olympics in Nazi Germany](#) were held as usual, to the applause of the "civilized" world).

On May 8, 2016 the CBS program *60 Minutes* aired a [broadcast](#) about doping in Russia. The interviews featured recorded conversations between a former staffer with the Russian Anti-Doping Agency (RUSADA), Vitaly Stepanov, and the ex-director of Russia's anti-doping laboratory in Moscow, Grigory Rodchenkov. That program was just the fourth installment in a [lengthy series](#) about the alleged existence of a system to support doping in Russian sports.

A few days later the *New York Times* [published](#) an interview with Rodchenkov. There that former official claims that a state-supported doping program was active at the Sochi Olympics, and that the orders for that program had come almost directly from the Russian president.

One important fact that escaped most international observers was that a media campaign, which had begun shortly after the 2014 deep freeze in Russian-Western relations, was constructed around the "testimonies" of three Russian citizens who were all interconnected and complicit in a string of doping scandals, and who later left Russia and are trying to make new lives in the West.



Yulia Stepanova née Rusanova

A 29-year-old middle-distance runner, Yulia Stepanova, can be seen as the instigator of this scandal. This young athlete's personal best in global competition was a bronze medal at the European Athletics Indoor Championship in 2011. At the World Championships that same year she placed eighth. Stepanova's career went off the rails in 2013, when the Russian Athletic Federation's Anti-Doping Commission disqualified her for two years based on "blood fluctuations in her Athlete Biological Passport." Such fluctuations are considered evidence of doping. All of Stepanova's results since 2011 have been invalidated.

In addition, she had to return the prize money she had won running in professional races in

2011-2012. Stepanova, who had been suspended for doping, acted as the primary informant for ARD journalist [Hajo Seppelt](#), who had begun filming a documentary about misconduct in Russian sports. After the release of ARD's first documentary in December 2014, Stepanova left Russia along with her husband and son. In 2015 she requested political asylum in Canada. Even after her suspension ended in 2015, Stepanova told the WADA Commission (p.142 of the [Nov. 2015 WADA Report](#)) that she had tested positive for doping during the Russian Track and Field Championships in Saransk in July 2010 and paid 30,000 rubles (approximately \$1,000 USD at that time) to the director of the Russian anti-doping laboratory in Moscow, Gregory Rodchenkov, in exchange for concealing those test results.



Vitaly Stepanov

Yulia Stepanova's husband is Vitaly Stepanov a former staffer at RUSADA. He had lived and studied in the US since he was 15, but later decided to return to Russia. In 2008, Vitaly Stepanov began working for RUSADA as a doping-control officer. Vitaly met Yulia Rusanova in 2009 at the Russian national championships in Cheboksary. Stepanov now claims that he sent a letter to WADA detailing his revelations back in 2010, but never received an answer. In 2011 Stepanov left RUSADA. One fact that deserves attention is that Vitaly has confessed that he was fully aware that his wife was taking banned substances, both while he worked for RUSADA as well as after he left that organization. Take note that Stepanova's blood tests went positive starting in 2011 – i.e., from the time that her husband, an anti-doping officer, left RUSADA.

With a clear conscience, the Stepanovs, now married, accepted prize money from professional races until Yulia was disqualified. Then they no longer had a source of income and the prize money suddenly had to be returned, at which point Vitaly Stepanov sought recourse in foreign journalists, offering to tell them the "truth about Russian sports." In early June he [admitted](#) that WADA had not only helped his family move to America, but had also provided them with \$30,000 in financial assistance.



Gregory Rodchenkov

And finally, the third figure in the campaign to expose doping in Russian sports – the former head of the Russian anti-doping laboratory in Moscow, Gregory Rodchenkov. According to Vitaly Stepanov, he was the man who sold performance-enhancing drugs while helping to hide their traces, and had also come up with the idea of "[doped Chivas mouth swishing](#)" (pg. 50), a technique that transforms men into Olympic champions. This 57-year-old native of Moscow is acknowledged to be the best at what he does. He graduated from Moscow State University with a Ph.D. in chemistry and began working at the Moscow anti-doping lab as early as 1985. He later worked in Canada and for Russian petrochemical companies, and in 2005 he became the director of Russia's national anti-doping laboratory in Moscow. In 2013 Marina Rodchenkova – Gregory Rodchenkov's sister – was found guilty and received a sentence for selling anabolic steroids to athletes. Her brother was also the subject of a criminal investigation into charges that he supplied banned drugs. Threatened with prosecution, Gregory Rodchenkov began to behave oddly and was repeatedly hospitalized

and “subjected to a forensic psychiatric examination.” A finding was later submitted to the court, claiming that Rodchenkov suffered from “schizotypal personality disorder,” exacerbated by stress. As a result, all the charges against Rodchenkov were dropped. But the most surprising thing was that someone with a “schizotypal personality disorder” and a sister convicted of trafficking in performance-enhancing drugs continued as the director of Russia’s only WADA-accredited anti-doping laboratory. In fact, he held this job during the 2014 Olympics. Rodchenkov was not dismissed until the fall of 2015, after the eruption of the scandal that had been instigated by the broadcaster ARD and the Stepanovs. In September 2015 the WADA Commission accused Rodchenkov of intentionally destroying over a thousand samples in order to conceal doping by Russian athletes. He personally denied all the charges, but then resigned and left for the US where he was warmly embraced by filmmaker *Bryan Fogel*, who was shooting yet another [made-to-order documentary](#) about doping in Russia.



Prof. Richard H. McLaren

As this article is being written, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) is studying a [report](#) from an “Independent Person,” the Canadian professor Richard H. McLaren, who has accused the entire Russian Federation, not just individual athletes, of complicity in the use of performance-enhancing drugs. McLaren was quickly summoned to speak with WADA shortly after [the NYT published](#) interview with Rodchenkov. The goal was clear: to concoct a “scientific report” by mid-July that would provide the IOC with grounds to ban the Russian team from the Rio Olympics. At a press conference on July 18 McLaren himself [acknowledged](#) that with a timeline of only 57 days he was unable “to identify any athlete that might have benefited from such manipulation to conceal positive doping tests.” WADA’s logic here is clear – they need to avoid any accusations of bias, unprofessionalism, embellishment of facts, or political partisanship. No matter what duplicity and lies are found in the report – it was drafted by an “independent person,” period. However, he does not try to hide that the entire report is based on the testimony of a single person – Rodchenkov himself, who is repeatedly presented as a “credible and truthful” source. Of course that man is accused by WADA itself of destroying 1,417 doping tests and faces deportation to Russia for doping-linked crimes, but he saw an opportunity become a “valuable witness” and “prisoner of conscience” who is being persecuted by the “totalitarian regime” in Russia.

The advantage enjoyed by this “independent commission” – on the basis of whose report the IOC is deciding the fate of Russia’s Olympic hopefuls – is that its accusations will not be examined in court, nor can the body of evidence be challenged by the lawyers for the accused. Nor is the customary legal presumption of innocence anywhere in evidence.

It appears from Professor McLaren’s statement that no charges will be brought against any specific Russian athletes. Moreover, they can all compete if they refuse to represent Russia at the Olympics. There are obvious reasons for this selectivity. A law professor and longstanding member of the Court of Arbitration for Sport, Professor McLaren knows very well that any charges against specific individuals that are made publicly and result in “legally significant acts” (such as a ban on Olympic participation) can and will be challenged in court, in accordance with international law and on the basis of the presumption of innocence. All the evidence to be used by the prosecution is subject to challenge, and if some fact included in those charges can be interpreted to the defendant’s advantage, then

the court is obliged to exclude that fact from the materials at the disposal of the prosecution.

As a lawyer, McLaren understands all this very well. Hundreds of lawsuits filed by Russian athletes resulting in an unambiguous outcome would not only destroy his reputation and ruin him professionally – they could form the basis of a criminal investigation with obvious grounds for accusing him of intentionally distorting a few facts, which in his eyes can be summarized as follows.

✖ During the Sochi Olympics, an FSB officer named Evgeny Blokhin switched the doping tests taken from Russian athletes, exchanging them for “clean” urine samples. This agent is said to have possessed a plumbing contractor’s security clearance, allowing him to enter the laboratory. In addition, there are reports that Evgeny Kurdyatsev, – the head of the Registration and Biological Sample Accounting Department – switched the doping tests at night, through a “mouse hole” in the wall (!). Awaiting them in the adjacent building was the man who is now providing “credible evidence” – Gregory Rodchenkov – and some other unnamed individuals, who passed Blokhin the athletes’ clean doping tests to be used to replace the original samples. If the specific gravity of the clean urine did not match the original profile, it was “adapted” using table salt or distilled water. But of course the DNA was incompatible. And all of this was going on in the only official, WADA-accredited anti-doping laboratory in Russia!

How would something like that sound in any court? We have witnesses, but the defense team cannot subject them to cross-examination. We cannot prove that Blokhin is an FSB agent, but we believe it. We do not possess any of the original documents – not a single photograph or affidavit from the official examination – but we have sufficient evidence from a single criminal who has already confessed to his crime. We did not submit the emails provided by Rodchenkov to any experts to be examined, but we assert that the emails are genuine, that all the facts they contain are accurate, and that the names of the senders are correct. We cannot accuse the athletes, so we will accuse and punish the state!

To be honest, we still do not believe that the Olympic movement has sunk so low as to deprive billions of people of the pleasure of watching the competitions, forgetting about politics and politicians. That would mean waving goodbye to the reputations of the WADA and the IOC and to the global system of sports as a whole. Perhaps a solution to the colossal problem of doping is long overdue, but is that answer to be found within the boundaries of only one country, even a great country like Russia? Should we take a moment here and now to dwell upon the [multi-volume history](#) of doping scandals in every single country in the world? And in view of these facts that have come to light, is not WADA itself the cornerstone of the existing and far-reaching system to support and cover up athletic doping all over the world?

In conclusion, we cite below the complete translation of the Russian Olympic Committee’s [statement](#) in response to the WADA report:

“The accusations against Russian sports found in the report by Richard McLaren are so serious that a full investigation is needed, with input from all parties. The Russian Olympic Committee has a policy of zero tolerance and supports the fight against doping. It is ready to provide its full assistance and work together, as needed, with any international organization.

We wholeheartedly disagree with Mr. McLaren's view that the possible banning of hundreds of clean Russian athletes from competition in the Olympic Games is an acceptable 'unpleasant consequence' of the charges contained in his report.

The charges being made are primarily based on statements by Grigory Rodchenkov. This is solely based on testimony from someone who is at the epicenter of this criminal scheme, which is a blow not only to the careers and fates of a great many clean athletes, but also to the integrity of the entire international Olympic movement.

Russia has fought against doping and will continue to fight at the state level, steadily stiffening the penalties for any illegal activity of this type and enforcing a precept of inevitable punishment.

The Russian Olympic Committee fully supports the harshest possible penalties against anyone who either uses banned drugs or encourages their use.

At the same time, the ROC – acting in full compliance with the Olympic Charter – will always protect the rights of clean athletes. Those who throughout their careers – thanks to relentless training, talent, and willpower – strive to realize their Olympic dreams should not have their futures determined by the unfounded, unsubstantiated accusations and criminal acts of certain individuals. For us this is a matter of principle.”

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