

Russian Olympic Doping Scandal: McLaren Report 'Sexed up', implicated Clean Athletes

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More evidence of deep divisions between the IOC and WADA over the Russian doping scandal have emerged in two articles in The Australian. One article, which is [behind a paywall](#), derives from off-the-record conversations with IOC officials. The [other article](#), which is open access, gives Professor McLaren's side of the story. It alludes to the article behind the paywall and reproduces some of its material.

For an open source account of what is in the article behind the paywall, one is obliged to turn to [RT](#). It claims that the article says

"...that there are members within the International Olympic Committee (IOC) who believe the release of the McLaren report on the eve of the Olympics was designed to set off the "nuclear option" of issuing a blanket ban on Russia competing at the games."

This is very similar to what I said in an [article](#) I wrote a few days ago. I said that the whole way the campaign was conducted, and the timing of the publication of the various WADA reports, shows that the agenda all along was to get the whole of Team Russia expelled from the Olympic Games. Here is what I said:

"That this was indeed the agenda is clear enough from the way the whole anti-doping campaign against Russia has been conducted. It seems that a decision to expel Russia from the Olympic movement was taken probably around the time of the failure of the campaign to boycott the Winter Olympics in Sochi in 2014. All the various allegations of doping in Russia that have circulated since 2010 and even before were then sifted through to construct a case. Someone then put them all together in a dossier, spicing them up with witness testimony from people like Stepanova and Rodchenkov. A series of lurid articles and documentaries then appeared in the Western media, reviving all the allegations and putting the worst possible spin on them. A series of reports from WADA then followed in quick succession starting in the autumn of last year, timed to make the maximum possible impact and to leave the least possible time for proper independent fact checking or for any other steps to be taken before the start of the Rio Games. That way the allegations could not be properly and independently assessed and no fully fair arrangements could be made to allow for the admission of all indisputably clean Russian athletes. That opened the way, just as the Rio Games were about to start, for the IOC to be presented with a demand for a blanket ban."

In my article I also said on the basis of certain comments by IOC President Thomas Bach

that all the facts pointed to the IOC being furious with WADA for its conduct of the whole affair. Again RT's summary of the article behind the paywall confirms as much.

"Once it was clear that the IOC was not going to support a full ban, the author of the report, the Canadian lawyer Richard McLaren, handed over the names of Russian athletes who had been cited in his document to the 28 federations. These names had initially not been published when the report was first made public on July 18. However, The paper's sources reportedly said that WADA now has a problem as it "had been caught short not having enough detail to justify some of the claims against athletes."

"They sexed it up which is crazy because now the entire report is under scrutiny and I am sure most of the report is absolutely accurate. It just puts question marks where question marks should not be," a sports official told the publication.

The president of the Australian Olympic Committee, John Coates, who is also an IOC vice president, reportedly wrote to Australia's Health Minister Susan Ley, saying that the IOC had a "lack of confidence in WADA."

"McLaren said there was evidence that 170 Russian athletes, the majority of whom were set to compete in Rio, had previously had positive doping tests destroyed by the Moscow Anti-Doping Laboratory. Following further analysis of the samples carried out at the Moscow laboratory, it was found that Russian samples were split into four separate categories of seriousness. However, one of these categories was for samples which were not considered serious at all.

"We were asked to make a judgment about Russian competitors based on McLaren's report but without having any of the detail to understand the significance of them being named," a senior sports official said, as cited by The Australian. "Now to be told that there were four different categories - why weren't we told this at the very beginning? It's a mess and it's WADA's fault.'"

That RT is reproducing the article accurately is confirmed by the [open access article](#). It corroborates RT's account of the article behind the paywall:

"Sports officials have accused WADA of "sexing up" the case against Russian athletes by handing over to sporting federations the names of competitors who had no evidence against them in order to invoke the "nuclear option" of expelling Russia from the Games. IOC spokesman Mark Adams said yesterday the confusion showed the dangers of working with an unfinished report: "To have someone who didn't (commit) a competition doping offence but was counted as such is a very dangerous thing. We encourage a full report by Professor McLaren before we make any full and frank decisions.'"

(bold italics added)

The reference to McLaren's report being "unfinished" and to the need for a "full report" refers to something else I said in [another earlier article I wrote a week ago](#):

"In any rational world what ought to have happened is that when Stepanova's and Rochenkov's allegations became public a full and proper investigation ought to have been set up, with all the witnesses examined and represented by legal counsel, and with the forensic evidence examined by a variety of scientific experts, who could have been cross-examined and whose reports

would have been made public. Since this would have taken time – a year at least – arrangements of the sort now set up by the IOC should have been made in the meantime to ensure that there was no cheating by Russian athletes at Rio. Given the scale of the allegations and the suspicion of state involvement in the doping, this would inevitably have involved barring Russian athletes already found to have cheated from competing in Rio, harsh though that is. At the end of this process the investigation would have delivered a proper report – not like the deeply flawed report provided by McLaren – either confirming or refuting the allegations, and making specific recommendations to prevent the problem arising again.”

The IOC is obviously right to complain that it should not have been asked to make a decision on the basis of an incomplete report provided just 2 weeks before the Games in Rio were due to begin. However, given his actions in preparing his report and the way he presented it, Professor McLaren is obviously the wrong person to prepare the full report IOC spokesman Mark Adams is referring to.

The open access article in The Australian shows the extent to which McLaren and WADA have been thrown onto the defensive. It reports McLaren complaining that

“The focus has been completely lost and the discussion is not about the Russian labs and Sochi Olympic Games, which was under the direction of the IOC. But what is going on is a hunt for people supposed to be doping but that was never part of my work, although it is starting to (become) so. My reporting on the state-based system has turned into a pursuit of individual athletes.”

I am at a total loss to understand how Professor McLaren thinks that a report supposedly about an alleged state-sponsored system of doping should not look into the evidence of doping on the part of individual athletes, when it is precisely those individual cases of doping which are the evidence that there was a state-sponsored system of doping in the first place.

Obviously there was insufficient time to look into each and every allegation of doping properly in the 57 days in which Professor McLaren’s investigation was conducted. However that merely points to the fact that conducting a proper investigation within a timeframe of just 57 days was impossible. Professor McLaren should have admitted as much and asked for more time to conduct his investigation properly, leaving it to WADA and the IOC to put in place proper arrangements to prevent possible cheating by Russian athletes at the Olympic Games in Rio in the meantime. However that is not what he did. Instead he delivered an incomplete and defective report and demanded a blanket ban on the strength of it.

Frankly I cannot see in Professor McLaren’s words anything other than confirmation that that was his objective all along. Judging from what IOC officials are reported to have told The Australian, it seems that is their opinion too.

Further confirmation that this was the objective is provided by the way WADA is now desperately trying to retreat from the way McLaren “implicated” individual athletes in his report. In order to explain this away WADA’s chief executive Olivier Niggli is quoted by The Australian as providing what can only be called a twisted explanation of what happened.

“WADA chief executive Olivier Niggli said the confusion arose because sports

officials had not understood what the word “implicated” meant. “Professor McLaren gave each sport the list of the athletes who were implicated. That was the word used by the IOC; which athletes were appearing there in the report. Then we get to the confusing part. He gave the international federations everything he had, every name.” There was no further information about some names, yet the sports federations believed listing meant they were “implicated” and they should withdraw the athletes and, following IOC guidelines, they should withdraw them from Olympics competition.”

That Professor McLaren (who is a lawyer) “implicated” athletes in a way that was not intended to cast suspicion on them strikes me as frankly absurd. On the contrary it is now starting to look as if he presented his findings in such a way as to create the impression that there was more evidence of Russian athletes being involved in doping than was actually the case.

All this is of course grist to the mill for the lawyers in the court cases which the Russian athletes are now bringing. Some of the comments on the thread to the [article](#) in which I discussed these court cases doubted that they would have much effect. On the contrary it is precisely because these court cases are being brought that the IOC and WADA are now so publicly at odds with each other. What one can see in these angry exchanges and recriminations are the frantic steps of the two sporting bodies as they try desperately to cover their positions in anticipation of the court cases that are now coming. Moreover in any court case there is a legal duty of full disclosure which the Russian athletes can use to demand sight of all the correspondence (including telephone records and emails) which led to the decision to exclude them being made. I expect their lawyers to advise them to use this right to the hilt. This is beginning to look like a debacle. As I have said before this affair is only at its start.

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