

Who Is Burying the Olympic Movement and Why?

By [Oriental Review](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#), [Law and Justice](#)

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Featured image: A harsh critic of WADA and honorary member of the IOC Hein Verbruggen (1941-2017)

By the time the 2018 Winter Olympic Games opened in Pyeongchang last week, the masterminds behind the so-called Russian doping scandal had finally lost their control of the narrative, causing irreparable damage to the Olympic movement and to sports in general. The politically motivated actions of a tiny group of functionaries in the sports industry have discredited the very concept of the purity of athletics and have resulted in a sharp drop in the world's interest in the Games in Pyeongchang. This is evident in the [disastrous attendance figures](#) (a month before the competitions began only 60% of the tickets had been sold, and the most popular events, hockey and figure skating, had the highest number of unclaimed seats) and could also be seen in the significant drop in the IOC's ad revenues.

The reason for this downward spiral is obvious, when some athletes are discriminated against based on their nationality while others [run mad](#) with impunity, this not only ruins the element of suspense in the competitions, it also kills off spectator interest and advertising contracts.

Let's take a quick look back at the time line of events. After the Russian Olympians' stunning [victories](#) in 2014, which did much to spur the success of the ["Russian Spring" in Crimea](#) three weeks after [the closing ceremonies in Sochi](#), **influential Western players began investing serious money into hyping the scandal over the so-called "Russian doping file."**

Back in December 2014, Germany's ARD television channel produced a [documentary](#) featuring Russian track and field athlete **Yuliya Stepanova** and her husband, **Vitaly Stepanov**, a former employee of the Russian Anti-Doping Agency (RUSADA), in which they "exposed" the system of doping in Russia. The fact that one year previously Stepanova had been disqualified in Russia, losing her eligibility for two years for doping, and that her violations had only been revealed after her husband left RUSADA in 2011, had somehow escaped the attention of the documentary's creator Hajo Seppelt (for more information on the first round of efforts to promote the doping scandal, see our July 2016 article, ["The Olympics as a Tool of the New Cold War"](#)).



A month later WADA established a commission to investigate the alleged use of doping in Russian track and field athletics. It consisted of three people: the chairman and first president of WADA, **Richard Pound** (Canada; image on the right), a law professor from the University of Western Ontario, **Richard McLaren** (Canada), and a former criminal

investigator at Interpol, **Günter Younger** (Germany). On Nov. 9, 2015, this commission published a [report](#) that included accusations against RUSADA. The report also stated that in December 2014, the director of the Moscow Anti-Doping Laboratory, **Grigory Rodchenkov**, had ordered the destruction of more than 1,400 athlete doping tests, three days before a WADA audit team was to arrive in Russia. On Nov. 10, 2015 Rodchenkov resigned from his position and in January 2016 he emigrated to the US (for more details on this individual's background, please see the article mentioned above, "[The Olympics as a Tool of the New Cold War](#)").

On May 12, 2016 the *New York Times* [published](#) a media bomb based on information provided by Rodchenkov. It alleged that a special "doping program" was developed in Russia before the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, involving several dozen athletes, and its "specialty" supposedly consisted of anabolic steroids that were washed down with alcohol (!). Then, in order to verify these borderline-bizarre allegations, WADA, at the IOC's request, established yet another commission, this one headed by McLaren, which in July 2016, just a few weeks before the start of the Olympic Games in Rio, [released](#) the first (apparently urgent) section of its report that made the unsupported claim that the doping program in the world of Russian sports had the backing of the Ministry of Sports, the Sports Training Center for Russian Teams, and the Russian Federal Security Service. **On the basis of this "document," which was never subsequently deemed convincing by any judicial authority, practically all Russian track and field athletes, as well as several competitors from other events, were banned from the Games in Rio.**

In November 2016 [a new legislation](#) took effect in Russia making it a criminal offense, with a punishment ranging from a fine to 3-5 years imprisonment, to induce an athlete to use doping drugs.

On Dec. 9, 2016 the [second part](#) of the McLaren commission's report was released. It claimed that the samples taken from 12 of the Russian medal winners at the 2014 Winter Olympics had been doctored. It also stated that more than a thousand athletes might have been involved in or benefited from manipulations to conceal positive doping tests. On the basis of this report, the IOC decided to strip the Russian national team of 13 of its medals won at the 2014 Winter Olympics. But on Feb. 1, 2018, the CAS (Court of Arbitration for Sport) issued its own [verdict](#), restoring the rights of 28 of the 42 Russian Winter Olympians affected by the IOC's actions, including all of those who had lost their medals, and this fact would seem to put into question the legality and validity, at the very least, of McLaren's report, based on the following statement found in that verdict:

In 28 cases, the evidence collected was found to be insufficient to establish that an anti-doping rule violation was committed by the athletes concerned.

Decisions about what to do with the remaining athletes were either postponed because it was no longer a pressing matter (the athlete in question had already retired) or else the plaintiffs' appeals were partially upheld. The lifetime ban on participation in the Olympic Games was lifted from all the applicants.

Despite the fact that the court blocked the IOC's arbitrary decision to strip the Russian athletes of the medals they had won in Sochi, there was not time to challenge another [egregious verdict](#): suspending the Russian Olympic Committee's membership in the IOC and forcing the Russian team to compete in PyeongChang under a neutral Olympic flag.



Before we try to get the lowdown on this story, we must emphasize once again: both of these “investigative commissions” were established in the immediate aftermath of the made-to-order and in many respects fake news reports in the Western media about “doping in Russia.” The biggest tipoff that they were fake was the fact that the main protagonists of this “investigative journalism” were individuals who had been justifiably punished or prosecuted in Russia for either using doping drugs or inducing others to use them, and under pressure from their media patron, those individuals extrapolated from their own sad experiences in front of the cameras to condemn the entire Russian sports community. The hack jobs by **Hajo Seppelt** (image on the left) and the *New York Times* on the subject of Russian doping are examples of fake news in its purest form.

So, to all appearances, shortly after Russia’s triumphant performance at the Sochi Olympics, a small group of predominantly Anglo-Saxon sports functionaries made the decision (at present it’s hard to say whether they did so independently or at the behest of someone higher up) to ensure that there would be no more unpleasant surprises in the future. They hired several professionals, the most publicly visible of whom were Richard McLaren and Hajo Seppelt, to help out with the media on their project and lend it an air of expertise (proof that McLaren is in no way an “independent lawyer” can be seen in his outraged [reaction](#) to the February CAS decision).

In addition to the challenging task of discrediting Russian athletics in the international media, these individuals had to conduct a backstage war with the International Olympic Committee at the same time. Far from everyone in the IOC’s leadership was delighted at the prospect of the nascent scandal and the serious damage to the Olympic movement that was being broadly predicted three years ago. This is quite evident from the [copies](#) of the email correspondence (seemingly quite genuine) between IOC officials in regard to the doping scandal that have recently appeared on the Internet.



Without question the most illustrative example of these was the exchange of harshly worded letters between McLaren and the Director General of the IOC, **Christophe de Kepper** (image on the right), which took place in March 2017. They were prompted by de Kepper’s Feb. 24, 2017 [memo](#) that was circulated to the members of the IOC Executive Board, the National Olympic Committees, and international sports federations, which contained criticism of McLaren. In particular, it noted that “*the work of the [Oswald Commission](#) and of the IFs is not easy,*” as McLaren’s mandate “*did not involve any authority to bring Anti-Doping Rule Violation (‘ADRV’) cases against individual athletes.*” In regard to accusations that a “state doping system” exists in Russia, de Kepper stated with bewilderment that in his reports McLaren could not even stick to a consistent terminology: in some places he speaks of a “state sponsored system” whilst in the final full report he described an “institutional conspiracy.” The main problem, as de Kepper acknowledges, is the lack of sufficient evidence to back up the accusations against the Russian athletes:

“The establishment of acceptable evidence is a significant challenge, as some IFs have already experienced; where in some cases they have had to lift provisional suspensions or were not able – at least at this stage – to begin disciplinary procedures due to a lack of consistent evidence.”

As can be seen both from the text of the memo and in other publicly available confidential IOC documents (for example, a stunningly open [list of questions](#) for Prof. McLaren, dated Dec. 19, 2016 and drafted by the [IOC Disciplinary Commission](#) chaired by Samuel Schmid after examining his final report), in the first days after the report's publication, the IOC and international federations were faced with the difficulty of digging up any shreds of evidence backing McLaren's allegations. Questions have even been raised in regard to the accuracy of the translation of the materials found in the report (apparently translated from Russian):

"At the recent meeting (21 February) held by WADA in Lausanne to "provide assistance to IFs regarding how to analyse and interpret the evidence", it was admitted by WADA that in many cases the evidence provided may not be sufficient to bring successful cases. IFs were told by WADA to make direct contact with the IP team to try to obtain further information. WADA also explained that the translations used by the IP team were not adequate and was obtaining official translations of some of the texts."

International sports officials had a foreboding even back then that they could expect a real grilling once matters made it to the courts and arbitration tribunals:

"It is already evident from the appeals filed against some International Federations provisional suspension decisions that the IOC decision will have to stand up to a strong legal challenge."

It is also interesting that in his memo de Kepper makes it clear that WADA's flawed and one-sided efforts were much to blame for the scandal over "Russian doping":

"The IOC is also pursuing the reform of the WADA system... We are driving forward to establish an independent testing authority - independent from sports organisations and from national interests... Sanctioning should be delegated to the CAS as the IOC successfully did at the Olympic Games Rio 2016... The IOC has made proposals for more accountability, transparency and diversity [of WADA]".

You are unlikely to have read Prof. McLaren's March 2, 2017 [response](#) to this memo. But it's quite interesting and a few passages from it deserve to be quoted here.

First of all, the professor expresses his intense dissatisfaction with the fact that he was not informed in advance about the drafting of the memo and also that the issues in dispute were never discussed with him:

"It would have been helpful if you had spoken to me in advance so that I could have addressed the various issues you raise in relation to my Report."

Second, he tries to argue that he had never been tasked with searching for evidence of doping by any specific Russian athlete:

"It was not my mandate to bring violations against individual athletes. I am concerned that the IOC seems to be on a quest to re-define my mandate by attempting to establish that my Reports are inadequate for a purpose for which

they were never intended.”

In regard to the confusion about the terminology (“*state sponsored system*”), McLaren acknowledges that the fantasies of those who fabricated information for him about “Russian doping programs” did not rise higher than the ministerial level (“*My evidence stopped at the Ministry of Sport*”).

Finally, as for the inaccuracies in the translations, it turns out that he had no intention of making those official:

“The translations into English by my team... were never intended to be ‘official’. They were provided on the Evidence Disclosure Package (EDP) to assist users and not to certify the translation for some legal purpose.”

Incidentally, in later comments with respect to the last passage, de Kepper’s office quite sensibly remarked: “It should be pointed out that the IOC as well as (and maybe even more so) the IFs **are being asked to take some very tough decisions**, with serious legal and non-legal consequences, on the basis of the Report(s).”

In general, de Kepper’s team’s **reaction** to Prof. McLaren’s letter and their [stiff response](#) indicate that the IOC had a pretty accurate picture of both the motives driving the Canadian lawyer as well as the mandate assigned to him:

“It seems that Robert McLaren’s first Report **was intended to lead to the complete expulsion of the Russian team from the Rio Games, and the second - to expulse the Russian team from Pyeongchang Games**, but not to deal with athletes on an individual basis. Perhaps **McLaren and WADA should have thought this through in more detail prior to the Reports being made public** - in particular, to themselves to have had the courtesy to **discuss this matter of principle with the IOC in further detail, before WADA went down the path of using the (first) Report to try to have the Russian team excluded from the Rio Games**, rather than McLaren and WADA considering to go down the path that the IOC intended to take, namely, to deal with the individual athletes on a case-by-case basis. **This put the IOC and the IFs, and the Olympic movement in general, in a very difficult position.**”

It should be noted that the insiders at the IOC Executive Board peppered their letter from McLaren with comments that indicate that the Canadian professor is lying at every turn:



As a result, de Kepper’s response has some harsh things to say about McLaren’s claims that he supposedly always cleared his reports with the IOC in advance:

“I am sorry to inform you that this has simply not been the case. We made multiple requests to be allowed to have advanced view of your documents with the promise of total confidentiality ahead of publication but sadly this was never forthcoming. Indeed, in the case of the first interim report you even told us that “this content does not primarily concern you”.”

De Kepper even twice transparently drops hints to McLaren, implying that the latter, in his role as a professional lawyer, must, after all, easily be able to see for himself how decisions that will inevitably face a strong legal challenge must be drafted:

“As a senior and respected international lawyer, you will certainly appreciate that the process of gathering credible evidence against individuals, sufficiently robust to ensure convictions **in a manner which justice is done and seen to be done**, is a long and detailed process. It was for this reason that it was felt necessary and important to send a communication to the Olympic Movement on the work by the two IOC Commissions to explain the process and describe the work that was being done. Indeed, it was the very fact that your mandate did not extend to individual cases that impelled us to explain to our stakeholders the process that is underway to complete this work.”

“This may well be the case – but as a law professor I hope you will agree that this is another instance where the standard of evidence we will need to successfully prosecute cases is higher than the evidence you have provided.”

In general, de Kepper’s letter in many places deserves to be quoted verbatim:

“As for the matter of you changing your description of the affair from a ‘State sponsored’ system to an “institutional conspiracy” this does seem to mark a change in attitude on your part. However, whatever your final conclusions, whilst your report does indeed uncover a conspiracy **there is precious little evidence as to who would be involved in such a conspiracy**. Would this again be a case that ‘goes beyond your mandate’ or would you be able to indicate and provide evidence of who exactly may have been involved in this conspiracy. **At present you have left us with good evidence that a crime has been committed but little evidence of those who were responsible.**”

“Let us both agree that cooperation has not always been what it should have been between the IP team [Independent Person – a sleek euphemism, used by Prof. McLaren to indicate himself in his reports – OR] and the Olympic Movement. You have brought to our attention the limits of your mandate. However, please note that, in view of these limits, **the IOC and, in particular, the IFs have ended up bearing a huge and very difficult burden in trying to convert the material/information referred to in your Report into Anti-Doping Rule Violations against individual athletes**. A further problem was created by your Report (and the previous Report regarding this subject) seemingly **being used to try and justify a total ban of the complete Russian Olympic team from the Rio Games and the Pyeongchang Games when, in fact, the IOC and the IFs are/were simply not of the view that a collective punishment should be, or should have been, imposed upon all Russian athletes**” [all emphasizes done by OR].

“It is clear that such cooperation [between the IOC and IP team – OR] is now needed if we are to do our job and to turn your general conclusions about an ‘institutional conspiracy’ into concrete findings against individuals and organizations and also **if we are to successfully prosecute individual cases with at least a chance of success at CAS**. WADA has said that International Federations need to contact your team directly to receive materials. It would be good to receive your cast iron agreement that your team will offer this full cooperation and allow us to go beyond your mandate and prosecute successful cases against individuals and organizations based on evidence that will stand up in a court of law.”



It is interesting that during those same few days when de Kepper was working with his staff to draft the letter answering McLaren, de Kepper was also **corresponding** with the chief executive officer of the US Olympic Committee, **Scott Blackmun** (image on the left).

That correspondence was in reference to the statement from the US Olympic Committee, [circulated](#) on **March 10, 2017** by the leading global news agencies, that it was preparing some kind of "[position paper](#)" in advance of the March 11-12 World Anti-Doping Agency Symposium in Lausanne (Switzerland), which would include American proposals for reforming WADA, specifically stipulating that "*there must also be a clearly independent anti-doping body with overriding global authority of those national anti-doping organization (NADO) programs, with the responsibility to test, investigate, and sanction when necessary – ensuring consistency across countries and sports.*" This was undoubtedly an attempt by the US to head off the initiative announced by de Kepper in his Feb. 23 memo about needing reform and better balance from WADA. De Kepper's urgent email to Blackmun leaves no doubt that the USOC statement was entirely unexpected for him:



In his reply, Blackmun feigns surprised innocence:

"This was a piece that our executive board asked for and actively participated in creating...

...If there are differences between the details of our position and the IOC's, then our statement is meant to reflect our recommendations, nothing more...

If you believe that our input should not conflict with the IOC's desired outcome in any respect, I think that kind of defeats the point of providing input...

My own personal view was that the statement would not give you any heartburn as I know from our discussions that you agree on the most important point, which is independence. If I have miscalculated, apologies."



The IOC's position could not be clearer, based on the following correspondence:

De Kepper: "*My point is rather that USOC had an opportunity also to show unity with the rest of the Olympic movement by openly supporting the IOC/OM positions on reforms and in particular the ITA [Independent Testing Authority – OR].*"

And the essential: "***There is however one problematic point and this is a fundamental one. USOC is pleading for WADA to have sanctioning powers and we strongly disagree with this. The same organisation cannot be legislator, police and judge at the same time. Recent history has shown where this can lead even more so if it is a political body with only limited cultural and geographical diversity in its boards.***"



During those same few days (March 11-12, 2017), battles were raging even at the level of the Athlete Commissions (AC) between WADA and the IOC about the future of the anti-doping system. Judging by mails coming from the same source, at the March 12 WADA AC meeting, an attempt was made to remove that body from the orbit of the IOC, and the meeting apparently became very heated. The sponsor of the scandalous initiative was WADA's Director General Olivier Niggli, and it was prompted by WADA's dissatisfaction with the IOC's position on the work of the McLaren commission:



Those who want to get a better feel for the nuances of the disputes between WADA and the IOC regarding the work of the world anti-doping agencies can study the [draft presentation paper](#), which the Athlete Commission of the IOC drafted in the wake of Olivier Niggli's maneuver. In our opinion, the main correction introduced into the text that day was the recommendation that WADA AC be composed with a majority of elected members and that its Chair should sit on the WADA Executive Committee as a full member:



Perhaps sports-industry insiders will be able to glean other interesting nuggets from this document.



Craig Reddie (right), president of the World Anti-Doping Agency, and Olivier Niggli, its director-general

Here is the picture that is emerging based on the material available to us: **There is indeed a conspiracy at the heart of the “Russian doping” scandal, but it’s quite a different one than what the global media has so fervidly described so far.** This conspiracy involves WADA bureaucrats and a few national Olympic committees (the USOC is among them for certain), and their **goal is to establish complete control over the system of regulating doping in sports, independent of the IOC.** They need that control, on one hand, to prevent any PR damage from the systematic use of doping by Western athletes, and on the other - to **acquire some effective leverage in the form of political and propaganda pressure that can be used on any sport nation they think needs to be hog-tied.**

Even more condemning conclusions over the doping deadlock the WADA is leading the international top sport into, were articulated by the late honorary member of the IOC Hein Verbruggen in his [letter](#) to Thomas Bach on Oct 13, 2016. If you haven't read it yet, we strongly recommend to do it now. A couple of key quotations:

“The dramatic events of the last months in anti-doping have made us all think about WADA’s role and responsibilities. I think we have suddenly all realized that this organisation has in fact during 17 years been in the hands of four people: Mr Pound, Mr Howman, Mr Reddie and Mr Niggli. I left out Mr Fahey who unexpectedly was put into the WADA chair without having any experience in anti-doping (which was perhaps convenient for those who wanted to retain the power but definitely not good for WADA).”

“With all respect for President Reddie, I think nobody familiar with WADA will contest that Mr Pound still has a dominant position within that organization.”

“The current WADA has to a large extent failed to be a viable and universally trusted and respected anti-doping organization, because – as well as for genuine anti-doping – it has from the beginning (17 years ago) also been used for politics. We all know – but we usually do not dare to say – that there exists a sound anti-IOC and anti-Europe attitude at the level of the WADA leadership. This WADA-leadership (appointed by the IOC, which is the cynical part of the story) usually teams up with a small group of (mainly) Anglo-Saxon NADO’s (USA, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, United Kingdom and Norway/Scandinavia on the sideline) and this has created a division that has allowed the same people to stay at the helm for a way too long period. This “coalition” can also be seen from the composition of the WADA committees (including panels and expert groups)…”

“We have to face up to the inconvenient fact that many within the Olympic Movement are afraid of criticism by WADA and Mr Pound in the sensitive and mediatic field of anti-doping. This fear explains in my view why Mr Pound and friends do not seem to worry about not being nominated anymore and why they have been able to maintain their WADA positions for 17 years, as if there were no other competent people and good governance would not recommend a change from time to time. But of course Mr Pound sees that fear also and it explains why he feels so strong in his lecturing (and in my opinion: even insulting, see e.g. his “redemption” article) the IOC.”

“Even recognizing the work that WADA and its leadership have done for the fight against doping, that does not allow to turn a blind eye on what went wrong. This has recently culminated in WADA arrogating a public call on the IOC to impose a last minute ban on all Russian athletes from the 2016 Olympic Games, whereas it was precisely WADA that largely contributed to this very problematic situation by not following up promptly and adequately the information it had received since 2010.”

“My battle was, and still is, also for what I consider to be WADA’s genuine mission in an effective fight to protect clean sport, and in support of the IOC that has the moral leadership of the fight against doping and was and still is repeatedly chafed by the WADA leadership.”

As we know, despite the desperate struggle for legitimacy in sports, at least by the Director General of the IOC Christophe de Kepper, the International Olympic Committee was eventually forced to yield to the pressure of the international doping lobby. The question as to what types of leverage were being used in mid and late 2017 might be the topic of a separate investigation. It is obvious, for example, that [McDonalds’ June 2017 decision](#) to terminate its sponsorship contact with the IOC ahead of schedule, after a 40-year partnership, did not happen in a vacuum, but was instead part of a campaign to exert pressure on the IOC leadership. It is also symptomatic that in January 2018, United States prosecutors issued grand jury subpoenas against the biggest sports organizations, including the International Olympic Committee, on “*racketeering, money laundering, and fraud charges related to various elite competitions.*” An additional juicy detail is that the *New York Times* [story](#) on this subject not only came out within mere hours of the CAS’s verdict exonerating the Russian athletes, but also was written by the same Rebecca Ruiz, who in May 2016 was ordered to draft the fake [article](#) that triggered McLaren’s “investigation.”

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