



Doping at the Olympics - Richard Conway

[00:00:08] Welcome back to Bribe, Swindle or Steal. I'm Alexandra Wrage, and I'm really looking forward to today's podcast. In anticipation of the Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang that open on Friday, I'm joined by Richard Conway to talk about doping in sports and, in particular, the state-sponsored doping by the Russians that led to that country's exclusion from this year's Winter Olympics. Richard is the sports news correspondent for BBC Sport in London. He analyzes some of the biggest stories in sport and has done some phenomenal reporting. I got to know Richard when I was involved in the farcical FIFA Independent Governance Committee and, actually, Richard will be able to tie Russian doping back to FIFA for us because all shoddy governance roads seem to lead back to FIFA. Richard, this is fascinating for me. Thank you for joining me.

[00:00:56] Pleasure to join you, Alexandra.

[00:00:57] Let's talk about the Russians. Can you describe how that story broke and what we learned about their misconduct?

[00:01:03] OK. This has been going on now for just over three years. It was back in December of 2014. German broadcaster ARD released a documentary. It had lots of accounts from Russian athletes, coaches, anti-doping officials, and the message from them was quite clear: This was about the Russian government being alleged to have helped procure performance-enhancing drugs for athletes and then covering up positive test results. It was said that it stretched back to London 2012, the Olympics there. It's certainly taking place as it transpired. The Sochi Olympics in 2013 had been affected. A whole range of other world championships and around 30 sports, all in all, both the Olympic and non-Olympic, including Paralympic sports as well. It was really very wide-ranging state of affairs. What happened from there is the World Anti-Doping Association, WADA. They got involved, started their own independent commission to try and look into this. They reported back, went in and got lots of corroboration on claims, and what became clear from their work was that what we were looking at was a state-sponsored system, a system of doping that stretched into the very heart of the Russian government itself, implicated members of the FSB - that's the Russian Secret Service - and went all the way to the very top, it was alleged, of the Russian Sports Ministry, including Vitaly Mutko, who was then the Russian Sports Minister. He is now one of Vladimir Putin's deputies, the Russian president. Very serious claims, very far-reaching claims and a lot of problems and mess for the various governing bodies to take over and make decisions on. We've seen the fallout from it in various different forms since then in terms of impact upon Russian participation and how the various different governing bodies dealt with it. The International Athletics Association Federation - the IAAF - they've taken their own view on this ahead of the Rio Olympics in 2016. Even this week, we've seen problems in terms of the upcoming Winter Olympics in South Korea with the Court

of Arbitration for Sport overturning 28 Russian athletes in total, having made this decision to ban them from the Olympics - their removal for life being overturned and their suspensions being overturned as well. It really is a very, very deep scandal. Obama wrote that the Russians still deny in various forms. We've seen different explanations given in different things but, ultimately, they will not accept responsibility on this, and until that happens, it seems very difficult to see how we can move forward. It's been a game of cat mouse between the authorities and the Russians, who seem absolutely determined to ride this out and complain bitterly about any suggestion of their integrity being impugned or any suggestion that their behavior was untoward, despite the evidence that has emerged both from WADA's investigation and from the likes of Dr. Grigory Rodchenkov. He was the head of the Russian lab at one stage. He's now in hiding in America, but he's given and provided lots of evidence on this. That's the state of play in terms of Russia. It's perhaps one of the biggest sports scandals we've ever seen.

[00:04:41] Russia, at the Winter Olympics in Vancouver in 2010, won three gold medals. Then at their own Olympics, the Sochi Olympics four years later, they won 13 gold medals. That's a four-fold increase. That's either doping or an impressive home court advantage.

[00:04:57] It's good to mention that Vancouver Games. The Russian team that went to Vancouver came home humiliated. Russia prides itself on its sporting prowess and, in particular, on its winter sport prowess. It sees itself as a global superpower, and yet, its performance in Vancouver was a source of national shame. We've learned from various whistleblowers that have come forward that this was one of the big driving factors behind these claims, that they went on a mission to improve performance by any means necessary. Its claim included this state-sponsored doping program, hiding test results, covering it up, and also making sure that the athletes had the right mix of performance-enhancing drugs to outperform their competitors. When it came to Sochi, that was a Winter Olympics that I attended, and nothing was going to be left to chance. This was going to be Russia's big moment on the global stage. Its demonstration of soft power by Vladimir Putin that this was Russia showing its sporting might and showing what a great games it could put on. The stadiums looked amazing in Sochi itself, and then you went up the road, up the mountains to Rosa Khutor, which is where some of the other events - the ski jump events, for example, and the downhill events - they were all taking place up there. It was a very impressive, on the surface, games, but little did we know, right under our very noses, one of the biggest sporting scandals of all time was taking place because some clean urine was being swapped for dirty urine in the middle of the night through a mouse hole that had been cut into the wall of the drug testing laboratory in Sochi. Dr. Grigory Rodchenkov, who I've mentioned - he was a part of this. The FSB, the Russian Secret Service was assisting in getting those clean samples into this supposedly secure lab so that Russian athletes who had used performance-enhancing drugs, their tests would show up as clean. This was a detailed, highly sophisticated operation, and it was done almost in plain sight. It was a level of audacity that I think that many people find most galling. This was their own Olympics, a

moment when there was supposedly national pride. This huge operation to engage in cheating was going on right in the heart of the Olympic village itself.

[00:07:45] I assume you've seen "Icarus," Bryan Fogel's 2017 Netflix documentary that maps this all out with diagrams and how the samples are switched out.

[00:07:57] Yes, I was. I was surprised my voice pops up in it halfway through because they sort of interspersed news reports. I sat down to watch for the first time and heard my sign off for BBC, which give me a bit of a shock. My wife was alarmed as well. She said, "I can't get away from you and your reporting."

[00:08:13] Does that comport pretty closely with your understanding of the scandal?

[00:08:18] It's a phenomenal piece of work, and it really brings to light that the risk and the dangers that were involved with Dr. Rodchenkov making his escape to the United States and then bringing forward this evidence. I would encourage your listeners, if they haven't seen it, it's on Netflix, and it's a very good watch. It really does illuminate some of the things that we've spoken about here and what was going on in Russia at the time and how it was the question of they had to win and Rodchenkov's role in that. In addition to that, in terms of additional reading, I'm looking at Rebecca Ruiz at the New York Times - and other reporters in the New York Times - I should say, have done a phenomenal job on this in particular. Just recently, just before Christmas, Rebecca Ruiz published Dr. Grigory Rodchenkov's diaries, which showed in great detail in the only way that that personal diaries can. It included things like he was going to the café to buy a chocolate bar at one stage. That's the level of day-to-day detail that we get, let alone when we come down to conversations with the head of the Russian Sports Ministry and his claims that he was under instructions to make sure nothing went wrong in terms of ensuring that Russian athletes' urine would be clean and that there wouldn't be a problem and that those podium medals would survive and that they would be victorious at their own Olympics. There's a lot of good material out there now to look at and to weigh that this is being examined and analyzed.

[00:09:50] Rodchenkov was right at the head of this. He was the head of the Russian anti-doping programs. To the extent that he's credible - and he certainly seems to be - he had ultimate access to information about the program. It seems to have turned on these incredibly high-security urine sample bottles, and when they were later tested, the McLaren report said 100 % of the bottles they looked at showed signs of tampering.

[00:10:22] Yeah, that's right. These are the Swiss-manufactured bottles that were supposedly foolproof, that were supposedly not going to have any security flaws in them, but what has come to light is that the FSB - the Russian Secret Service - have managed to find a way to reopen those bottles and spot the urine that would show traces of performance-enhancing drugs for clean urine. We really are going into the levels of a James Bond film when we when we look at this and the lengths and depths that they went to inside this conspiracy. Interestingly, what's happened in the last few weeks, the company that manufactures these

bottles has produced a new one, another supposedly tamperproof one. ARD, again, the German broadcaster discovered that, actually, if you freeze those bottles, they can be tampered with. The seal can come off and be replaced. There's been a bit of a scramble ahead of the Winter Olympics in South Korea to reintroduce foolproof bottles, so they've gone back to an earlier model. It shows the inherent problems in maintaining an anti-doping system and maintaining that it is verifiable, that it is beyond reproach. That is one of the practical things that is being looked at because, yes, those bottles were shown to have very tiny, microscopic scratch marks on them whereby the Russians have managed to somehow pry them off and then replace them without alarming anyone or showing signs that they had been tampered with. That's the extraordinary detail in this story.

[00:12:03] The idea that this was some sort of ad hoc amateur effort is pretty far-fetched when you read all the detail. Let's shift for a minute to the governance aspect of this. Can you help us understand the relationship between WADA - the World Anti-Doping Agency - and the International Olympic Committee, the IOC?

[00:12:23] It's complex, as most things are in sports governance, and this is something you're well aware of, Alexandra, from your dealings with various organizations over the years. At its heart, WADA was created as the global organization. It's headquartered in Montreal. It has been under a degree of attack of criticism from all sides, really, in relation to this issue. But intentions with the IOC: WADA wants to be seen to be funding arrangements that are closely linked with the IOC and closely with international sports governing bodies and governments as well. They all pay to support WADA. But it has tried, I think, in fairness to show the problems that have been created from the Russian doping allegations. They did their level best with Dr. Richard McLaren in his initial commission, which looked into these issues. Part of the problem of the anti-doping world is trying to show that it is beyond reproach, that it is acting in the best interest, but the very nature of the way the system is established, without going into too much detail, has meant that it has become a very political fight between the various different bodies.

[00:13:35] The McLaren report was a product of WADA, then, and was very damning to the Russians. They made that public. Am I correct in understanding that the IOC, at that point, can decide whether to accept and act on those findings?

[00:13:52] Yes, exactly. Then that's what was supposed to happen. What happened in the end is there was a range of decisions made prior to the Rio Olympics in 2016, but then the IOC started what's called the Oswald Commission. One of their members looked into these claims specifically, went away and came back and found largely, again, in terms of what had happened, that yes, this has been a state conspiracy, a big cover-up, and in order for Russia to be readmitted, they had to try and fulfill a number of criteria. WADA encouraged, by signs from Russia, that they were getting on board with the requirements to reintegrate themselves back into the world sporting community, but they wouldn't accept, ultimately, a level of responsibility and an acknowledgement that this had been a conspiracy. So the IOC were left to act on the basis of WADA's work and then also through its own commission, which went away

and did a lot of work on itself and came to its own conclusions, having taken both reports into account. Then that's what got us to this situation whereby the IOC has taken this decision to effectively, on the surface, exclude Russians from competing at the Winter Olympics. For what we know is that there will be 169 Russian athletes able to compete in Pyeongchang, but it will be individuals, and they will be called "Olympic athletes from Russia." Many people are unhappy with this. They see it as a monumental fudge whereby the IOC has not made a clear-cut decision. They've allowed Russian athletes to compete by the back door, and many people questioned whether this is really a punishment. The talk at the time was that the IOC were going to get tough on the basis of what the Oswald Commission had discovered and what WADA were telling them. But as you say, 169 Russians will be in Pyeongchang. Now we have the case whereby the Court of Arbitration for Sport have overturned decisions against 28 Russian athletes who were banned for being part of the doping conspiracy in Sochi back in 2014. Their status is unclear at the moment. Some of them have retired, but some of them will definitely want to be in Pyeongchang in one way or another. It's an almighty mess at the moment whereby the integrity of the Olympic Games is in question. It's certainly at stake where you could have, as it stands, athletes who many people allege were part of that doping conspiracy taking part in the Olympic Games.

[00:16:36] I think we saw that CAS decision coming. The Court of Arbitration for Sport has never been a fan of lifetime bans. It just seems that banning them for a period of time was more likely to be upheld.

[00:16:52] Yeah. The jurisprudence on this was very clear, and it has been. The IOC lost a very similar case back in - I believe it was 2011 - and the British Olympic Association had to end its lifetime ban for drug cheats in 2012 after losing a court case involving the sprinter Dwain Chambers. A lot of people are looking at this and saying that, actually, the IOC should've seen this coming. They should have known that the Court of Arbitration for Sport would not uphold life bans for Russians under these circumstances and, indeed, that CAS ruling has completely demolished that part of the IOC's judgment. I think it's 11 of the athletes had their decisions upheld, and they are banned from Pyeongchang, from the next Winter Olympics, but there will be no lifetime ban. Was it a PR exercise on behalf of the IOC? Did they look to act tough when it came to the moment? Was Russian pressure involved in making it seem on the surface as if they had been banned, but as we know, 169 will go wearing uniforms that have "Olympic athlete from Russia" emblazoned on the front. Many people look at this and think it's a ban in name but really, in nature, it's anything but.

[00:18:09] Absolutely. They can wear the Russian flag on their clothes. If they win, there's the Olympic anthem instead of the Russian anthem, but I think we can be pretty confident that Russia will lay claim to any medals that are won in Pyeongchang by Russian athletes. I promised at the outset that you would tie this back to FIFA for us. You've mentioned Vitaly Mutko, and he was the Minister of Sport from 2008 to 2016 in Russia and is now, as you said, Russia's deputy prime minister. Can you explain his role at FIFA and talk a little bit about the upcoming World Cup in Russia?

[00:18:45] This is the situation that FIFA finds itself in, as it inevitably does. Vitaly Mutko was a member of FIFA's executive committee, and then it obviously transformed into the FIFA Council under a series of reforms. He was due to stand for re-election as a member of the UEFA, which is the European Football Confederation. He was due to stand for re-election under their terms. A man by the name of Professor Miguel Maduro, a former Portuguese politician and someone that FIFA had brought in to head their governance committee as an independent member, ruled that he was not eligible to stand because FIFA has rules about political independence, that political figures shouldn't be involved. He said he simply cannot stand on a case. That annoyed a large number of people within FIFA, including its president, Gianni Infantino, and de facto, its general secretary, Fatma Samoura. Mr. Maduro was dismissed in May of last year, which was a surprise because he 'd only been brought in by Gianni Infantino the year previous and then heralded as a sign that FIFA was getting really serious about its governance. And there he was, kicked out the organization in what Maduro says is solely because he blocked Mutko and was not doing the bidding of the organization. Now, fast forward to this - and, obviously, Vitaly Mutko is embroiled in these allegations of state-sponsored doping in Russia and said to have been intimately involved in the decision-making, accused by Rodchenkov, amongst others, as being part of a conspiracy and, of course, he was the head of the organizing committee for the upcoming Russia 2018 World Cup, the showcase, the prize event in the FIFA calendar, its biggest moneymaking event. There it was: this man who was at the very heart of these allegations taking charge of it. In the end, the heat proved to be too much even for FIFA, even for Vitaly Mutko, so he's moved aside as the Sports Minister, and he stepped aside as the organizing head of the Russia 2018 World Cup, but he will still be involved, we're always sure, in some way, shape or form. However, he is not allowed to attend Olympic events anymore. He's been banned from those. As an official, you can be pretty certain that he will be very prominent this summer at the Russia 2018 World Cup. It was he who was largely involved in the bidding process for it and seeing it through to this late stage. The paths crossing, in terms of FIFA and the IOC, the other issue of course, as well - which is in the background of all this - claims that perhaps that in amongst those who were subject to Russian state doping was indeed the Russian football team who competed at the 2014 World Cup. FIFA has a problem with that and has said it is going to investigate and is going to talk to the whistleblower involved, try and gather evidence, but of course, that is a huge problem for them if the host team for its own World Cup, which takes place in June this year, is implicated in a doping scandal. The expectation is that the answers on this will perhaps come sometime after the World Cup final has been played and the final whistle has been blown on July 15th. I don't think anything is going to be allowed to rain on FIFA and Russia's parade, but that is a complex situation that faces FIFA, the IOC, WADA. It's very much an enmeshed situation.

[00:22:30] As somebody who lives in the world of commercial corruption, corporate corruption, the sports world has us beat. It's always pretty amazing. A last question about WADA: Do they have credibility at this point, after everything that we've been through?

[00:22:45] As a BBC correspondent, I'll probably have to walk the line on this one because I'm supposed to see both sides of the argument and bring it to a conclusion. I think WADA has a degree of sympathy. I think it has a degree of public sympathy because it is certainly arguing that it is trying to do the best it can, given restraints in finance, restraints in cooperation and restraints in the way that the anti-doping system works. It's a national - based system, and they are the overarching body across the various different national anti-doping organizations. It has been dealt an extremely difficult hand because if you believe the claims and believe the allegations - and the evidence does seem to be overwhelming - a huge state like Russia has been at the heart of a massive campaign and conspiracy to dope its athletes, to hide the evidence and then continue to argue politically and by various other means that it has done nothing wrong. WADA has been caught at the very heart of this. Now that's not to say it is not without fault, it is not without blame. I think there are lots of people who could speak to you who could talk in greater depth than I could about the problems within WADA and within its structure and the way it's set up and its financing and so on and so forth. But I think given the circumstances it finds itself in, it is hard to find a path through. It is hard to find a way through. Has there been damage to its credibility? Potentially. But ultimately, I think the governing bodies, the governing organizations, the International Olympic Committee in particular - I think FIFA is going to have an increasing spotlight shone on it over the next few months - those are the organizations that have the real power in this. I think what we're seeing in particular with the IOC at the moment are huge question marks over its decision-making, given the work that WADA did to corroborate evidence, to show what had happened, had been happening within Russia and with its athletes over a prolonged period of years and how they're now dealing with that evidence and its own evidence that it has gathered through the likes of the Oswald Commission. I think that is where the final analysis will be made.

[00:25:08] In fairness, it's worth noting that WADA threw an awful lot of firepower at the Sochi Olympics. There was a team of scientists there. There were a lot of people who lent a lot of credibility to the effort, but I just don't think anybody anticipated this sort of cloak-and-dagger FSB - formerly KGB - effort to sneak samples out in the middle of the night, tamper with them and then sneak them back in through concealed holes in the wall. That's a high level of intrigue for an organization like WADA to uncover.

[00:25:45] Exactly, yeah. I think people have to remember that it is not a police force. It is not a law enforcement agency in any way, shape or form like that. It has limited powers, relies on cooperation, and it relies ultimately on goodwill. When you have a state power of the size of Russia drilling holes in the walls of laboratories, having shadow laboratories with months upon months of clean urine being stored and labeled and identified correctly to individual athletes so that when the time comes for the performance-enhancing drugs to be masked and to be swapped for clean urine, it can happen. As I say, I was there in Sochi during that time. The big story going into the Olympics was all about security. Would the Sochi Olympics be free from terrorism given Russia's many enemies? Would it be a safe Olympics? There was a ring of steel around Sochi itself. On site, you didn't see a lot of armed policemen, but we knew to get into

that area was very difficult. To get through the airport, to get on site was a very difficult task if you had ill intent. Russia was a very, very secure state. They operated under that cloak to manipulate, according to the evidence, those doping samples and to fool the world, to fool the Olympic movement as to those winning performances that everyone watched on television and in those stadiums and on those mountain tops. That strikes at the very integrity of the heart of sport. If sport doesn't have integrity, if sport is not seen as being clean, then, eventually, the public, the sponsors walk away because people have to believe that what they see is real. That is why it is such a serious issue - because it strikes to that central tenet of what makes sport great, which is that we are watching it because we think we are watching people perform to the very limit of their abilities, that we're seeing great performances, heroic achievements. If we find out subsequently that they were cheating and that there was an organized conspiracy, that really undermines it. I think that's why the onus really is on the IOC and others to get this right. At the moment, I think the jury is out on that.

[00:28:06] That's a great note to end on, Richard. Thank you. I was not in Sochi. I am off to Pyeongchang in a week and looking forward to a whole lot of ice hockey and a little bit of curling.

[00:28:16] I lived in Scotland for many years, and I'm a curling fan. Actually, it's one of the only things that Britain is quite good at Winter Olympics. We won a few medals last time around, but curling is one we in Britain always look out for that.

[00:28:29] I'm excited about the games, but you're right. This does cast a real shadow over things, but the Russians had Sochi locked down and had complete control over the security situation there, as you say. It'll be a very different situation in Pyeongchang, which has its own security issues on the global stage but of a very different nature

[00:28:48] Indeed. I think, ultimately, that's the real shame - that, rather than a few days now until those Winter Olympics begin, we're not talking about the sport and about the excitement of the sport and about what we're going to see and those medal prospects. What we're talking about instead, once again, going into an Olympic Games, is the question of Russia: what we do with Russia, the reaction and what is done in light of these doping claims, these very serious doping claims that are against them. It seems intent now that it will overshadow the beginning of them and, of course, all the way through because let's not forget that at the very end of this Olympics in South Korea - the closing ceremony - Russia will come back together again. The IOC have said they will march at the closing ceremony under the Russian flag once again. This was seen as the moment when Russia will be reintegrated having served their punishment. I think many people will look at that and think, "Perhaps justice has not yet been done," and that will be a real moment at the very end of that Olympics when I think there will be a lot of dissatisfaction from the sporting world, when that Russian team walks in under their flag once again.

[00:29:53] That's without even mentioning North Korea looming to the north at the same time. Interesting times. You will be turning your attention to the Russian World Cup and not at the

Olympics, I understand, but I encourage people to follow you on Twitter for breaking sports news. Thank you so much for your time today, Richard.

[00:30:12] It's a pleasure, Alexandra. Thank you very much.