

## **INSIDE THE RINGS**

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## **Days and Decisions Shaking the World of Sport**

***Michael Pirrie sees the landmark CAS ruling that upholds the IAAF's ban on Russian athletes at the Rio Olympic Games as a turning point in the war against doping and corruption in sport, increasing pressure for a complete and unprecedented ban on Russian Olympic teams in the days ahead***

In his seminal work "Ten Days That Shook the World," the American journalist John Reed documented the events of the Russian Revolution of 1917, which would shape the political landscape for most of the 20th century. Olympic and international sport are now experiencing a period of radical if not revolutionary change nearly a century on - a period of change and uncertainty prompted by revelations of modern day widespread illegal doping activity in Russia supported by the Russian Secret Service and Sports Ministry; a system, ironically, that evolved from government systems that grew out of the Russian Revolution and the political landscape it spawned.

The decision by the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) upholding the IAAF ban on Russian track and field athletes attending international sporting events, including next month's Rio Olympic Games, will trigger the biggest shake up in the world of sport for decades, including a possible ban on all Russian sports teams and athletes in Rio.

While the uncertainty of the legal action and initial ban by the IAAF on Russian athletics had created some divisions within sections of the Olympic Movement, the silent chorus of approval and applause that greeted the CAS decision from honest athletes, millions of Olympic sports fans and young people worldwide was almost palpable as news of the verdict spread quickly around the world.

You could perhaps also see Olympic legends past and present nodding their approval – from Jesse Owens and Muhammad Ali to Usain Bolt, and even the father of the modern Olympic Movement, Pierre de Coubertin – for this was a decision of and for honest athletes, especially WADA commission athletes and athlete associations who played a key role pushing ►►►

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for the investigations that ultimately helped to expose the doping culture in Russia and led to the CAS case and decision.

The CAS decision is a seminal and defining moment in world sport. IOC President Thomas Bach has long urged and warned sporting bodies, regulators and stakeholders to change while they could, or be forced to change. The CAS ruling takes world and Olympic sport into that space.

The CAS ruling is a powerful vindication of the leadership style and focus shown by new IAAF president Seb Coe in restoring faith and credibility back into his federation, which is responsible for the biggest and most popular sport in the Olympic Games, track and field, the foundation Olympic sport, but which has been mired in allegations of doping related corruption and bribery prior to Coe's election last August.

Coe's determination to clean up the sport to which he has devoted his life and his bravery in following the trail of doping related evidence to wherever it may lead, has already produced sweeping changes to the sport and provides a blueprint for other sports seeking to also reform their governance structures and modernise.

Coe is on track to have an even greater influence on Olympic sport as an administrator than even as a multi world record holder and Olympic gold medalist.

The CAS decision is also a major victory for the WADA Board and its president Sir Craig Reedie who supported the stand taken by the IAAF in its battle against doping, and believe the CAS ruling represents a significant step closer to the much fabled level playing field, especially at the Olympic Games, sport's ultimate showcase.

The CAS decision is the ultimate wake up call for national sporting bodies to ensure their athletes, anti-doping systems for testing, analysis and staffing are compliant with WADA protocols and their international federations.

The ruling is unique in world sports law. Never before has a National Olympic Committee challenged a world sports governing body in a court of law over the selection of athletes in a government controlled sports system that sponsored doping activity for the Olympic Games; a sports doping system that a highly respected IOC Vice President John Coates recently described as "rotten to the core."

The verdict will shake world sports politics and reshape the sporting landscape in ways that will be profound but which are not yet fully clear.

We are in new and uncharted territory, where no world sports governing body like the IAAF has been brave enough nor bold enough to venture before in order to defend its own eligibility regulations against a member federation seen to be noncompliant with its doping rules.

On the surface, the CAS ruling essentially means that Russia's track and field teams, the largest in the world, will not have access to the world's biggest sporting event, the Olympic Games in Rio, because its governing body, the IAAF, has deemed the team ineligible to compete due to noncompliance with its WADA based anti-doping code. CAS has upheld this position.

The decision by the Court of Arbitration For Sport reaffirms the authority of the IAAF, and by inference, all other IFs, to decide the eligibility of athletes from national member federations to compete at international events in circumstances where the member federation has not complied with the parent IF's regulations.

The CAS ruling follows the landmark WADA McLaren, Pound and IAAF task force findings and related reports which outlined extensive doping in Russia's sports system, helping to set the stage for the legal case and arguments that led to the CAS decision, and which will impact on follow up decisions relating to Russia's wider participation at the Rio Olympic Games and other major international sporting events in the short term at least. ►►►

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The fall out from the CAS ruling is far from over, with even greater shockwaves possible - the IOC must now decide whether or not to ban the entire Russia Olympic team from Rio, the first time the Olympic governing body has been forced into such a position.

The CAS verdict is not binding on the IOC but sets a very strong precedent for decisions relating to the eligibility of other sports and national teams found or suspected to be in violation of IF regulations, in this instance failing to comply with the IFs WADA based anti doping regulations.

While discussing the challenge of doping allegations arising from IAAF taskforce and WADA non-compliance declarations and reports in relation to Russia and Kenya at a media conference after the Rio 2016 summit in Lausanne for Olympic stakeholders recently, the IOC president said the conclusion of the summit had placed serious doubts on the presumption of innocence of athletes coming from these countries.

Russia's doping crisis poses one of the greatest challenges to the Olympic Movement since the US and Russia boycotts of the eighties; this time Russia wanting to stay rather than leave - it also provides the opportunity for the Olympic Movement to make a powerful statement of leadership to the world of sport and beyond in support of core Olympic and sporting values and clean and honest athletes.

The CAS decision now focuses the attention of the IOC on determining the fate of Russia's other Olympic sports in Rio – a decision that will be influenced heavily by the recent WADA McLaren report which found evidence of widespread systematic doping in winter Olympic sports at Russia's 2014 Sochi Games, and the likelihood as well of doping across the board in summer and winter sports.

The IOC Executive Board will have to decide essentially whether it takes a collective decision and suspends all or most Russian sports and athletes from Rio, or looks at how possibly different criteria regulating competition eligibility in different IF's could apply to selection and participation in other Olympic sports in Rio.

The CAS decision will help to restore much needed confidence and credibility back into sport.

It will serve as a deterrent to rogue sporting nations, governments and non-compliant federations. The CAS decision however should not be seen as a penalty or punishment for athletes caught up in Russia's corrupt doping programme.

The decision only went in the IAAF's favour because the federation's rules and regulations governing eligibility for competition were judged to be legally robust, reliable and relevant to concerns about Russia's national athletics federation and lack of compliance with the international federation's anti doping code of practice.

The CAS decision highlights the enormous responsibility of national member federations and officials to meet their obligations under their respective IF codes and the need to comply with IF anti-doping protocols in each of the national jurisdictions they are responsible for.

This is probably the most efficient and practical way to ensure that all athletes are competing as closely as possible on a level playing field.

\*Michael Pirrie is an international communications and media strategy adviser and commentator on Olympic and world sport. He was Executive Adviser to the London 2012 Olympic Games Organising Committee (Locog) and chairman Sebastian Coe on international media strategy, and liaised with the IOC Executive Office on content and planning for Olympic Games Executive Board, Project Review, Co-ordination Commission, and Session meetings; he led the international media relations strategy for the London Olympic Games Bid Committee against Paris, New York, Moscow and Madrid.

