

# From Russia with dope

German report alleges 99% of Russian athletes caught in drug web

NINETY-NINE percent: that's the staggering, depressing percentage of Russian Olympic athletes alleged to be involved in a systemic, multisport doping cover-up by a German investigative report last week.

Briefly, pursuing evidence provided by two whistleblowers from inside the Russian sporting system, journalist Hajo Seppelt uncovered a network of corruption so deep that even the governing body of athletics, the IAAF, is implicated in covering up and facilitating doping and positive test evasion.

The cover-up runs from the top down, with coaches and officials providing aspiring athletes with drugs. With the co-operation of the Russian anti-doping agency, and even the Russian ministry, doping was covered up with a complex system of providing clean urine samples to replace "dirty" ones, false names to avoid detection during travel, and even sacrificial lambs — lesser-known athletes whose positive tests were revealed to create a veneer of respectability about Russian sport.

The scandal affects South African athletics directly, since one of the marquee names implicated in the investigation is Mariya Savinova, who won the Olympic 800m title in London, beating our own Caster

DOCTOR  
KNOW

ROSS  
TUCKER



‘The cover-up runs from the top down

Semenya, who, for all her troubles since, may well be the rightful Olympic champion, a sobering thought for the bigger picture. How many more athletes have been denied by systemic cheating?

It's tempting to dismiss this as an isolated incident of a corrupt government organisation who are willing to break the rules for a sporting advantage. Historians of sport can point to the East German system of the 1970s and 1980s. Or more recently to Lance Armstrong's US Postal Service team at the Tour de France, hyperbolically described as "the most sophisticated, professionalised and successful doping programme that sport has ever seen".

The Russian scandal of 2014

(and sadly, probably many years before) dwarfs that in scale. And while we may want to leave these unsavoury accusations behind the shadowy remnants of the Iron Curtain, there are a number of reasons why we cannot.

First, even if the estimated 99% is twice as high as the actual number of doped athletes, we must sit up and pay attention, because not a single Russian athlete failed a doping test at the 2014 Winter Olympic Games. Only one failed a test at London 2012.

If doping is so pervasive, and testing cannot detect it, then where do we stand on clean sport?

Second, the report confirms what those involved in sport have long recognised — athletes rarely dope in isolation. Testing is by no means perfect, and there's truth in the idea that failing a test requires a lapse, an error, or simple stupidity.

However, the testing process is now good enough that, without systemic support, the net eventually closes. The Russian scandal reveals that systemic support exists and that is extremely worrying.

Third, the Russian system lasted as long as it did because of a culture that accepted that doping was the only way to win. Why would such a culture be

exclusive to Russia? And if doping has powerful effects on performance, and Russians are not winning all the medals, then what does it say about other nations and the chances they, too, are doping?

Finally, the investigation revealed that the two whistleblowers approached the World Anti-Doping Agency, but that they had limited powers to intervene — their only response is to let the sport's governing bodies know. In other words, the highest anti-doping body has to pass information on to the very organisations complicit in doping. You can see the catch-22 here.

It creates a confused, toothless system, where the conflict of interests, combined with ineffective powers from the top, mean that doping is, sadly, worth the risk.

Until external agencies have the power to ban entire nations from Olympic Games, or even sports, then doping will continue, not because of immoral athletes, but rather because the athletes themselves are reduced to weapons in a much larger battle.

In the words of the Russian athletics president in response to the allegations: These are "a pack of lies". Sadly, the same may be said of elite sport if things do not change.



FALSE POSITIVE: Russia's Mariya Savinova wins gold ahead of second-placed Caster Semenya in the women's 800m final at the London Olympics in 2012. Savinova is a marquee name implicated in a German doping probe  
Picture: REUTERS

## Khan's big-time shot

BRITISH boxer Amir Khan is treating his debut as headliner next Saturday at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas as "a dress rehearsal for facing Floyd Mayweather" ahead of a career-defining 12 months.

Khan faces the former two-weight world champion Devon Alexander for the World Boxing Council silver welter-weight title, knowing a win could propel him into fights with Mayweather, Manny Pacquiao and Kell Brook next year.  
— © The Sunday Telegraph

## Ronaldo's record

CRISTIANO Ronaldo scored a record 23rd hat-trick in La Liga — and his 200th goal in the Spanish top flight — as Real equalled the Spanish record of 18 consecutive wins in all competitions on Saturday.

Ronaldo scored all of Real's goals in a 3-0 win over Celta Vigo to break the hat-trick record of Telmo Zarra — whose record as La Liga's top goalscorer was recently broken by Lionel Messi — and Madrid legend Alfredo di Stefano, both with 22. — AFP

## Sick Tiger still bites

TIGER Woods battled through nausea, fever and vomiting to fire a three-under-par 69 in the third round of the Hero World Challenge, his first golf tournament after a four-month injury layoff.

Woods birdied the last three holes for a level-par 216 after 54 holes at Isleworth, Florida, but remained last, despite shooting lower scores even when feeling progressively more ill.

"It wasn't easy. I fought hard," Woods said. — © The Sunday Telegraph

## Blitzbokke on a high

THE Blitzbokke will arrive in Port Elizabeth today boosted by their sensational form in capturing the Dubai leg of the HSBC World Sevens Series at the weekend.

The South Africans thrashed Australia 33-7 in the final, only hours after their record 28-0 win against New Zealand in the semifinal and are now undisputed favourites to win the Port Elizabeth title. The win has propelled SA to second on the overall log with 37 points, two behind Fiji. — Craig Ray