

## Editorial

*By Dag Vidar Hanstad, Norwegian School  
of Sport Sciences, Norway*



### **The suspicion towards Russia**

Russia is a super power in international elite sport, but its image is tainted as a result of issues with performance-enhancing drugs. Can the Russians sort out their problems in time for the Olympic Winter Games in Sochi, 2014?

This week, the FIS Nordic World Ski Championships are underway in Oslo, Norway. Winter sports in general are probably not top of the agenda for readers of INHDR's website, but the World Championships in Oslo are important from a doping perspective.

The organizers of the FIS Nordic Ski event claim to be carrying out more and better drug tests than ever before. Allegedly the big news is that it is now possible to test for blood doping in instances where athletes use their own blood. Also, according to one of Norway's best selling newspapers, *Verdens Gang*, there will be a special focus on athletes from one specific nation - Russia. Since 2007 ten cross-country skiers at international level have been charged with the use of illegal substances. Following the revelations regarding the Russian medal winners Larissa Lazutina and Olga Danilova during the Winter Games in Salt Lake City in 2002, there have been drug related incidents not only among cross-country skiers, but also in another Olympic endurance sport, biathlon.

As a result, any Russian who performs well during the Championships in Oslo will immediately be suspected of using performance-enhancing drugs. At the same time, Russian sport has been humiliated. The glorified portrait of Russian sport has been torn down by international sport leaders. Last summer, the International Ski Federation (FIS) imposed economic sanctions on the Russian

Ski Federation, and threatened it with exclusion. Such actions have effect on a nation which is hosting the Olympic Winter Games in three years time.

If there is one thing President Medvedev and Prime Minister Putin do not want to experience during the Winter Games in Sochi, it is scandals, like the ones experienced by Greece during the Summer Games in Athens in 2004. The Ski World Championships in Lahti in 2001 will also always be remembered for doping. The governing leaders in Russia won't tolerate their prestigious event being tarnished by doping revelations. Already the wheels have been set in motion to make Russian sport both strong and clean. This is not going to be easy, but there are examples of nations that have succeeded.

These examples include Canada, Denmark, Sweden, Australia and Norway, where the development of elite sport and anti-doping work has gone hand in hand over the years. Of course there have been scandals involving doping in the mentioned nations, but the governing bodies in both society and sport have always worked closely together with a vision of elite sport being as clean as possible.

For the past 15 years Norway has developed a strategy that may help Russia to clean up. Since the mid 1990s Norway and China have worked closely on anti-doping through bilateral cooperation agreement, and the feedback is that this collaboration has been absolutely vital in the development of more effective control routines.

The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) believes that 'the Norwegian way' will lead to results. In the past bilateral agreements have been initiated by the parties involved, but the collaboration between Norway and Russia, initiated in 2009, was arranged by WADA. Norway's mission is to train Russians in all aspects of anti-doping work and establish a proper ISO-certification system. WADA did also ask Norway to contribute financially, a process handled by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs over a three-year period. Even though Norway makes a financial contribution, the major part of the economic investment is coming from Russian.

A close collaboration is initiated between Anti-Doping Norway and the Russian Anti-Doping Agency (RUSADA). During the winter of 2011, WADA has initiated a process to establish similar agreements between strong anti-doping organizations and nations, which perform well in international sport, but lack knowledge and professionalism regarding anti-doping work. Nations such as Brazil, India, Turkey and Jamaica are likely candidates for mentoring along the lines of the Norwegian-Russian model.

Russia has watched performances wane in sports such as cross-country and biathlon, as well as in more global sports such as athletics. If we just stick to winter sports results, Russia only managed three gold medals at the Winter Games in Vancouver. This resulted in heads rolling at the top of Russian sport. It is possible to speculate that the downturn in Russia's medal fortunes could be related to all the doping cases. In cross-country alone, there were five incidents involving performance-enhancing drugs during the winter of 2009/2010. One explanation for the poor performances could, therefore, be

## International Network of Humanistic Doping Research

that most of the athletes who use doping now get caught, while others stay clear of illegal substances and for that reason experience worse results.

Nations that manage to combine the aspects of elite sports and anti-doping work may stand out as the 'winners'. Such a combination results in a strong international reputation, and definitely receives credibility and legitimacy within the nation. It could also have a positive impact on government funding of elite sports – which obviously builds a platform for better results.

Is it possible that the Russians have discovered this too?

### Citation suggestion

Hanstad (2011). "The suspicion towards Russia". INHDR editorial. March. [www.doping.au.dk](http://www.doping.au.dk).