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Russian Track Team Should be Banned from 2016 Rio Summer Olympics, Argue former White House Drug Spokesman Robert Weiner and Senior Sports Policy Analyst Ben Lasky, or "Rio Could be the Dirtiest Olympics."

World Vote Set for June 17

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(<http://www.prnewswire.com/news/robert+weiner+associates+and+solutions+for+change>)



WASHINGTON, May 19, 2016 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- Former White House Drug Spokesman Robert Weiner and senior sports policy analyst Ben Lasky write in the Salt Lake Tribune that the Russian track & field team should be barred from competition in Rio this August, and at a minimum tested a month and also three days before the Games, citing the country's refusal to clean up its sport. The world's track body (IAAF, the International Association of Athletics Federations) will vote on the issue June 17.

Weiner and Lasky argue, "Rio this summer could turn out to be the dirtiest Olympics."

They state, "A documentary on German TV station ARD showed that Russian coaches who have been banned for doping still have their jobs, and claimed that Russian officials are tipping off athletes prior to what are supposed to be random drug tests. Sebastian Coe, the British gold medal runner who now is President of IAAF, told *Reuters*, 'We discussed the contents of that program, and the task force members are very concerned and investigating further.' Just last week, the former head of Russia's sports doping lab alleged that at least 15 Russian athletes tested positive from the last Olympics in Sochi, with Russian authorities arranging for masking performance drugs in alcoholic drinks and switching urine samples in the testing room."

Weiner and Lasky explain, "A final decision on banning Russia's track team from Rio for illegal doping, will be made June 17 by the IAAF, the world track governing body. Back in November, the IOC and the IAAF voted for Russia's ban subject to developments. USA Track & Field (USATF) is an important member of IAAF. The world organizations and we should vote to keep the ban.

They maintain, "With just over three months to go until athletes compete in Rio, Russia shows little effort to rid itself of performance enhancing drugs and blood doping despite the temporary ban. They are making the predictable claims of cleaning up. But the country whose leader, Vladimir Putin, brought disgraced and now indicted world soccer head Sepp Blatter to Moscow and called him 'very respected' and someone who 'should be awarded the Nobel Prize' despite the now-public under the table money for winning bids, has little credibility."

They go on, "Rune Anderson, who heads a five-person task force that is reviewing Russian actions following November's suspension, said that Russia has made "significant progress." So you can hear the waffling beginning."

They contend, "'Significant progress' must mean monitored testing, proof of action against dopers past and present, and firings of trainers and coaches clearly complicit."

They write, "Dick Pound, founder of the World Anti-Doping Agency, said March 9, 'My guess is Russia may not make it back for Rio. The IAAF and WADA (World Anti-Doping Agency) are not going to risk their reputations by rolling over and playing dead.' Pound added, 'There seems to be some evidence that they (Russia) are just changing deck chairs on the Titanic.' If Pound means what he says, he needs to stand his ground. Though a formidable anti-drug warrior, Pound is also an IOC loyalist, an IOC member and former Vice President who has negotiated multi-billion dollar television contracts for the Olympics."

Weiner and Lasky continue, "With so little time to go until the Games, it appears that the only way Russian track and field gets back in is the same leverage of money to the IOC that Blatter, now fired and indicted, used to pick World Cup sites including Russia. Russia has a lot of money. But the Olympics could survive without it if it wants to be an inspiration to the youth of the world. And all their other sports teams besides track would still compete."

The authors argue, "Here's something that could work, if IAAF and IOC courage does fail: Russia could be allowed in 'provisionally.' Every Russian athlete who participates should be tested by WADA a month before the games, and again three days before, in addition to the testing at the Games themselves. Athletes should not only be banned for failed tests, but evidence-based findings from witnesses, as Lance Armstrong and Marion Jones were outed and banned by WADA and USADA. Even if the athletes cover up doping with masking agents, large numbers of witnesses aren't lying in court-mandated depositions. That new evidence-based strategy has made a tremendous difference in catching cheaters."

They suggest, "The IOC and IAAF should use the example of USATF. America has been the gold standard. We are not afraid to bust and ban, because it shows a priority of clean sport. Even in masters track, for older athletes in their own competitions, USATF has banned cheaters who tested positive."

Weiner and Lasky conclude, "The USA can lead. America provides the biggest TV contracts and the most sponsor money to the Olympics. Russia must show evidence that it is no longer doping. Saying you have a plan is not enough. Taking 'significant steps' does not mean just talking about cleaning up, it's actually doing it."

Robert Weiner was spokesman for the White House National Drug Policy Office and directed WADA media outreach at the Salt Lake Olympics and White House Olympic drug media at Sydney. He assisted in creation of WADA and USADA. Ben Lasky is sports policy analyst at Solutions for Change.

The article is titled, "Russia should show real doping progress to be allowed in Rio Games." Link to article: <http://www.sltrib.com/opinion/3884037-155/op-ed-russia-should-show-real-doping>

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