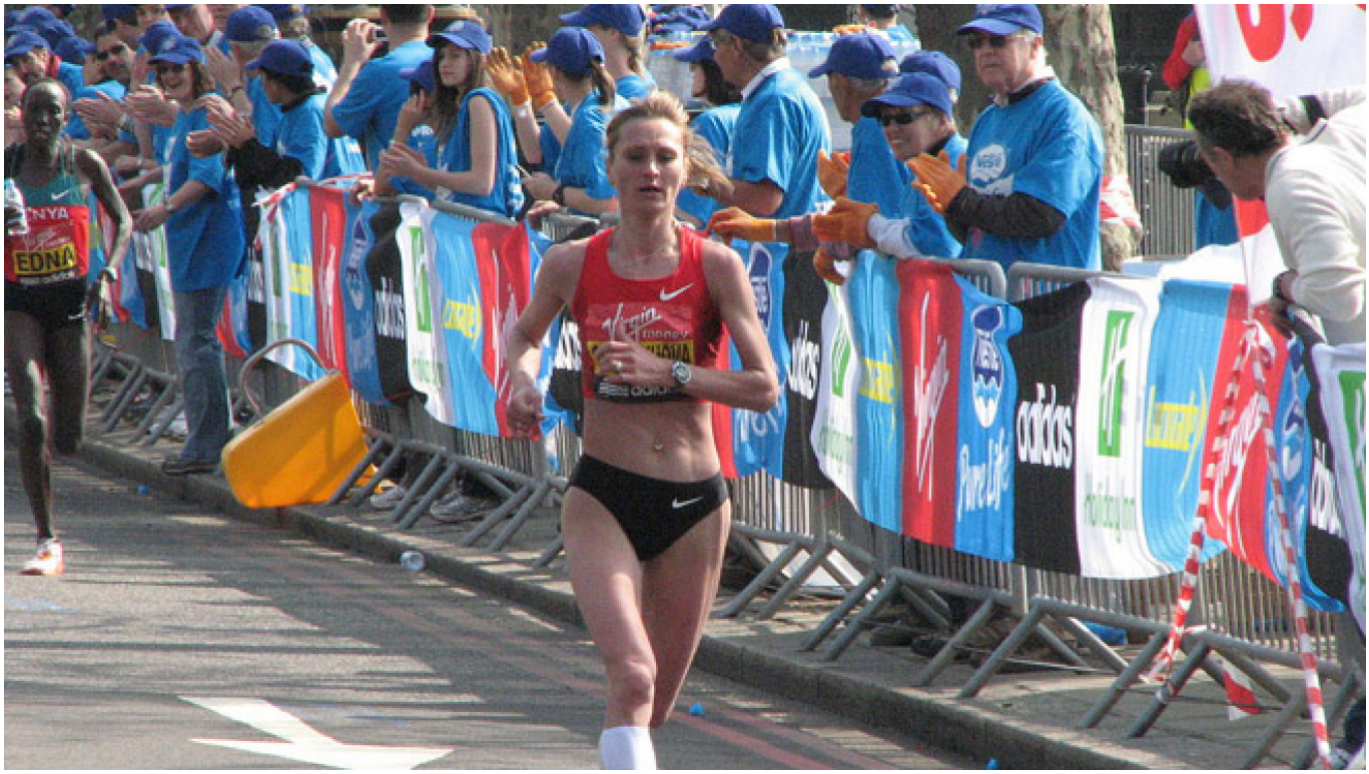
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U.S. Doping Head Awaits 'Important' Probe Into Drugs Use in Russian Sport

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WADA has set up an independent commission to investigate claims of systematic doping among Russian athletes.

SINGAPORE — The probe into allegations of widespread doping in Russia is looming as the critical battle in the global fight against drugs in sport, the head of the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency (USADA) said.

The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) has set up an independent commission to investigate claims of systematic doping among Russian athletes and USADA chief Travis Tygart said the findings could prove to be a turning point for all sports.

"This investigation that WADA has undertaken into Russia is so critically important right now," Tygart told a high-level doping conference in Singapore on Wednesday.

"There are allegations out there that have been portrayed in the media [and] there are facts that back some of those allegations.

"We can argue about the credibility of those facts at this point but there are facts out there which is what initiated WADA's investigation.

"And that's why it's a defining moment, if not the defining moment, where a country that's alleged, along with its anti-doping organizations, its lab, other sport federations, of doping its athletes in order to win on the world stage."

Russian sports officials have denied allegations, which were aired in a German television documentary but have not been verified by Reuters, of widespread doping and corruption in Russia, despite a recent spate of positive tests.

Last month, Russia's anti-doping agency announced that three Olympic walking champions, Olga Kaniskina, Valery Borchin, Sergei Kirdyapkin, as well as the 2011 world champion Sergei Bakulin and the 2011 World silver medallist Vladimir Kanaykin had all been suspended for doping infringements.

A week later, Valentin Maslakov announced he was resigning as head coach while Russia's Athletics Federation (VFLA) president Valentin Balakhnichev intends to step down from his job next week.

Tygart, the former lawyer turned anti-drugs crusader who helped unmask American cyclist Lance Armstrong's long drug use, said the outcomes of the Russian investigation would have wider implications for athletes all over the world.

"When there's evidence of these types of allegations, it's incumbent upon the overseers of the whole anti-doping program, WADA, and its role under the code, to fully vet and investigate the allegations that have been made and hold any people that have violated the rules accountable," he said.

"That ultimately is what gives confidence to clean athletes around the world who are otherwise being held to the highest standards.

"If one country is not held to that standard and they go to the [Olympic] Games and they win ...if that was not done the right way, and the allegations prove to be true and athletes who won in those events shouldn't have won because they violated the rules, then they've got to be held accountable."

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