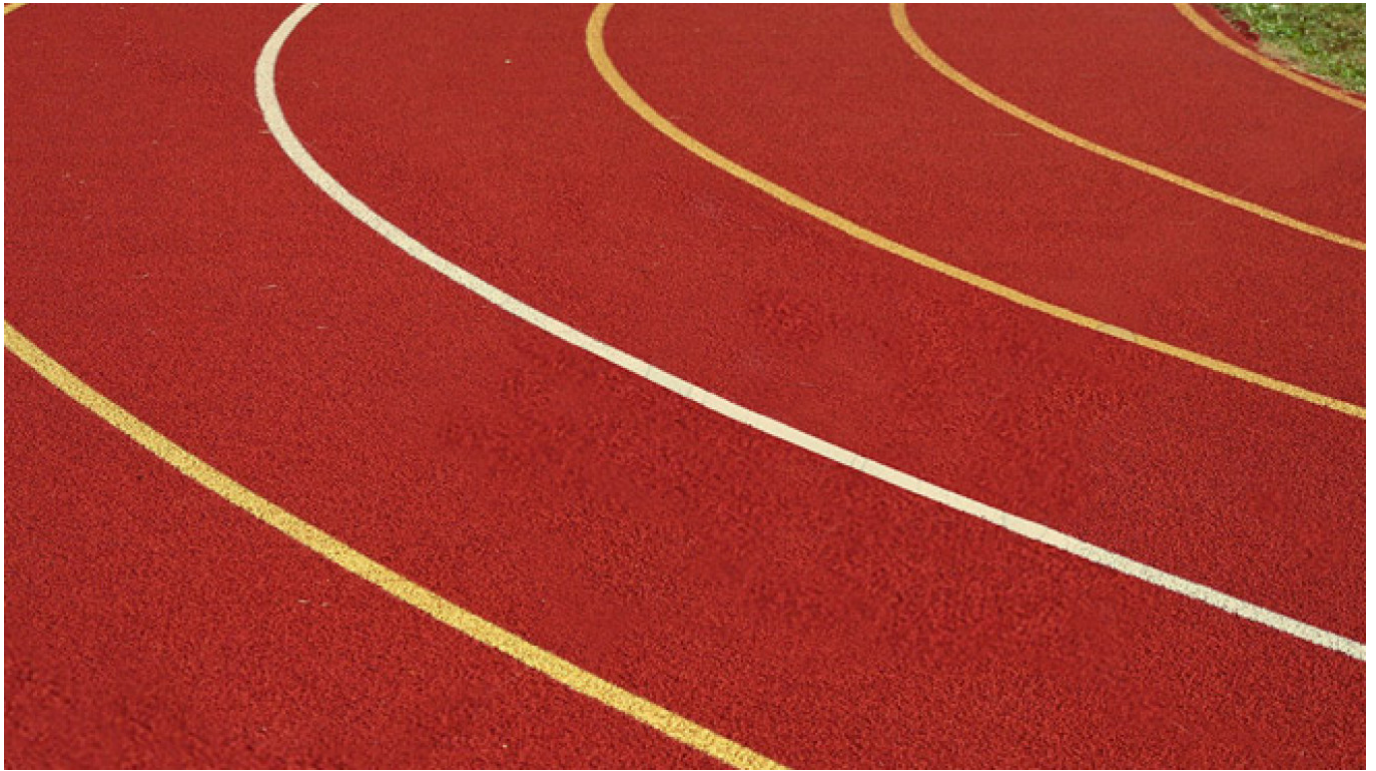


Russian Athletics Federation Suing German TV Network Over Doping Allegations

By [Gabrielle Tetrault-Farber](#)

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In January, RUSADA suspended a steeplechase runner, a heptathlete and five Russian race-walkers.

The Russian Athletics Federation has launched a series of defamation lawsuits over a German documentary featuring claims that doping had become endemic to Russia's track and field scene, state news agency RIA Novosti reported Tuesday.

"We demand that the concrete allegations [made in the documentary] that are false and defamatory be refuted," RIA Novosti quoted the federation's lawyer, Artem Patsev, as saying.

In the interview, aired in December by German television network ARD, filmmakers interviewed elite Russian track and field athletes who admitted to doping and attested to the widespread use of performance-enhancing substances among their teammates on Russia's

national team.

According to RIA Novosti, the individuals targeted by the lawsuits include the staff of the German television network, investigative journalist Hajo Seppelt, as well as track and field coach Oleg Popov, runner Yulia Stepanova and her husband, Vitaly Stepanov, a former employee of Russia's national anti-doping agency RUSADA. Popov, Stepanova and Stepanov were featured in the documentary.

Valentin Balakhnichev, who at the time was president of the athletics federation, said in a statement in December that the documentary had been a "provocation meant to undermine Russian sport."

Balakhnichev, who stepped down from his position as the president of the federation earlier this week, has also embarked on his own legal proceedings against the filmmakers, according to Patsev.

Renowned national track and field coach Valentin Maslakov also resigned over the scandal last month, only to reintegrate into the athletics world earlier this week as the new head coach of Russia's sprint team.

The documentary sent shockwaves through the Russian and international athletics communities. The World Anti-Doping Agency set up an independent panel in December to investigate the allegations.

In January, RUSADA suspended a steeplechase runner, a heptathlete and five Russian race-walkers, including three Olympic gold medalists and a world champion, for using banned substances.

Editor's note: An earlier version of this article incorrectly stated the the documentary was also shown on ZDF when, in fact, it aired only on ARD.

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