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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Former Russian Athletics Head Receives Life Ban From Sport

By The Moscow Times

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A view through a fence, decorated with the Olympic rings, shows a building of the federal state budgetary institution "Federal scientific center of physical culture and sports", which houses a laboratory accredited by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA), in Moscow.

The former head of Russian athletics Valentin Balakhnichev, the country's former head coach Aleksei Melnikov, and Papa Massata Diack, the son of the former IAAF President Lamine Diack, have all been banned from the sport for life over corruption charges.

The IAAF Ethics Commission made the announcement on Thursday, also banning the organisation's former doping chief Gabrielle Dolle for five years, after all four men were found to have committed multiple breaches of anti-doping rules and been involved in the attempted coverup of positive drugs tests.

The bans follow from a World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) report that found indications of a state-sponsored culture of doping in Russia. The report raised doubts that world athletics

power Russia would be able to participate in this year's Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro.

Most of the charges involved Russian former London marathon winner Liliya Shobukhova, who paid $600,000 to have positive doping tests covered up. She provided evidence to WADA last year that led to Russia being suspended from international athletics.

In a lengthy statement issued on Thursday, the IAAF Ethics Commission gave details about the lengths all three senior men went to, both in the initial corruption attempts and then in attempting to cover it up.

Sins of Omission

"The Panel considers in the light of its findings that VB [Balakhnichev], AM [Melnikov] and PMD [Diack] should be banned for life from any further involvement in any way in the sport of track and field," the report stated.

"Any lesser sanction would not meet the gravity of their offences.

"In GD's [Dolle's] case such ban is also appropriate but in his case for five years only. His sins were those of omission, not commission." Balakhnichev and Diack were also fined $25,000 and Melnikov $15,000.

Russia's R-Sport agency reported that Balakhnichev had described the ban as "politicised" and said that he intended to appeal.

The hearings have taken place against a background of investigations by the French police and Interpol into the affair and other corruption claims involving IAAF officials but the commission said there had been no requests for an adjournment because of those investigations.

"The panel understands that civil and disciplinary proceedings are often conducted in France notwithstanding the possibility or pendency of criminal proceedings," the statement said.

Next Thursday, WADA's independent commission is to release the second part of its investigation into doping and corruption and is expected to further criticise the IAAF's role, having held back the release pending the police investigation.

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