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Doping-Clock Ticking on Russia as WADA Prepares for Report

By Reuters

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Craig Reedie, President of the World Anti-Doping Agency (Aziz Karimov / Reuters)

The Russian doping scandal is set for a messy end with the World Anti-Doping Agency's (WADA) Compliance Review Commission (CRC) considering possible new sanctions on Monday even as an inspection team was retrieving data from a Moscow laboratory.

A game of brinkmanship between WADA and Russian authorities continued as the CRC met at WADA's Montreal headquarters to discuss a report from a five member inspection team that last month was denied access to data inside the Moscow lab for using equipment not certified under Russian law.

Access to the data before a Dec. 31 deadline was a condition of WADA's September decision to provisionally reinstate the Russian Anti-Doping Agency (RUSADA). Russian authorities finally relented and last Thursday allowed a WADA inspection team into the tainted Moscow lab but the extraction process has been slow as inspectors work to retrieve data from outdated servers

described as decades old. The inspection team will use equipment purchased in Russia while a Russian forensics team will remove the hard drives under supervision.

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Once the hard drives have been removed they will, according to protocol, be handed over to the WADA inspection team who will carry out the actual copying of files. The mirroring of a server must be conducted by the WADA forensic expert.

"There is no interference by the Russians in the forensic retrieval process and WADA has complete control of the data extraction," emphasized Gunter Younger, WADA's Director of Intelligence and Investigation.

While Russia scrambles to meet its obligations the CRC is preparing a report on RUSADA's code compliance status, to be presented to the executive committee by Thursday, that could recommend new sanctions. The executive committee said it will deliver its ruling on Jan. 22.

If the inspection team, however, completes its work in Moscow before Jan. 22 it could trigger a chaotic rewrite with the CRC informing the executive committee it needs to take back its recommendation.

As a result WADA, again, finds itself in an awkward position caught between anti-doping hardliners who believe they are being played and Russian authorities who will argue they have met all the responsibilities laid out in the Road Map to Compliance.

Athletes groups and anti-doping organizations already outraged by WADA's patience and compromising are unlikely to be impressed with the data extraction process.

Despite the delays and conditions imposed by the Russian authorities, Younger told Reuters he is confident the data extraction will be clean.

"They (Russia) complicated it because of the equipment but on the other side we have to understand," said Younger.

"I come from law enforcement and if a private organization would come and say we want to have access to your evidence and would say I bring my own equipment to download on your equipment, I think 99 percent of the law enforcement in the world would say, 'no way'.

"This is the same. All the (Moscow) data is under the custody of (Russia) law enforcement.

"What they said, if we give you access with your equipment not certified under Russian law, then our accused person will come and say, 'so you telling me you gave someone outside of Russia access to the evidence which you are now going to use against me'.

"Is there any possibility this information could be compromised by WADA?"

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