

## DOPING SCANDAL DERAILS PUTIN'S SPORTS MASTERPLAN

**MOSCOW:** President Vladimir Putin has pumped vast sums into sport to refashion Russia's image and bolster his personal prestige, but the scandal over state-run doping threatens to obliterate any successes.

The International Olympic Committee's (IOC) executive board are to hold a conference call today to discuss barring Russia from the Rio Olympics starting on August 5 over jaw-dropping doping revelations. That move comes with Russia's track and field squad already barred from the competition over evidence of state-sponsored cheating. Judo-loving former KGB agent Putin has often lamented the collapse of the Soviet Union and his determination to use sport to harness national pride has echoes in the Communist-era clashes between East and West. "Under Putin the greatness of the country is measured not only in the number of rockets, warheads, tanks and planes, but by the

amount of medals won, champions and victories," Konstantin Kalachev, head of the Moscow-based Political Expert Group think tank, told AFP.

"Russia is rising from its knees, becoming a great power again and that means returning to the things that we were proud of during the USSR." Since coming to power 16 years ago Putin has staked his personal reputation on bringing major sporting events to Russia in a bid to recast the country as a resurgent force on the international stage after the upheavals of the 1990s. In 2007 he flew to Guatemala to personally plead Russia's eventually successful case to hold the 2014 Winter Olympic Games in Sochi and then splurged over \$50 billion on hosting it.

Next up, Russia will be holding the football World Cup in 2018. "Nobody says now that sporting victories are proof of the supremacy of our way of life but winning is a means for increasing

patriotism," says Yevgeny Slyusarenko, deputy editor of Russian sports website Championat.com. "Like during the USSR, sport is used for some internal aims—now it is patriotism, increasing the prestige of the authorities inside the country."

### NEW SPORTS COLD WAR?

That may go some way also to explaining the reactions by Russian officials and a large swathe of the population to the latest scandal, which saw Russia accused of state-run doping that included the samples of cheating athletes swapped for clean ones in Sochi.

Ukraine, Syria and now doping: for many in Russia it is just the latest attack by the West.

Rather than focus their ire on the officials accused of systematic cheating, Russians have tended to lash out at the allegations as just the latest move in a broader political campaign to damage the country. With ties with the West

already at their lowest ebb since the collapse of the Soviet Union over the crisis in Ukraine, Putin has also drawn parallels with the Cold War-era confrontation in sport. "Recent events, the difficult atmosphere around international sports and the Olympic movement, unfortunately stirs analogies with the 1980s," Putin warned this week, citing the boycotts of the 1980 Games in Moscow and 1984 competition in Los Angeles.

"Now we are witnessing a dangerous return to political interference in sport."

Others, however, argue that the political meddling in sport is coming mainly from the Russian authorities and desperation for success lies behind the current doping scandal.

A report released by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) this week detailing the "state-dictated" system to hide drug test failures said it was put in place after a dismal showing at the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver. "It was

decided that this could not happen at Sochi and the plan to ensure lots of medal winners was concocted" by the sports ministry, the report cited whistleblower Grigory Rodchenkov as saying.

Russia went on to top the medals table in Sochi—another source of enormous national pride for Putin and many Russians. Only now have the extraordinary lengths they went to get there been revealed.

While Putin has furiously denied that there is any state-run doping programme in Russia, analyst Kalachev said that the Kremlin's thirst for victory was likely fuelling the cheating. "Some here like to say that Putin's ideal is the GDR (former Communist East Germany)," Kalachev said, pointing to the country where the Kremlin leader served as a KGB officer and which ran a notorious doping campaign. "The successes of the GDR in sport relied heavily on doping. History is now repeating itself." —AFP

## RATTIN RECALLS MOMENT THAT SPARKED ENG-ARGENTINA RIVALRY

**BUENOS AIRES:** Diego Maradona's Hand of God goal in 1986 is the stand-out incident in soccer clashes between Argentina and England but the one that sparked an intense rivalry was Antonio Rattin's sending-off at Wembley 20 years earlier.

Rattin, the Argentina captain, was infamously dismissed by German referee Rudolf Kreitlein after half an hour of an ill-tempered 1966 World Cup quarter-final for protesting. "I saw that all his decisions favoured England... corners, fouls, he even invented handballs," said the 79-year-old, recalling the incident on its 50th anniversary on Saturday. "In view of that, I showed his my captain's armband and for several minutes asked for an interpreter to ask for explanations," Rattin told the Argentine daily La Nacion (www.canchallena.com).

"I couldn't believe it (when he sent me off)," Rattin added. "The dismissal was so unfair that in anger I sat on the red carpet of the Queen's royal box. She wasn't in the stadium." Rattin eventually took the long walk round the touchline to the tunnel behind one of the goals and recalled he ate bits of chocolate bars thrown at him by

fans before throwing them back, wringing a British corner flag with his hand in anger and dodging beer cans.

He watched the rest of the match which England won 1-0 on the way to the title through a small window in the changing rooms "with (a feeling of) total impotence". England manager Alf Ramsey infamously called the Argentine players animals but Rattin, sent off that one time in his career, said: "I'd like to be taken back there. 'I'd get off the plane, go and see the new Wembley, chat again with Bobby Charlton, go and see the Queen, who is still alive, and come back home.' The incident led to the introduction of red and yellow cards and started a fierce, sometimes violent, rivalry between two of the world's leading football nations.

The teams avoided each other at the next four World Cups, with one or the other failing to qualify and the luck of the draw in 1982 when the countries were at war over the Falkland (Malvinas) islands.

Maradona punched in the opening goal with his fist to help Argentina beat England 2-1 in the 1986 Mexico City quarter-finals on the way to their second title. —Reuters

## BATTERED FROOME FACES FINAL TOUR CHALLENGE

**MEGEVE:** Leader Chris Froome's knee and back will play a pivotal role in how yesterday's penultimate—and likely decisive—Tour de France stage pans out.

The 31-year-old Briton has been pounding dominantly towards a third Tour title with not a single rival able to slow the Sky juggernaut. At least that's how things seemed until the yellow jersey wearer crashed on a slippery descent during Friday's 19th stage.

Battered and bruised, his jersey torn and riding a team-mate's bike to the finish, Froome lost only a handful of seconds to some of his rivals, while actually gaining time on others and extending his overall lead. But it is one thing to soldier on in the final 20km of a stage when the adrenaline is high, and quite another to tackle 146.5km of Alpine terrain with four categorised climbs if you're stiff, sore and in pain.

What's more, it's expected to rain all day, creating more treacherous descents. Froome assured fans he was fine following Friday's stage but he took to the podium with a heavily bandaged knee. If ever there is a chance that this Tour race is not yet run, it will depend on Froome's physical condition today.

"I'm OK, I'm lucky nothing is seriously injured. I lost some skin and banged my knee a little bit but today I'm grateful to have that four-minute advantage to fall on a little bit," he said following Friday's stage. "Tomorrow (Saturday) will be hard, I'm sure I'm going to be a bit sore and stiff from today but hopefully I can

rely on my team-mates and just one last push again to get through tomorrow's stage now."

Two years ago he crashed during the Criterium du Dauphine while in the lead and although he got to the stage's end still in contention, the next day he suffered badly and lost several minutes, dropping out of the top 10.

While his 4min 11sec advantage over second-placed Frenchman Romain Bardet should afford him ample breathing space, the raging battle for the other two podium positions should ensure the pace is high on Saturday and the attacks are numerous.

Fabio Aru showed on Friday he's prepared to push the pace to try to drag himself onto the podium. He's sixth and just over a minute and a half off the podium so cannot afford to play a waiting game if he wants to claim a top-three finish.

Bardet and third-placed Nairo Quintana are separated by only 16sec with Adam Yates another 19sec further back, meaning those three should be trying to test each other. Bardet is the best descender of the three, meaning the other two will need to attack on the final hors category climb before the 12km descent to the finish in Morzine in order to displace the Frenchman. Fireworks will likely be going off all around Froome, what remains to be seen is whether or not he has the condition to keep calm and stay in control. — AFP



**MEGEVE AND MORZINE-AVORIAZ:** (From L) Italy's Fabio Aru, Belarus' Vasil Kiryienka, Great Britain's Christopher Froome, wearing the overall leader's yellow jersey, and Great Britain's Luke Rowe ride during the 146.5 km twentieth stage of the 103rd edition of the Tour de France cycling race yesterday between Megeve and Morzine-Avoriaz, French Alps. — AFP



**BUDAPEST:** Mercedes driver Nico Rosberg, right, of Germany, celebrates after setting the pole position with second placed Mercedes driver Lewis Hamilton, of Britain, at the end of the qualifying session for today's Formula One Hungary Grand Prix, at the Hungaroring racetrack, in Budapest, Hungary, yesterday. — AP

## ROSBERG GETS POLE IN HUNGARY, YELLOW FLAGS HINDER HAMILTON

**BUDAPEST:** World championship leader Nico Rosberg seized pole position in a rain-delayed, stop-start qualifying session for today's Hungarian Formula One Grand Prix after team mate and title rival Lewis Hamilton was hindered by yellow flags.

Rosberg lapped the 4.3-km Hungaroring in one minute 19.965 seconds yesterday, beating Hamilton by 0.143 seconds. The Briton, ahead of Rosberg on the road as the Mercedes pair began their final runs, had to slow down as yellow flags waved for Fernando Alonso's spinning McLaren, forcing him to abort his lap.

The reigning champion had been significantly quicker and on course for pole up to that point. Hamilton, though, was relaxed about being second on the grid. "I don't know how much Nico was up but I got the fastest first sector," he said. "Bit unfortunate with Fernando but these things happen so I'm not really too disappointed."

The pole was the 26th of Rosberg's career and his fourth of the season. It was also the Mercedes team's 46th pole in the last 49 races, with the German outfit starting all but one race this year from the front.

There were doubts about whether Rosberg would be allowed to keep pole after onboard replays showed him also encountering yellow flags but the 31-year-old driver said he had lifted off the throttle in that section of the track. Rosberg, who agreed a two-year extension to his contract with Mercedes on Thursday, leads Hamilton by one point in the championship. Daniel Ricciardo was third for Red Bull on a weekend when the former champions hope to challenge Mercedes for the win, with his team mate Max Verstappen fourth.

Sebastian Vettel, winner in Hungary last year, was the sole Ferrari driver in the top 10 in fifth. Team mate Kimi Raikkonen fell casualty to the rapidly shuffling order in changing conditions and was knocked out in the second phase of qualifying. He starts 14th.

McLaren had their best qualifying result since renewing their engine partnership with Honda at the start of last year with Fernando Alonso and Jenson Button, who both had their first race wins in Hungary, in seventh and eighth.

Force India's Nico Hulkenberg and Williams Valtteri Bottas rounded out the top 10.

A torrential rain shower in the build-up to qualifying forced the start of the session to be delayed by 20 minutes.

The opening 18-minute session was then interrupted by four more red flags, first as the rain returned and then as several drivers, including Williams's Felipe Massa, crashed out.

It eventually ended almost an hour later when a crash for Manor's Rio Haryanto brought out the final red flag. —Reuters

## SUNDERLAND APPOINT MOYES AS ALLARDYCE REPLACEMENT

**LONDON:** Sunderland appointed David Moyes as manager yesterday, replacing Sam Allardyce who has taken charge of the England team. The 53-year-old Moyes, without a club since being sacked by Spain's Real Sociedad in November, has signed a four-year contract at the Stadium of Light.

"I am delighted to have joined Sunderland. I am relishing the challenge and excited by the opportunity," Moyes said in a statement yesterday.

"I have taken over a big British club with great support and I'm looking forward to working in the Premier League again. I look forward to continuing the good work done by Sam." The Scot's last managerial job in England was his ill-fated spell in charge of Manchester United in 2013-14, following Alex Ferguson's retirement.

Moyes has also managed Preston North End, winning the third-tier crown with them, and Everton where he spent more than 11 years. He is Sunderland's fourth full-time managerial appointment since Italian Paolo Di Canio was sacked in September 2013.

The club have flirted with relegation in each of the last four seasons. Uruguayan Gus

Poyet took over from caretaker manager Kevin Ball in October 2013 and guided the club to 14th place in the league.

Poyet was dismissed in March 2015 with Sunderland one point above the relegation zone. The club appointed Dutchman Dick Advocaat who guided them to the safety of a 16th-placed finish with one game remaining.

Advocaat resigned in October 2015 with Sunderland second from bottom. Allardyce was appointed the same month and performed wonders to avoid the drop by ending up fourth from bottom.

"We are absolutely delighted to welcome David Moyes who was by far and away our first choice," Sunderland chairman Ellis Short said. "He is a man whose football pedigree speaks for itself and is someone I have long admired."

"He was my number one managerial target for the last five appointments but his desire to honour existing contracts meant we were not able to bring him to Sunderland previously." To be able to finally welcome him as our manager is fantastic news for the club," added Short. Sunderland launch their new league campaign at Manchester City on Aug 13. —Reuters



**ROTHERHAM:** Newly appointed Sunderland manager David Moyes, left, poses with a supporter as he arrives for the pre-season friendly match between Rotherham United and Sunderland, at the New York Stadium, Rotherham, England, yesterday. — AP