

IOC OFFICIAL SAYS UNCLEAR DOPING LAB WILL BE READY IN TIME

RIO DE JANEIRO: A top International Olympic Committee official says it's unclear if the suspended anti-doping laboratory for the Rio de Janeiro Olympics can be re-opened before the games start in just under six weeks.

"This is something that is doable," Olympic Games Executive Director Christophe Dubi said Sunday. "But there are a number of steps that need to be taken." The World Anti-doping Agency announced Friday it had suspended

the Rio lab. Dubi said the suspension was for "wrongly interpreting" test results and producing "false positives." Thousands of blood and urine tests will need to be shipped abroad if the lab remains closed, another major embarrassment to games organizers who have faced problems from the Zika virus, to budget cuts to slow ticket sales.

Officials of the lab said Friday they expect "operations to return to normal in July."

Brazil's anti-doping authority, known as ABCD and run by the sports ministry, shared the same view.

Dubi said it was up to WADA to send in experts and restart the accreditation process. He did not offer a timeframe. The Rio lab was recertified earlier this year after being put on a watch list last year by WADA.

Dubi said enough time remained to recertify the lab, though he hedged when asked if

testing would be done in Brazil. "Hopefully," he replied. Dubi acknowledged shipping thousands of samples abroad was not ideal. This is the same way testing was done for Brazil's 2014 World Cup.

"Of course it is not as easy as if you can do the testing here, because then you have the whole logistics around it," Dubi said. "But that's what the experts have to evaluate. What is essential is that at games time we can guaran-

tee the integrity of the testing."

The IAAF referred to a "systematic and deeply-rooted culture of doping" in Russia. Kenya, home of many of the world's top distance runners, has also been hit by dozens of positive drug cases.

The IOC said last month that over 50 athletes had tested positive in reanalysis of their doping samples from the 2012 London Olympics and 2008 Beijing Games. — AP

USA CYCLING RELYING ON HIGH-TECH TRAINING TOOLS AHEAD OF RIO

NEW YORK: The standard training tool for cycling coaches for decades has been the stopwatch, a quaintly inconsistent barometer that could tell how fast a rider was completing a segment of work.

These days they're little more than a prop. USA Cycling is pushing the limits of training technology in the run-up to the Rio Olympics, first with a revolutionary track bike that took years of design, then with proprietary hardware and software they can use to better gauge how well their athletes are training in the months leading up to the Summer Games.

"We are always looking for technologies to improve and push the limits of our athletes' performance," said Andy Sparks, director of the U.S. track cycling program, "especially aiming at our goal for gold in Rio."

The bike from manufacturer Felt, with its odd-looking left-side drivetrain, is what viewers at home will notice in August. But smart glasses from Solos combined with custom, cloud-based software from IBM have become an integral part of training - and could ultimately be the secret to their success. The software integrates everything from heart-rate monitors to power meters while tracking standard data such as speed. It then puts the information in a format that allows coaches to examine it immediately. The data is likewise streamed to the smart glasses, worn by the riders in the midst of a work session.

USA Cycling vice president Jim Miller called the hardware-software combination "a cutting-edge tool" that is especially helpful for the women's pursuit team, which heads to Rio as the heavy favorite to win gold. Work on the project began nearly two years ago, when USA Cycling met with officials from IBM. The problem they presented was this: Coaches could capture biometric and power data, but it was on a computer mounted to the bike, and often it would take hours before the data could be analyzed.

"Sometimes it would take the multiple days to give feedback on that training session," said Randy Wilcox, who spearheaded the program for IBM. "So the first problem was to get the analytics to the athletes when they needed it, which is immediately after a training session."

IBM solved that problem by creating a cloud-based app, run off an iPhone, that syncs to the different hardware on the bike - power meters, heart-rate monitors and the like. The setup allows the data to be sent to coaches in real time, then shared

with the riders the moment they dismount from the bike. So, if Chloe Dygert was going too hard during a session, they could instruct her to dial it back. If Sarah Hammer was wasting energy during a particular segment, they could determine right away why it was happening. And with the pursuit team, where riders shuffle from front to back in an attempt to keep the freshest riders doing the pull, those position changes within the race can be analyzed in greater detail. "Say they have a target speed or target time they need to maintain - we have that objective," Wilcox said. "Now, we can give them an indication of if they're meeting that objective." While it's nice for coaches to be able to analyze that data in real time, they would still have to wait until the end of a training block to discuss it with the riders. USA Cycling solved that dilemma by turning to Solos, whose parent company Kopin has roots in "smart" glasses developed for the military.

Working hand-in-hand the past 18 months, USA Cycling and Solos developed eyewear that projects in front of a rider whatever metric they might be interested in: speed, heart rate, oxygen levels and more. Or, the glasses can give an indication, such as a flashing signal, if a rider is exerting too much energy.

"The glasses have a very similar architecture to what a smartwatch would be," explained Ernesto Martinez, the creator of Solos Wearables. "We've found a way to project it in a display that makes sense."

The company had to work closely with riders for several reasons: The eyewear itself had to be the kind of high-performance eyewear they were accustomed to using, but the optics also had to provide the information they wanted without becoming a distraction in a sport where speeds are high and crashes hurt.

"It's like having your Garmin (bike computer), but it doesn't get in your way," Dygert said. "If you're supposed to keep a certain lap time or your watts at a certain level, you kind of glance at it. It's great for training when you want to make everything perfect." Just about the only thing the technology can't do is the work: The riders still have to put in the effort. But it at least ensures they are getting the most out of their work, and those tiny details are often what make the difference between winning an Olympic medal and finishing off the podium. "We're doing everything we can to ensure success in Rio," Miller said. "Nothing left untuned." — AP



TAIPEI: Retired NBA superstar Kobe Bryant cheers with young players while he holds a short basketball clinic in Taipei, Taiwan, yesterday. Kobe Bryant is in Taiwan to hold basketball clinics for young athletes. — AP

DURANT, ANTHONY LEAD 12-PLAYER US OLYMPIC BASKETBALL ROSTER

NEW YORK: The US has selected its 12-player basketball roster, led by Kevin Durant and Carmelo Anthony, with the goal of winning the Americans' third straight Olympic gold medal.

Durant and Anthony are the only players with Olympic experience after a number of stars, including LeBron James, decided to skip Rio.

Also chosen Monday for the team were: Golden State's Klay Thompson, Draymond Green and Harrison Barnes; Toronto's Kyle Lowry and DeMar DeRozan; Cleveland's Kyrie Irving; Indiana's Paul George; Chicago's Jimmy Butler; Sacramento's DeMarcus Cousins and the Clippers' DeAndre Jordan.

"We're very, very positive about the talent level and then the individual strengths of this team," USA Basketball chairman Jerry Colangelo said. "We're long, we're athletic. I think we have some terrific defenders as well as terrific shooters and the versatility is over the top."

Irving was the MVP of the 2014 Basketball World Cup on a US team that included Thompson, Cousins and DeRozan and easily won gold. The Americans should roll into Rio as the favorites. Yet they won't look as imposing as expected after the withdrawals of NBA MVP Stephen Curry and All-Stars such as Russell Westbrook, Chris Paul and James Harden.

Colangelo said having a national team pool,

which he began in 2005, always has the Americans ready for player losses. There were 31 players in this year's and he had to go deep into it - and eventually even beyond it - to find 12 as the usual factors that can knock players out were joined by the Zika virus and other concerns in Brazil. "Prior to this year, in the past we dealt with things like free agency, injuries, personal issues that might prevent someone from moving forward. This year it was exacerbated by circumstances beyond anyone's control, and that was the reality, the speculation and the circumstance in Rio," Colangelo said. "So somewhat more challenging, but at the end of the day, and this is important: This is not about who isn't here, this is about who is here."

That includes Anthony, who becomes the first US men's basketball player to appear in four Olympics, and Durant, who set a US record by averaging 19.5 points in London. "Carmelo and Durant serve as both individuals who have been there, done that and won gold medals," Colangelo said.

Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski will coach the Americans for the third and final time, tying Henry Iba's team record, and be assisted by Syracuse's Jim Boeheim, Minnesota Timberwolves coach Tom Thibodeau and former Oklahoma City assistant Monty Williams.

They will lead a team with strong NBA credentials - nine were All-Stars this season - but a little short on international experience after the withdrawals.

The toughest competition for the US is likely Spain and Lithuania. The final and perhaps biggest blow was James, who would have joined Anthony with a fourth selection. He pulled out last week after leading the Cleveland Cavaliers to the NBA championship.

The heaviest losses came at the point guard spot, where Curry passed on making his Olympic debut after knee and ankle injuries in the playoffs. Former Olympians Paul and Westbrook pulled out and Washington's John Wall was injured. What was a position of strength became so depleted that Lowry was added last week even though he wasn't even a member of the pool. But Colangelo focused on the strength of the team that was selected, adding that he and Krzyzewski are excited about the challenge in working with new faces. "Their credentials speak for themselves and now it's just a matter of coach having some time with the group, because there's so many new people, just getting everyone to blend in," Colangelo said.

The Americans will open training camp in Las Vegas on July 18 and play five exhibition games before traveling to Rio. — AP



PARIS: PSG headcoach Laurent Blanc gestures during his French League One soccer match against Monaco, at the Parc des Princes stadium, in Paris. Paris Saint-Germain says yesterday it has parted company with coach Laurent Blanc. PSG made his departure official in a statement. — AP

PSG PART COMPANY WITH BLANC AMID EMERY TALK

PARIS: Laurent Blanc left his role as Paris Saint-Germain coach yesterday, the French Ligue 1 champions announced, with former Sevilla coach Unai Emery widely expected to replace him. "My collaboration with PSG ends today," said Blanc, 50. "I would like to thank all the people who've worked alongside me. I spent three seasons here that were fulfilling on a human and professional level, littered with numerous trophies. I wish the best for PSG and its supporters as well as good luck for my successor."

Emery, 44, is tipped as the favorite to take over from Blanc having guided the Spanish side to three successive Europa League titles. French sports daily L'Equipe had said on Thursday that Blanc would pocket 22 million euros (\$24m) as part of his severance package, but the club did not reveal any financial details.

Blanc arrived at PSG in 2013 and won the domestic treble in each of his last two seasons with the club. But it was his failure to make substantial progress in the Champions League that proved his undoing. The former France defender, a World Cup winner in 1998 and Euro 2000 champion, took over PSG after

two years in charge of the French national side and had signed a two-year extension with the club in February. A statement read: "In a respectful atmosphere, negotiations were completed on 27 June. An agreement, by common accord, preserves the interests of both parties."

Assistant coach Jean-Louis Gasset and fitness trainer Philippe Lambert also left the club as part of the deal that was struck.

"As we embark on a new chapter in the development of the club, I would like to thank Laurent Blanc for everything he has achieved over the last three years, both in terms of the playing style and results," Qatari club owner Nasser al-Khelaifi said.

"I wish him the best for his future challenges." Khelaifi had hinted earlier this month that Blanc's time was up. "The players, the coach, the management, we need turnover, a new cycle," he told the Le Parisien newspaper. Khelaifi was particularly unimpressed with the limp manner PSG lost to Manchester City in the Champions League this season. "This elimination is the worst moment since I came to Paris," he said of that 3-2 aggregate defeat in April. — AFP

THOUSANDS OF ARGENTINA FANS DESPAIR AT 'LEO MEXIT'

BUENOS AIRES/SANTIAGO: Argentines begged Lionel Messi yesterday not to abandon the national team before the 2018 World Cup after he tearfully announced his retirement in frustration at another last-gasp international defeat.

As Chileans danced in the streets and honked their horns to hail their team's victory by penalties in the Copa American Centenario, the rainy streets of Buenos Aires were deserted.

Apart from the humiliation of being beaten on penalties for a second time by their neighbors, they were gutted at the news of what online wags were calling "LeoMexit" - Messi's announced retirement from international service. A hashtag in Spanish reading "Don't Go, Leo" spread on Twitter in the hours after the 29-year-old star striker said he was quitting the squad. "Don't go," echoed the popular sports newspaper Ole in its front-page headline.

Messi left the pitch in tears having missed a penalty in Argentina's 4-2 loss in the final shoot-out. It was the fourth time he had lost the final of a big tournament with Argentina and the third in a row after defeat by Germany in the 2014 World Cup final and Chile in last year's Copa America. "It is really unfair. Messi played well. It was the coach's mistake to field injured players," said Ricardo Miranda, 47, a passerby in a rainy Buenos Aires yesterday morning.

As for the star striker, "He will not leave-you will see," Miranda added. Some media blamed the players however for failing to land a killer blow in the final after an impressive Copa campaign. Others branded Argentina's 23-year drought of international titles a "curse."

"The worst thing about this situation is that no other player was able to take advantage of the talent of the best player on the planet to bring Argentine football home from exile," wrote leading newspaper Clarin. Other angry web users branded their team "losers" and "feeble."

RED-HOT CHILE

Chileans meanwhile celebrated their second



EAST RUTHERFORD: Lionel Messi #10 of Argentina reacts to the loss to Chile during the Copa America Centenario Championship match at MetLife Stadium on Sunday in East Rutherford, New Jersey. — AFP

Copa America triumph in a row after last year's win on home soil - also by penalties over Argentina. Fans in red team shirts poured out of bars into the streets cheering and weeping with joy after Francisco Silva scored the winning penalty. "Chi, chi, chi... le, le, le!" they yelled as the party stretched into the early hours of Monday. Chile may not share the footballing heritage of its World Cup-winning neighbor Argentina. But it is enjoying a golden generation of players such as Alexis Sanchez of Arsenal and Arturo Vidal of Bayern Munich.

"We are so happy at all this passion that our

Chilean team has given us recently," said one reveler in Santiago, Edison Tapia. The television screens showed a devastated Messi with head bowed after missing his penalty at Sunday's game in the United States. For Chilean fans, their victory was all the greater for being against the Barcelona player widely rated the best on Earth and one of the best ever. "Our team are 11 warriors, against the best player in the world, Lion Messi," said jubilant Chile supporter Juan La Barrera. "I do not deny that he is the best. But my team is double champion of America!" — AFP