

RUSSIA DOPING TENSION MARKS FINAL DAY OF IOC MEETINGS

LIMA: The raw feelings created by the Russian doping scandal spilled onto the floor and into the hallways of the International Olympic Committee meetings Friday, with less than five months until the Winter Games and still no decisions made about the fate of the country's athletes.

IOC members received updates on two investigations that will eventually determine Russia's status: One on whether there was a state-sponsored doping program in the country, the other on the individual cases of athletes who were implicated in the scandal at the Sochi Games in 2014.

The leaders of both investigations, which are using information from an earlier inquiry by Richard McLaren, urged patience and insisted they are working as fast as they can. Still, a handful of IOC members made clear they're worried about the timing. "A lot of progress has been made, but we're not there yet," said Camiel Eurlings, an IOC member from the Netherlands. "I understand it takes a lot of time, but we can-

not have this discussion just before the Pyeongchang Games. It must be clear months before."

In another report, IOC member Craig Reddie, who heads the World Anti-Doping Agency, said progress is being made toward reinstating Russia's suspended anti-doping agency. Russian IOC member Alexander Zhukov was encouraged. He reiterated what he told The Associated Press this week - he expects Russia to field a team in Pyeongchang: Asked if a state-sponsored doping program existed in Russia, his answer was simply: "no."

Russia's unwillingness to acknowledge the state-sponsored program is a problem, as it is a requirement for re-entry into the sports world on many fronts - notably its anti-doping agency, track team and Paralympic team. IOC President Thomas Bach called it "only a small part" of the equation.

STATE-SPONSORED DOPING PROGRAM

"It can be symbolic," he said. "But an

admission alone cannot help you forget what's happened in the past." Urged by Bach, the IOC refused to ban the entire Russian team from the Rio Games and instead sent the individual cases to the international sports federations, which had only a matter of days to determine the status of hundreds of athletes. More than 280 Russians participated, and given evidence of the state-sponsored, systemic doping program in the country, there were howls of protest across the globe. Not wanting to see a repeat, a group of 17 anti-doping leaders released a statement Thursday calling for a complete ban of the Russian Olympic Committee from Pyeongchang. That irritated some IOC members, especially Reddie, who took time in his presentation to assail the leaders.

"The comments made ... omit entirely all the work that's been done to develop proper anti-doping systems in Russia," Reddie said. "It looks backward instead of looking forward. I want to make it quite clear that most of what they say in their press release is not poli-

cy, and is not helpful." One of the authors of that release, Travis Tygart of the US Anti-Doping Agency, responded in an email to the AP: "Yeah, clearly, the truth can strike a reaction, but to be clear, the only thing unhelpful is the lack of decisive action in fully protecting clean athletes' rights."

Denis Oswald, the IOC member looking into the individual cases, said his committee has been "working hard since Day 1." "But when you have a pile of documents like this," he said, while holding his hands several feet apart, "and you have (so) many cases involved, it takes time. You have to respect the procedure. You can't just say they were in Sochi and they are Russian and they probably were doped."

The McLaren Report said the doping scheme involved 1,000 athletes covering 30 sports, both winter and summer.

Oswald spelled out a clearly defined ranking of the importance of the cases, starting with Russian athletes trying to compete in next year's Olympics. He said he hoped to have much of the work

completed by November, which would give the IOC and other governing bodies three months to sort out eligibility.

The other report - about whether state-sponsored doping exists, as shown in both McLaren's research and a previous investigation by IOC member Dick Pound - is also on track to be done before the Olympics, and Bach said it has to be. Because that looks at the entire operation and not the cases of individual athletes, it figures to be an even more difficult issue for the IOC to sort out.

The director of the IOC's medical and science department, Richard Budgett, explained some of the delays come down to simple math: For instance, he said it takes about three hours to examine each urine-sample bottle to determine whether tampering has occurred. Key to Russia's scheme at the Sochi Games was a plan in which officials opened bottles containing tainted urine, traded it with clean urine and resealed the bottles without anyone discovering they had been compromised. — AP

AUSTRALIA ENGAGE LOCAL INDIAN SPINNER TO FOIL YADAV THREAT

CHENNAI: Australia skipper Steve Smith exuded confidence his team can dominate India's left-arm wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav in the one-day series beginning today after two days of facing a local bowler of similar action in the nets.

Yadav's 4-68 on test debut against Australia helped secure India's 2-1 series victory earlier this year but the tourists left no stone unturned in their preparation, roping in local left-arm wrist spinner KK Jiyas for some valuable practice.

"He's a good young talent," Smith said of Yadav, who will lead India's spin attack in absence of seniors Ravichandran Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja who have been rested from the first three encounters of the five-match ODI series.

"He can be difficult to pick at times so he's someone you've got to watch really closely. Hopefully we can put him under a

little bit of pressure early in his spell and try and take him for as many (runs) as we can.

"(Engaging Jiyas) is a chance to train against someone who bowls the same. There's not too many around the world so it's a little bit different and it's been good to get someone who bowls a bit of that."

While Yadav remains the worry for Australia, India are fretting over Shikhar Dhawan's replacement after the opener was released from the squad to be with his ailing wife. Home captain Virat Kohli hinted Ajinkya Rahane would partner Rohit Sharma at the top of the batting order. "I am not saying it's easy," Kohli told reporters at the MA Chidambaram Stadium. "Ajinkya Rahane plays in middle order in ODIs and tests and then he has opened in the ODIs as well." "Now we are backing Rahane at the top of the order so he knows his plans are clear." —Reuters

CRICKET

INDIA, AUSTRALIA RENEW HEATED RIVALRY IN SHORTER FORMATS

CHENNAI: India takes on Australia in the first of five ODI matches in Chennai today, with a three-match Twenty20 contest to follow, as rivalry resumes between the two cricket giants. India beat Australia 2-1 earlier this year in a controversial test series, played in such a hostile atmosphere that India skipper Virat Kohli said at the end he didn't consider Australian cricketers as his "friends" any longer.

That's not worrying Australia. "I am not too concerned about my differences with Kohli. He is obviously a very good player and he has got a phenomenal ODI record," Australia captain Steve Smith said on arriving in Chennai earlier this week. "Hopefully we can keep him quiet as much as possible, and if we do that, it can go a long way in having some success on this tour."

Kohli faltered in the Test series - 46 runs in five innings, his poorest return from a Test series on home soil - and has a point to prove against Australia. "You can keep talking the whole time, but if you don't deliver on the field, it doesn't matter," Kohli said yesterday, adding that "mind games" wouldn't distract him.

Kohli has recovered his form and India returned from an emphatic tour of Sri Lanka, where it beat the hosts across all three formats. India won the ODI series by a 5-0 margin, despite resting key bowlers. While pacers Umesh Yadav and Mohammed Shami are back to face Australia, spinners Ravichandran Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja continue to be rested.

In their absence, left-arm orthodox spinner Axar Patel, left-arm leg-spinner Kuldeep Yadav and leg-break bowler Yuzvendra Chahal have done the job well. They shared 14 wickets in five ODIs in Sri Lanka.

"It is a great advantage to have them in the squad," Kohli said. "They are different bowlers, yet are both wicket-taking bowlers." Yadav made his test debut against Australia in Dharamsala and took 4-91. The Australians are treating him as a serious threat, even recruiting the services of a left-arm leg-spinner from Kerala to practice in the nets leading up to this first ODI.

"It was a chance to train against someone that bowls the same," Smith said. "Hopefully we can put him (Yadav) under pressure early in his spell and try and take him for as many as we can." Australia has won two out of its last three full ODI series in India, in 2007-08 and in 2009-10, both by a 4-2 margin. The Australians recently drew the two Test series in Bangladesh 1-1. Aaron Finch will miss out owing to a calf injury. Peter Handscomb has been drafted into the squad as his replacement, but he will not reach Chennai in time for this first ODI. Travis Head is expected to open the innings with David Warner.

For India, Ajinkya Rahane is expected to partner up with Sharma, as first-choice partner Shikhar Dhawan was released from the ODI squad due to his wife's illness. Lokesh Rahul will continue to bat in the middle order, while Kohli can opt for Kedar Jadhav or Manish Pandey at No. 6. — AP



CANBERRA: Australia's Michael Hooper, left, breaks a tackle from Argentina's Matias Alemanno and Tomas Lezana, right, during their rugby union test match in Canberra, yesterday. —AP

RUGBY

AUSTRALIA RALLY TO DOWN PUMAS 45-20 IN CANBERRA

CANBERRA: Australia scored five second-half tries to rally to their first victory of this year's Rugby Championship with a 45-20 win over Argentina at a chilly Canberra Stadium yesterday. Fullback Israel Folau scored tries either side of halftime and Sekope Kepu, Will Genia, Nick Phipps and Jordan Uelese also crossed to secure a bonus point victory.

Flyhalf Bernard Foley converted all six tries and kicked a penalty to help the Wallabies back to winning ways after they lost twice to the All Blacks and drew with the Springboks in their first three matches of the competition.

Argentina led 13-10 at halftime after bullying their hosts in the back-row contest but a first half try from Martin Landajo and a brilliant late consolation from Matias Moroni were not enough for a first win in Australia since 1983.

Michael Cheika was delighted with the improvement after the break, even more so because it was inspired by the players themselves rather than a halftime talk from the Wallabies coach. "I didn't say too much, they said it all, they knew what was going on," Cheika said. "They didn't hide from the lack of urgency and intensity and the need to pick it up."

"We know we let ourselves down in the first half." The Pumas head back to Argentina for their final two matches still searching for their first win of the Rugby Championship with only one victory, over Georgia, in seven matches this year. "We didn't have a good second half, we were too passive on defence," said coach Daniel Hourcade. "When we had the chance to score, we didn't and that was the match."

FIRST TRY

Australia opened the scoring through Foley's penalty but Argentina were dominating possession and Nicolas Sanchez levelled the scores in the 15th minute after the Pumas pack had rolled a maul deep into the home 22.

The Pumas butchered an opportunity to score the first try in the 20th minute when Sanchez's pass to Emiliano Boffelli went forward but scrumhalf Landajo made no mistake four minutes later when he spun over the line from a ruck. The visitors continued to make sure the game was being played in the Australian half and it was not until the half-hour mark that the Wallabies broke out to again square the contest.

Foley was twice involved in the sweeping move that sent Folau over in the corner, but the Pumas quickly resumed their territorial stranglehold and Sanchez slotted a second penalty to send his side into halftime with a slim lead.

Australia came out firing at the start of the second half and prop Kepu burrowed over the line from close range for a converted try to put them ahead 17-13 after 50 minutes. The

Wallabies were now playing more direct rugby up front and got their reward with a second try three minutes later when a lofted Will Genia pass gave Folau the space to cross again.

As the temperature plunged towards zero degrees Celsius, Australia just about weathered a period of intense Argentine pressure before the floodgates opened in the final 10 minutes

after Pumas replacement Enrique Pieretto had been sin-binned.

Scrumhalf Genia cut through the defence to score in the 72nd minute, a searing touchline run and offload from number eight Sean McMahon gifted replacement Phipps his try and rookie hooker Uelese barged over for his maiden test try after the hooter. —Reuters

RUTHLESS ALL BLACKS THRASH SOUTH AFRICA

AUCKLAND: Winger Nehe Milner-Skudder scored two of the All Blacks' eight tries as they destroyed South Africa 57-0 at North Harbour Stadium yesterday to post a record points margin against the Springboks.

The All Blacks were ruthless in their execution of their opportunities to post 50 points for the second successive test against their traditional foes, with their 57-15 win last year in Durban the previous largest margin.

Rieko loane, Milner-Skudder, Brodie Retallick and Scott Barrett all crossed in the first half to give the All Blacks a 31-0 lead at the break, before the right winger, Ofa Tu'ungafasi Lima Sopoaga and Codie Taylor all scored in the second half.

Despite the scoreline, the Springboks created numerous opportunities themselves with their running lines, interplay and kicks into space but were unable to finish off as the All Blacks defence was superb.

The All Blacks were ruthless in identifying space and taking their opportunities

throughout the game and had sealed the win by halftime. They scored three long range tries with loane, Milner-Skudder and Retallick all crossing after the world champions identified space behind the defensive line.

Replacement Scott Barrett also crossed after his older brother Beauden cross-kicked for Dane Coles to knock the ball down to the 23-year-old, who was on the field as Liam Squire underwent a head injury assessment. Milner-Skudder grabbed his second try in the 53rd minute and two coaches then emptied the benches, with Tu'ungafasi scoring his first test try 10 minutes later.

The All Blacks dominated the final 20 minutes with the Springboks defending for much of it and it was testament to their grit they only conceded the tries to Sopoaga in the 73rd minute and Taylor after the fulltime hooter.

The Springboks next face Australia in Bloemfontein on Oct. 1, while the All Blacks play Argentina in Buenos Aires. —Reuters



AUCKLAND: New Zealand's winger Rieko loane scores a try against South Africa during their Rugby Championship match in Auckland, New Zealand, yesterday. The All Blacks defeated the Springboks 57-0. — AP



CHENNAI: Australian cricketer Travis Head bowls during a training session, ahead of the India-Australia cricket series, in Chennai yesterday. India and Australia will play five ODIs and three Twenty20 matches during the tour lasting nearly a month, starting today. — AFP