

## Sports

# Russia picks new athletics chief as doping crisis deepens

## We represent athletes and they should not suffer: Yulia

**MOSCOW:** Yulia Tarasenko was appointed as interim president of Russia's athletics body yesterday following the suspension of previous head Dmitry Shlyakhtin by World Athletics. Tarasenko, the RUSAF sports director and head of the athletics federation of St. Petersburg, immediately sought to reassure Russian athletes she would fight their corner.

"We're not in a very joyful mood, the situation is very difficult in the federation, but we think there is a chance to fight for the federation," she said. "We represent athletes and they should not suffer," the new acting president Tarasenko told journalists.

Tarasenko was picked from three candidates after Dmitry Shlyakhtin resigned from the post of RUSAF president. Russian athletics' crisis deepened following Thursday's ruling by the Athletics Integrity Unit of global governing body World Athletics, which suspended Russia's reinstatement process and accused RUSAF of obstructing a probe into high-jumper Danil Lysenko.

It is now considering expelling RUSAF and suspending the provision allowing Russian to compete as neutral athletes, but for the moment awaits a decision by the world anti-doping agency on December 9 on whether to label Russia non-compliant.

Head coach of Russia's athletics Yury Borzakovskiy said yesterday that RUSAF's main goal

is "to protect the athletes and their coaches, so that they keep preparing for the Olympic Games and compete there."

"In what status is a different issue," he said. Some vocal Russian athletes have expressed frustration with the federation and accused authorities of hurting clean athletes by feet-dragging on needed reforms.

"Our athletics is in agony. We have lost four years. Clean athletes are still vulnerable and unsure whether they will get a chance to compete," three-time high-jump world champion Maria Lasitskene wrote in a ripping Instagram appeal to the Russian sports minister Friday.

Lasitskene, who has called on Shlyakhtin to step down repeatedly over the past months, told TASS agency yesterday that the new athletics chief Tarasenko is not a solution. "Shlyakhtin was changed to Shlyakhtin," she said. "Tarasenko is Shlyakhtin's appointee and should immediately quit the federation."

Lasitskene said yesterday's decision would only deepen the crisis and the federation should have instead picked a new face with a clear anti-doping stance and no connection to previous management.

"Congratulations to all who pushed for this appointment. Great job guys, the operation to liquidate Russian athletics is almost finished." —AFP



**MOSCOW:** Acting president of Russia's Athletics Federation (ARAF) Yulia Tarasenko speaks to media in the Russian Olympic committee in Moscow yesterday. —AFP

## Japan's Hanyu wins NHK Trophy

**SAPPORO:** Two-time Olympic champion Yuzuru Hanyu clinched his fourth NHK Trophy yesterday, grabbing a ticket for next month's Grand Prix Finals. The Japanese figure skating star smashed an overall score of 305.05 points at the men's competition, marking his second straight Grand Prix victory this season.

France's Kevin Aymoz came to second with 250.02 points as Roman Sadovskiy of Canada was in third with 247.50 points. Carrying his comfortable lead at the short programme, Hanyu opened with a quadruple loop and nailed a superb quadruple Salchow at the free programme.

He fluffed a combination jump but kept his nerve delivering clean triple axels and displaying gorgeous steps and spins. As he completed his performance in style, Hanyu bowed deeply to his fans as they in turn tossed his Winnie the Pooh stuffed toys, his mascot, onto the ice.

"I was nervous," Hanyu admitted

after the competition. "I want to work hard in the (Grand Prix) finals by taking advantage of a lot of energy I received here" from his fans, he added. Hanyu booked his place at December's Grand Prix Finals in Turin, a showdown by top skaters after the six-round Grand Prix series.

Double world champion Nathan Chen of the US and Russian Alexander Samarin have already qualified. On the women's side, Russian young star Alena Kostornaia won her first NHK Trophy title.

The 16-year-old landed clean jumps to score an overall score of 240.00 points, sealing her second Grand Prix triumph this season. With her victory, Russia swept the women's competition of the season's Grand Prix series.

Defending champion Rika Kihira of Japan was in second place with 231.84 points, wowing the home crowd. Reigning Olympic and world champion Alina Zagitova placed third with 217.99 points, coming back from fourth at the short.

With yesterday's results, Kostornaia, Kihira and Zagitova qualified for the finals. "I want to produce results that I can be satisfied with" when she competes in the finals, Kostornaia said. Kihira said: "I want to aim at a perfect performance in the Grand Prix Finals."



**SAPPORO:** Japan's Yuzuru Hanyu performs during the Men Short Program at the Grand Prix of Figure Skating 2019/2020 NHK Trophy in Sapporo. —AFP

Earlier in the day, French ice dance duo Gabriella Papadakis and Guillaume Cizeron won their first NHK Trophy title with a record 226.61 points. "We were very focused on not doing any mistake and skating well with emotion," Papadakis said.

Asked about qualifying for the Grand Prix Finals, Cizeron said: "We are really, really happy to be able to go to the final. We are going to do our best." Reigning world champions Sui Wenjing and Han Cong of China easily won the pairs title with 226.96 points. —AFP

## KIB title sponsor of Kuwait Marathon 2019 under slogan 'Run for Life'

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait International Bank (KIB) announced its title sponsorship of Kuwait Marathon 2019, a landmark local sporting event organized by Circuit. Set to take place on December 21 at the newly built Sheikh Jaber Causeway, the event will be the first of its kind to take place on the bridge. Online registration is open on [www.thekuwait-marathon.com](http://www.thekuwait-marathon.com), where the last date to register will be on December 1, 2019.

The Marathon will include four categories open to participants of all ages, including: 5km, 10km, 21km and 42km. Participants will be able to walk, run or combine both. More than just a race, the sporting event will feature a full program of activities, including the distribution of great prizes.

On this occasion, Senior Manager of the Corporate Communications Unit at KIB, Nawaf Najia, said: "KIB has always been committed to sponsoring and supporting events and initiatives that promote sports and help develop the local sports culture. This comes as part of our all-inclusive social responsibility program which seeks to leave a positive impact on the lives of

people in our community by promoting the importance of sport, physical fitness and healthy lifestyles to create a healthier, more productive community."

Najia further noted that KIB's sponsorship of this year's Kuwait Marathon under the slogan "Run for Life", comes in line with its overall vision of being a true "Bank for Life". The Bank's sponsorship comes as part of its belief in this unique event and its ability to attract people from all across the country. Additionally, KIB actively seeks to play an active and positive role in spreading health awareness, including encouraging people to play sports and boost their physical well-being, as well as taking care of their diets and adopting healthier lifestyles in general.

Moreover, Najia noted that in addition to sponsoring this race, KIB will also be present at a private booth dedicated to the Bank, offering a number of fun activities for contestants as well as their families.

On his part, Bader AlBanna, Co-founder of Circuit said, "We are thrilled to be organizing the Kuwait Marathon, the first event to take place on the Sheikh Jaber Causeway. We are looking forward to attracting a large number of participants of different ages, as we always strive to offer something new and different to promote physical activity as an integral component of people's everyday lives."

AlBanna also lauded KIB's sponsorship of this event, adding that: "KIB's title sponsorship of the Kuwait Marathon in its inaugural year is quite unique, and it emphasizes the important role the private sector and national institutions have in ensuring the success of such important sporting initiatives. KIB's support highlights the Bank's commitment to playing an

News that the All Blacks great had agreed to join the Wolfpack and lead the ambitious club into a first season playing in England's top-tier Super League sent shockwaves through the sport.

Though Canadians have little interest in rugby and know even less about Williams, the signing sparked national headlines. Toronto mayor John Tory rolled out the welcome mat. "Sonny Bill Williams is one of the best rugby players in the world and we welcome him to Toronto," Tory said.

The city, however, is still waiting to welcome its newest sporting celebrity. In fact, it will be several months before Toronto rugby fans get a chance to chase Williams for an autograph or selfie.

A week after the 34-year-old's signing was announced on Nov. 7 the twice World Cup winner was introduced at a news conference in London.

Immediately afterwards he flew to Australia without a paying a quick visit to the city he will represent for at least the next two years.

As the Super League's only trans-Atlantic club, Toronto will play the early part of their schedule in England. Wolfpack CEO and chairman Robert Hunter telling Reuters that fans are unlikely to see Williams in the flesh until their first home game scheduled for April 11 against Hull FC.

"We talked about that (bringing him to Toronto) but it is just very difficult with his travel schedule," Hunter told Reuters. "He just finished the World Cup in Japan, he had been away almost six weeks from his family. We talked about it and decided not to do it. We may not see him here until April."

Founded in 2016 the team have a loyal hardcore fan base and Wolfpack games have devel-

oped a reputation as a fun and affordable sporting option in the city of 3.5 million where NHL Toronto Maple Leafs, NBA Raptors, MLB Toronto Blue Jays, MLS Toronto FC and Canadian Football League Argonauts vie for the sporting entertainment dollar.

To get noticed in such a competitive market Hunter says the Wolfpack had to go out and buy it. Last season the Wolfpack, who play in a quaint but soulless venue in downtown Toronto that seats 10,000, averaged close to 7,500 fans a game. As rumours of Williams signing intensified the club saw a spike in season-ticket sales and another when the deal was announced, leading Hunter to predict that all 11 home dates will be sellouts. "It is certainly buying headlines," said Hunter. "In this marketplace where a lot of our commercial busi-

ness is driven by ticket sales and sponsorship you have to go big.

"One of the goals is to build a brand in this marketplace. You've got to invest. We're a small guy and we are just trying to keep our hand up so people know that we are there." The buzz generated by the signing of Williams may have boosted ticket sales but the excitement has quickly vanished and the Wolfpack are again out of the minds of Toronto sports fans. Hunter concedes that rugby is a niche sport in Canada and the real value in Williams signing will be felt at the grassroots level of sport.

But with him not arriving in Toronto until April and the club's last regular season game on Aug. 29 it is difficult to estimate how much corporate schmoozing can be squeezed into a five-month window. —Reuters

## Classy Cooney helps Ulster to Clermont win

**BELFAST:** Scrum-half John Cooney guided Ulster to a 18-13 victory over Clermont in Pool 3 of the European Champions Cup in testing conditions in Belfast on Friday. Ireland back-rower Jordi Murphy and Cooney scored either side of the half as the French side found it difficult to settle into the fixture due to the weather and a hostile home following.

"This one is for the purists today with those conditions," uncapped Cooney told BT Sport. "One of our mantras is fight for every inch, it's something we've worked on for the last few years and you can see it by the way we played for 80 minutes," he added. Ulster coach Dan McFarland made four changes to the side who beat Bath in England last weekend in their opening match in the competition this season including starting South African winger Louis Ludik.

The visitor's Frank Azema switched half-backs as Scotland's Greig Laidlaw and Australian Jake McIntyre came in for experienced Morgan Parra and Camille Lopez after hammering Harlequins last Saturday.

McFarland's side claimed an early 3-0 advantage as scrum-half Cooney kicked the first of his two penalties. The hosts dominated the opening half an hour controlling possession in the driving rain and unpredictable wind.

Ireland back-rower Jordi Murphy crossed at the back of a driving maul and Cooney slotted the conversion for a 10-0 lead in front of a raucous Ravenhill crowd.

Azema's men were on the scoreboard after 32 minutes as Laidlaw kicked his first penalty goal of the season but his side trailed 10-3. Cooney and Laidlaw traded penalties either side of the half and the Irish province led 13-6 with 20 minutes to go.

Cooney crossed as he chipped over Raka, took two football-like touches, and slid on the wet surface to score his second try in as many European games after 62 minutes. Despite his missed conversion the home side led 18-6 and Laidlaw was subbed off for Parra.

The impact of ex-France international Parra was seen immediately as his control behind a dominant Clermont rolling maul led to referee JP Doyle signalling for a penalty try to cut the advantage to 18-13 with 12 minutes to play.

Despite a tense final 10 minutes with Cooney involved in a scuffle with half a dozen Clermont players Ulster held on for their third straight home win over the French outfit. Azema's men return to the Auvergne region with a losing bonus point but are second in the table two points behind the Irish province. On Saturday, title holder Saracens welcome the Ospreys in their first home fixture since they were handed a £5 million (\$6.5 million) fine and docked 35 points for breaching Premiership Rugby's salary cap rules. —AFP

## With Williams out of sight, Wolfpack out of fans' minds

**TORONTO:** Sonny Bill Williams, the world's highest-paid rugby player and the sport's biggest name, has in recent weeks visited Japan, New Zealand, Australia and England. Williams has been seen in just about every corner of the globe where rugby is played with the exception of Canada and his newest team the Toronto Wolfpack, who have signed the hulking New Zealander to a reported two-year \$9 million deal.