

Abby Hoffman: IAAF anti-doping interview

N: Ladies and gentlemen welcome to beautiful Eugene Oregon, the heart of the World Junior Championships this morning and I'm here to talk about the IAAF Anti-Doping strategy and programme with Abby Hoffman.

Welcome Abby. Abby is a member of the IAAF Medical and Anti-Doping Commission as well as the IAAF Anti-Doping review board. Her day job is actually with the Ministry of Health, as Senior Executive in Canada.

Abby, thanks very much for taking the time to come here this morning. My first question for you is how did you get involved in IAAF Anti-Doping?

A: I was an athlete and I retired in the mid 1970s, which was just around the time that people were becoming very aware of doping as a reality in sport and then for a long time I was the director general of the national sports programme in Canada and, although people think of Canada as a country of fairness and fair play, we did have our own major doping challenges. Ben Johnson is best known, but we had many others before Seoul in 1988 and so we were one of the first countries to create an anti-doping structure and eventually a national anti-doping organisation. In my job as well as my given interest in athletics, I was also very involved in those initiatives which I would say were the early days of the international anti-doping campaign.

N: **I suppose it would have helped that being four-time Olympian, Commonwealth Games champion and Pan-American Games champion you could always see it from the perspective of an athlete as you were an athlete?**

A: Yes absolutely. I think I have always been conscious of the fact that with doping, it doesn't matter how few people do it, it undermines the integrity of sport, it makes sport a miserable place for those who play by the rules and I have always felt that the sports authorities and athletes and coaches and everybody else involved have an obligation to try to make our sport as clean as possible.

N: **So what would you say are the main features of the IAAF anti-doping programme?**

A: As an international sports body, the biggest focus of our attention is of course on our testing programme and I think we like to think that we have one of the most comprehensive, if not the most comprehensive, programme in the world.

Obviously we test athletes at major events but the in-competition testing is really the tip of the iceberg. The biggest activities are the out-of-competition testing programme, target testing, we have a registered athlete testing pool which brings together all of the top athletes based on an assessment of who these athletes are and what we know about the use of doping substances in particular events.

The programme of out-of-competition testing occurs and one of the most important features is the biological passport where, in major events and outside of major events, we

have collected literally thousands of blood samples which are stored and these become the basis for analysis of initial blood pool clouds and now move on to substances that are profiled and analysed. This has opened up a whole new world of possibilities in terms of detecting and apprehending any kind of cheats through doping.

N: That is a good point: what would you say are the latest developments, because it moves very quickly doesn't it? You've got to be ahead of the cheaters haven't you?

A: So the first focus on the biological profile was looking at blood samples and looking for abnormalities and there's a complicated process through which we determine what the probability is of some abnormality and that blood profiling was largely focused on the endurance athletes.

Now that we've moved with scientific capability to assess evolving profiles of athletes over time, that means we are able now to look at power and sprint events in the same way we have been able to apprehend athletes who have been using blood boosters or blood-related doping techniques.

So I don't want to say we have the entire universe of athletics covered but this is certainly a major issue and what I'd just say generally about the use of the biological passport and the profiles from blood samples is that we are able to shift focus from searching around for the actual substance used for doping to actually looking at the impact of having used a doping agent so we are able to actually find athletes and prove them guilty of a doping violation on the impact on the biological profile.

This has really changed the world of detection and apprehension in a very dramatic way and we keep all of these samples for a very long period of time in order to track these changes in the profile of the athlete.

N: One thing that must be very important as well is the intelligence gathering is finding out what people are doing, and what you can do about it. How does the IAAF manage that aspect?

A: In terms of human resources, we've got someone who has a title we'd all like to have: an intelligence officer. Basically the purpose of this person's activities is to look at the pattern of doping, to examine all the samples and the patterns that have emerged, and try to figure out what's being used, what times of year, are there locations in the world where there appears that some things are going on that we really need to pay attention to.

This individual and others are in touch with the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) and interacting with Interpol, Europol and other organisations that are in the business of tracking what's going on in terms of the world wide movement of substances that are used for doping and trafficking and so on.

All of that information is used to strengthen our testing, particularly our out-of-competition but also to a degree our no-notice testing programme that appears at competition. It's a very expensive business doing testing, and so every test that you do that isn't really based on some presumption or hypothesis about where, when or with what substances doping has

occurred is a bit of a waste. So the intelligence business is really intended to get better value for money, to make it more efficient.

N: Talking of the biological passport, we know that WADA set up the parameters originally, but how does the IAAF use or interpret those parameters?

A: First of all, all of the testing results include information on athlete whereabouts is maintained in a system that WADA developed called ADAMS (Anti-Doping Administration and Management System). This has really helped us make sure we know where people are and we keep track of and maintain over a long period of time any information about athletes based on test results, biological passports and so on.

The science behind anti-doping is very complex so WADA and a number of the major federations have invested a lot in the scientific analysis that underpins the blood passport system. This is a collaboration among the leading sports bodies and WADA because if you are going to apprehend someone and charge them with a doping infraction that is not based on finding a doping agent but rather on parameters in a blood profile, you've got to be really sure you are on solid scientific ground.

The importance of recruiting and supporting these scientists who actually do this profile work make sure that when we say there's a probability of abnormality, we have a solid scientific basis to say that, which we need to retain the confidence of athletes and the credibility of the programme.

N: If we look now directly at the athlete: so if you're an athlete, how many tests do you expect, in competition and out of competition?

A: It depends a lot on what event you're in, what country you're in and so on but I would say on average for a top-level athlete you could expect to be tested at least 10 to 20 times a year but it depends a little bit on how frequently they compete.

We, as the IAAF, don't necessarily do all those tests; if there's a strong national anti-doping organisation that athlete will be tested in their own country by their own national anti-doping body. If they don't have such a body then the IAAF backstops the system and we would do more tests in those cases. It's a lot of tests and I think it is important that these tests have to be administered fairly, but at the same time if we are looking for something and we feel we have good reason to believe that there's something untoward going on, we will inconvenience athletes with an out-of-competition no-notice test. This is all part of protecting the sport, protecting the credibility of the sport and the fairness of competition.

N: It is important to state the idea of the retest samples, tell us a little bit about that and how long after a test could they then be retested?

A: The retesting is a really important innovation; the IAAF has been maintaining – that is retaining – samples since 2005, so we have samples from all of the medallists from our major events since 2005.

The statute of limitations in terms of reanalysis is eight years, although under the new WADA code it is going to move up to 10 years. I would say that we feel that this has been a very successful effort, there have been 15 top-level athletes who have been apprehended and charged with doping infractions and penalised based on the retesting of samples.

The purpose of this is as testing science improves we are going back to samples that originally tested negative but now we have new methodology and we're getting positive test results so this is absolutely critical. And I think it's sending a very strong message to any athlete who is tempted to dope that the fact that you might not get caught today is not going to provide you with assurance about something that may happen in the next decade and given the rate of scientific progress I'd be thinking twice myself about doing something if I thought sometime in the next 10 years my sample might be retested.

N: I think it's also very motivating for the clean athletes; I was very proud to have helped Dylan Armstrong recover a medal that he gained, the world indoor bronze medal, and he was just so happy, so ecstatic that we were able to promote that which I think is a very good thing.

A: Absolutely, this is a critical point of the message, athletes that are clean want to know that any competition they go into is fair and I think our reputation now is dogged and let's face it a little bit ruthless. It really builds confidence in athletes and I know Dylan was awarded this medal recently and even though it was many years after I think that it sent a very powerful message that we are serious and that we want to protect the sport and we want to protect individual athletes and recognise achievements fairly gained; that's what we're in business to do.

N: Talking about the testing in a global system, of course sometimes we get accused of testing the same countries more often; what is the IAAF doing, or could you explain a little bit about why it may seem that certain countries are being tested more than others and what do they intend to do to equalise that?

A: First of all, the intent isn't necessary to equalise. The intent is to make sure that in those countries where there has either been a pattern of doping and/or there's a country that has a very strong record in athletics in terms of achievement but where the national capacity to test and to monitor and to educate is weak then we have to move in.

No country is exempt from this, the United States and Russia in the past have had their issues, currently Jamaica, Turkey, Kenya are in the spotlight so sometimes we may help to bolster the national anti-doping organisation. In Jamaica's case, Jamaica's national anti-doping organisation has been paired up with Canada so there's a good strong collaboration there.

In the case of Turkey I would say it was almost more dramatic, many people were concerned about what was going on there and ultimately there was an intervention which led to the cleaning out of the administration, a massive amount of testing. The national Olympic committee in Turkey was mobilised to say 'look we've got to do something here' and so

there's close to 100 positives in Turkey over the last couple of years but this is because of a sea-change that I think we helped animate to make sure that happened.

In Kenya, again, they don't have an anti-doping organisation but we've tried to make sure that the biological passport, particularly focused on blood parameters, is being pursued. So we have people in Kenya, we're making sure there are certified officers there who can do the collection and analytical work.

Each country has its own unique circumstances and we try to find a solution that suits the needs of that country. And let's face it, these are countries without the resources to create an organisation, to the extent that if we can backstop that then we will, but if it's a country that has resources, then our approach will be to make it politically unattainable to not put into effect an anti-doping programme.

N: Let's look a little towards the future. What new substances does the IAAF with its intelligence gathering think are out there? What is the IAAF focusing on at the moment?

A: There are always things that are being done to manipulate blood, we know that sometimes we are discovering situations where there will be a drug that was originally developed for a legitimate pharmaceutical and therapeutic purpose but for whatever reason didn't materialise and somehow or another, even though the manufacturer stopped production, we find that product comes up in doping control samples.

Then there are substance like EPO and human growth hormone that have been around for a while where the issue is not so much apprehending a new substance as actually finding a methodology to detect it and that's why we are so concerned about human growth hormone. A bit of it focuses on new substances and a bit of the focus is actually on new methodologies for older substances.

N: One interesting thing about being here with the junior athletes is the importance of education, to reach out to these people at a very young age, an informative age. What would you like to say about that and in particular what the IAAF does in terms of education?

A: At events that involve youth and junior athletes, there's a fair bit of outreach of information about the anti-doping programme which is focused both on the technical aspects and the ethical and fair competition dimensions.

We obviously rely on coaches and the national sport bodies and the national organisations to do a lot of the general education about why doping in sport is an issue and what should be done about it.

We try to make sure that all of our athletes who may be subject to testing – whether it is juniors at a competition like this one, or top-level athletes who are tested repeatedly – really understand what the doping control programme is all about, what their rights are, why they are tested with the frequency that they are and how the system works.

There's a degree to which we would say that by informing people about the technical features of the programme it reinforces the sense that we really care about fair competition, so there's an underlying ethical dimension but it doesn't require us to be preaching from the pulpit about fair play.

Our starting point is that we think the overwhelming majority of athletes want fair competition and we need to let them know that we are as committed to that as they are.

N: We are talking about the athletes but of course there are the coaches, the managers of the athletes, the entourages. What does the IAAF do to educate and control that group which is also very important?

A: This is a tough hill to climb; there is no doubt about that. Under the new code these other ancillary personnel will be covered so that if we are actually able to establish that there is trafficking or counselling around the use of doping, or agents, or banned substances, that these people can be apprehended.

Through our coaches commission we are trying to make sure this message is getting out and that the IAAF agents are licensed and we have ways of communicating with them, I will say that this is one of our more challenging situations.

It is very rarely the case nowadays that an individual athlete totally independently goes out and deliberately starts a doping regime; usually these things are done in conjunction with coaches, managers, agents.

I think this happened in Turkey and maybe it will happen elsewhere, and there are occasions underway now where this is really an issue. If we are able to penalise or suspend from engagement with our sport these people in these ancillary roles, this is going to send a really strong message.

We want to educate athletes so that if a coach, manager or somebody like that offers an athlete something, then the athlete now knows that they should be questioning that and that it's legitimate to question this. It doesn't mean that they are paranoid or chronically suspicious, just that they have an obligation to themselves to ask what is this all about, how will it help me, what are the contents, is this in some way going to cause me to run afoul of the anti-doping rules.

N: If we turn now to WADA, what is your relationship, how would you summarise that, what do you think WADA has achieved?

A: Track and field is one of the leading sports in the anti-doping movement. It has been at the core of WADA.

We collaborate with WADA on a lot of things; it's probably fair to say that we push WADA as well, as WADA has the challenge of trying to balance the interests of sport federations who range from claiming there is no doping in their sport so they don't really want to put too much energy into it, to sports like cycling, track or others where clearly there has been a history of doping challenges and they need to be dealt with.

Sometimes I think the concern is that WADA may put the watermark a little too low for our appetite, but on the other hand WADA is receptive and we lobbied very hard for the new four-year penalty for significant doping offences which will come into effect from 1 January 2015. I think we'd say we are a collaborator, but we are also challenging WADA to provide really strong leadership on a world scale.

N: What would you say precisely about the new WADA code? You were involved at the beginning and I know that with the IAAF you spoke yourself at their conference. So what would you think are the key parts of the new code?

A: I think the most important issue is the longer penalty, the advent of the four-year penalty. On the other side of the coin – and there are pluses and minuses here – the new code does provide for a considerably more elaborate system for so-called 'substantial assistance'. These are cases where an athlete or any other guilty party has an opportunity to get a reduced sentence if – and this is intended to be an incentive – that individual provides information about the doping environment in which this infraction occurred. Are there other people involved? If so, in what way? What are some of the new substances that are being used?

Some may feel that – and I feel like this on some days – the opportunity for sanctions to be reduced is pretty liberal. On the other hand, I think it is really important in cases where someone has information that the sport authorities do not have access to, if we can get that information, then maybe it is okay to reduce a penalty by a significant margin in return for the opportunity to actually apprehend other people and find out more about what is going on in the doping world. The increased penalty and substantial assistance and the inclusion of other parties, the athlete entourage that we talked about, these are all part of the new code.

N: One of the things about being very dominant in anti-doping is that the sport makes the newspapers with negative headlines. But I think you would agree that that is something that has to happen; if you are serious and dedicated, you are going to have that news coverage. Recently, over the last year unfortunately we have been back in the news with doping cases, what would you say about that? Would you say, as I've said personally as a spokesman, that it is a good thing when we catch high level people?

A: I think that is certainly the case. If you look at the other side of the coin and we had a lacklustre testing programme and we didn't take this business seriously at all, we would have very few positive tests to report.

That may be nice from a public relations standpoint but I think the public and the media are sufficiently well aware, and certainly the sport community, that doping is a reality and I think the general reaction if there were very few doping cases reported would be that we were not doing our job.

So we do our job, you go fishing you catch fish, you don't go fishing not to catch anything. I think that where it is a problem is if there is some obvious endemic situation and we are seen not to be addressing that, that's a problem.

If there are top-level athletes who should be tested regularly then – and this has happened in the past – we don't get on to them or our testing regime isn't tough enough so they only appear at a major competition where they are apprehended, which was the situation with Ben Johnson way back in 1988, then what were we doing? What was Canada doing? What was the IAAF doing? Only catching an athlete at the Olympic Games. Not that we failed but we know that we needed to do better.

N: Would you be able to comment on two very high-profile cases which were Tyson Gay and Asafa Powell? Of course both being 100m guys and always in the news.

A: Maybe the more important case I would say is Tyson Gay and this is a case that was apprehended, no question about that, he admitted it. But he did offer significant, substantial assistance that we know has led to the apprehension of some other athletes and will likely lead to action against some other individuals, non athletes.

As I was saying earlier, there's a trade-off: if we want to get information and intelligence that will help us better manage and curtail doping, then we're going to have to bite our tongue, hold our nose, and a guy like Tyson Gay is going to get a penalty that is going to be reduced to one year.

Now, under the new code, he might not get a penalty all the way back to a single year, he could, but these things happen, so we just have to acknowledge that this is part of the whole anti-doping landscape and if we just pick one case you're going to always find things that you can poke holes in. If you look at the overall movement and the overall effort, then maybe you have a little different view.

But I'll tell you what, it sticks in my craw that Tyson Gay only gets the one-year penalty. So, you know, sometimes we have to acknowledge that's just the way it is if we want to move forward.

N: What about athletes who take recreational drugs, what is your view on that?

A: I think I generally felt that this is not really the business of the sport authorities and I think it's really important that we deal with those substances that can have a performance-enhancing value.

Now the difficulty is that some of the public authorities that we collaborate with don't make that distinction, they're not fundamentally in the anti-doping business; they're in the drug business and the introduction business more generally. So we're under a lot of pressure to do things related to recreational drugs but frankly I think we ought to stick to our knitting and focus on agents that have to do it for performance enhancement.

N: As you mentioned already, in the new WADA code the longer bans, extensions of the sanctions, is very significant. What would you say about that?

A: In my judgement, I think there has been a lot of agitation, certainly in our sport for at least 20 years, to go to four-year bans for first infractions on major doping offences. So in a way I kind of feel like under the new code we are where we wanted to be in the mid-1980s.

Thank goodness we're there but it has been a tough fight to get there and I think that the reality is in our sport, where careers now can easily go into an athlete's mid-30s or even longer, that a two-year ban is a cost of doing business or an inconvenience. I think it's very clear that too many athletes come back after two-year bans and frankly I think it gives the sport a bad reputation. I'm in favour of second chances, but at the end of the day the integrity of the sport has got to be the pre-eminent consideration.

N: Finally, if you had one message to give to athletes or people involved with athletes who are thinking of doping, what would that message be?

A: I would say: you got into sport because you love it, you love to compete, you probably competed at the outset on a level playing field, that's the ethic that should underpin what you do. I don't think anybody who has an ill-gotten fame or achievement is going to have a very comfortable reflection on their life as an athlete as the years go by.