

**WADA's 18<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM**  
**12 March 2024, SwissTech Convention Centre Lausanne, Switzerland**  
**Opening address by WADA President, Witold Bańka**

**“One Mission, One Team”**

Distinguished guests, dear friends from the anti-doping community, ladies and gentlemen, good morning. It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to WADA's 18th Annual Symposium in Lausanne. Last year, I stood up here and spoke for 45 minutes. I received some complaints after that. Many of you felt that my speech should have been longer. So today I promise it will not be less than two hours... No, of course I am joking. Today I will be much more brief.

Anyway, thank you all for attending – whether in person or virtually. It is pleasing to see such a big turnout once again this year. This week we bring together a record number of people – close to 1,100 dedicated and talented people from all over the world. We really are one team, with a single mission: To work together to protect clean sport for all athletes of the world.

The next two days will be an opportunity. An opportunity to learn from one another, listen to one another and recharge one another's batteries... in a spirit of collaboration. We must challenge each other to do more. We must also question what we do to make sure we stay on course. And we must stand ready to help, to strengthen the system and forge ahead.

Later this morning, you will hear from the WADA Director General, Olivier Niggli. He will take a look back at the major achievements in anti-doping over the past 25 years, and look forward to our future strategic priorities.

One of the highlights of this entire week will be the fourth session today discussing anti-doping intelligence and investigations in Europe. In 2022, WADA won a European Union grant to strengthen I&I capability of the European National Anti-Doping Organizations and Law Enforcement agencies. To describe this project as a success would be a massive understatement. The level of collaboration and cooperation between WADA, the NADOs and law enforcement has been incredible. I do not want to give away the details ahead of that session. But we are talking about dozens of joint operations that have led to several TONS of performance-enhancing drugs being seized. Illegal labs smashed. Many arrests made. Customer lists discovered and analyzed. And cheats charged with anti-doping rule violations. The details revealed later today will blow your minds. Do not miss it!

Every year, I stand here. I talk about the power of collaboration for the anti-doping system. This is what I mean. The way the anti-doping community and law enforcement are working together across 48 different European countries is truly inspirational. It is an example of the incredible benefits that come with reaching out and working together. So far, this project has been in Europe only. But we have plans to expand it globally. Next year, we are taking it to Asia and Oceania.

Today, I feel very safe in this room. Not just because I am among friends and colleagues in anti-doping. But also, because I know there are more than 100 law enforcement officers from all over Europe in the audience. Including Europol and INTERPOL. Ladies and gentlemen, it is great to see you here. I thank you all for your service and for your hard work in helping to protect athletes and clean sport. Welcome to the anti-doping family!

In many ways, this example sums up WADA's entire history. In 2024, we celebrate our 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. It has been a quarter century of progress, of growth but, above all, of collaboration. The Agency's very origins are the result of a unique partnership between sports and Governments of the world. Remarkably, it is a partnership that has stood the test of time. I am not aware of any other socio-political scenario where this has happened.

Very quickly after WADA was founded in 1999, the World Anti-Doping Code was drafted, agreed, published and implemented. I think it remains WADA's single biggest achievement. Given what we know about global politics and the complexities of the Sport Movement, it really was an amazing achievement. WADA's first President Richard Pound, who is here today, deserves a huge amount of credit for helping to navigate those first few years of WADA. Success was not inevitable.

WADA has also been fortunate with the caliber of those who succeeded Richard as President. The late John Fahey from Australia and Sir Craig Reedie from Scotland guided us through challenging and, even, turbulent times. We will have an opportunity tonight to reflect more on their contributions. But for now, I would simply say that thanks to their leadership, WADA has continued to cement its place in the global sports landscape. And it is now stronger than at any time in its 25-year history.

And at the heart of that strength continues to be collaboration. Not just between governments and sport. Not just between NADOs and law enforcement, as described earlier. But also between WADA and... athletes, universities, the pharmaceutical industry, laboratories, the World Health Organization, UNESCO, private funders and sponsors... the list goes on. It really is a case of One Mission, One Team.

And to aid further in those collaborations, in the coming weeks, we will start rolling out a year-long engagement campaign. Coinciding with our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations, this is aimed at raising awareness among all stakeholders as to the vital role that WADA and the global anti-doping community play in preserving the integrity of sport. The campaign will start rolling out on Play True Day – that's 19 April. Stay tuned for more information in the near future.

Those collaborations have allowed us to deliver real results for athletes in the areas of:

- Science and medical. Research guides the way as we make data-driven decisions in all areas of anti-doping. Including: the Prohibited List, Therapeutic Use Exemptions, the Athlete Biological Passport, and artificial intelligence. Research is the bedrock of discovery and improvement. Year in, year out, some of the great scientific minds of our time are working hard to discover new testing methods and improve existing ones. They are making sure athletes are afforded the very best science has to offer to protect them and their sports.
- Intelligence and Investigations. Apart from the European project I mentioned earlier, WADA has built a world-class I&I Department that relentlessly builds cases. These are based primarily on intelligence provided by brave whistleblowers. These confidential sources are the unsung heroes of anti-doping. They take significant risks for the betterment of sport and their efforts must not be forgotten. WADA I&I is constantly running investigations. One example is Operation LIMS which continues to process data stored in the former anti-doping laboratory in Moscow. Since WADA seized those data in January 2019, we have

worked to bring cheats to justice. As of today, 250 successful convictions have been obtained with an additional 32 charged and 106 cases that remain under investigation. WADA works with International Federations around the world to deliver justice for athletes.

You see... collaboration again!

- **Compliance Monitoring.** We all know athletes are held to very high standards when it comes to anti-doping. For the most part, they accept that and in fact they support that. However, it is only fair that others are forced to meet equally high standards. That is where WADA's Compliance Monitoring Program comes in. Like never before, Signatories to the World Anti-Doping Code are being held to account for the quality of their policies and procedures. This helps deliver consistency and harmonization around the world.
- **Technology.** In September 2023, we were pleased to sign a five-year partnership agreement with technology transformation leader, Sword Group. Sword is now WADA's exclusive global IT partner. We plan to make life easier for athletes and the work of the anti-doping community more effective. This will be done by significantly enhancing our ability to improve our Anti-Doping Administration Management System [ADAMS] and other platforms. I welcome our partners from Sword, who are with us here today.
- **Education.** More and more, education is becoming a key pillar of anti-doping. We are rebalancing the system. On the one hand, we catch and punish those who break the rules. But on the other, we must support athletes to make the right decisions so we can prevent those rules from being broken in the first place. Last month, in Cannes, France, we held the fourth Global Education Conference, with a record number of delegates, in excess of 400. All Anti-Doping Organizations and Governments in attendance were encouraged to adopt a "prevention mindset" when it comes to keeping sport clean. This is the future.
- **All good organizations must continually evolve.** And WADA is no exception. The governance reforms we have implemented in recent years are making a real difference. Today WADA benefits from strong representation from all stakeholders, including NADOs and, even more importantly, athletes.

Athlete relations is an extremely important area for me. We have a new Athlete Council representing the full range of athlete voices. There are athletes on all our committees, including the Foundation Board and Executive Committee. In fact, one-third of our Board and ExCo members are elite level athletes. There is a sense now that WADA is a genuinely athlete-centered organization.

Since I became WADA President, I have been speaking and listening to athletes, directly and almost on a weekly basis. I was in Doha recently and met with an athlete group. I was asked what my overall message to them was. I told them that sport can be lonely. Sometimes you think you are on your own or just with your team. This is not true. Whatever you achieve, it is not just for yourself and your families. It is also about your country. The flag or symbol on your chest means something. It is powerful. When you go out there, you know your countrymen and women are watching. They want nothing more than to celebrate your performance with you; to

be happy for you; to be happy because of you; and to be proud with what you have achieved and how you achieved it. Don't destroy that spirit! Be the role models that your country needs so that the next generation of athletes has something to follow.

When I was a sprinter, I did not give much thought for WADA. I focused on those closest to me. I trusted those around me to support me to compete clean. The influence of my coach, Jan Dera, was central for me. He always stressed the importance of anti-doping. He instilled in me the values of respect, integrity and fair play. He used to say: "YOU must know that YOU did everything fairly. That is the only way you can enjoy your achievements. It is better to finish last clean than to win through cheating."

Unfortunately, injury prevented me from qualifying for the Olympics in 2008. It was my dream so I have huge respect for those who get there and can call themselves Olympians. I know how difficult it is. I know the sacrifice it takes and the hard work it demands. My friend and colleague, WADA Vice-President Yang Yang knows this even better than I do. Olympic medals are not given away easily, and she has five! Together, Yang Yang and I have tried to bring this athlete focus with us to WADA.

And it seems that athletes have noticed. I am glad to say that the preliminary results are in from our latest athlete perception survey, conducted between November 2023 and January 2024. We asked more than 1,500 elite level athletes from all continents of the world. In all, 88% of athletes perceive WADA as the leader in the field of anti-doping. 84% see us as trustworthy. 81% perceive our performance as positive. And 87% trust that the global anti-doping system enables clean competition and fair play. This is very encouraging feedback for us. It is a great morale boost for the hundreds of people in WADA and the wider anti-doping community who work so tirelessly day in, day out, to protect athletes and clean sport.

And we are ready to go further. We must keep pushing the boundaries. The Vice-President and I are committed to that. We feel we still have more to do as we help guide WADA in its mission. That is why, I would like to announce, Yang Yang and I informed the WADA Executive Committee yesterday that when our current terms end in 2025, we intend to run again for a further and final three years as President and Vice-President of the World Anti-Doping Agency.

But before that happens, we have plenty of work to do. Let us not forget the scale of the challenge we face every day. There are people out there who are determined to undermine and cheat the system for their own gain and at the expense of the greater good. Every day, we focus our efforts on making their task as difficult as possible.

And as if we didn't face enough challenges, 2024 is, of course, an Olympic and Paralympic year. WADA and the global anti-doping community are now working hard to prepare for Paris 2024. In the build-up to the Games, WADA is collaborating closely with the International Testing Agency to ensure all athletes are ready from a clean sport point of view. We are pleased to be involved with the Pre-Games Expert Group led by the ITA on behalf of the IOC. We are also on board with the International Paralympic Committee's Paris 2024 Anti-Doping Taskforce. WADA is providing the required support wherever and whenever it is needed. It is the first time the IPC has implemented such a taskforce, following the recommendations made by WADA's Independent Observer team at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games.

Today I am calling on all International Federations and National Anti-Doping Organizations to implement the testing recommendations that you receive from both the ITA and IPC. It is important for the broader system that those recommendations are fully applied. This will ensure

that athletes are subject to adequate levels of testing in the months leading into the Games. WADA will be monitoring that closely.

Of course, it is not just about testing. Part of the preparation lies in the education of athletes and their entourage. In this area, WADA has led the way in collaboration with the IOC, ITA and the IPC. In September last year, we launched a new education course for athletes and coaches intending to be at the Olympics. And last month, we published a course focused on the Paralympics. The high level of interest among athletes and their entourage is very encouraging.

Ahead of the Games, we will work hard with the WADA-accredited laboratory in Paris, to ensure it is ready for the challenge that awaits. And as usual, we will send teams of independent observers to Paris. These teams will provide real-time feedback to the ITA, IOC and IPC on every aspect of the anti-doping process. Afterwards, they will submit full reports so the anti-doping programs for the Olympic and Paralympic Games can continue to evolve, grow and strengthen.

I have received many questions from concerned athletes and others about Russian athletes who may be eligible to compete at the Games as neutrals. What I can tell you is they all remain subject to testing. The International Testing Agency and the various International Federations have been able to collect samples from athletes within Russia – as well as those Russians training or competing overseas. RUSADA, too, has continued to conduct the required amount of testing. All samples are transported to WADA-accredited laboratories outside the country. Testing information is registered within the ADAMS database and samples are being monitored via the athlete biological passport program.

Despite this and given the history, WADA remains deeply skeptical and wary when it comes to Russia. We must remain vigilant and leave no stone unturned to ensure that all the proper education and testing has taken place in advance of Paris. When they gather on the starting line, the athletes of the world want to know that everything is fair. For that to happen, all their competitors, regardless of where they are from, must face the same pre-Games anti-doping conditions as they have. They should know that the system is protecting them. To achieve this, Anti-Doping Organizations must use every available tool. This includes blood and urine testing, the Athlete Biological Passport, and intelligence and investigations, as well as all our education resources.

In closing, I would like to wish the best of luck to all those preparing for Paris. By that of course I include the IOC, the ITA, the IPC, all the doping control officers and chaperones, the laboratory analysts, and results management authorities. Everyone involved in the anti-doping program. But above all, to the athletes. They are serious and single-minded in how they prepare. They sacrifice a lot for their shot at glory. And we should all think like athletes. We must work hard. Dedicate ourselves to excellence. Stand strong in the face of adversity. Keep going when times are tough. Get back to our feet when we are knocked down. And do our very best. Then, in the months and years that follow, we can look back and take pride in our performance. So now, ahead of Paris 2024, let us give everything to the cause of clean sport and the values it upholds. We collaborate for the good of the athletes and the Games. We set the scene, ready for the players to do the rest... so they can thrill and inspire us with performances worthy of that stage. I can see the lights in front of us, I believe our best days are ahead. Together we can do it... as One Team, with One Mission.

Thank you.