

IF Forum 2024
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Speech by WADA President, Witold Bańka
‘A robust anti-doping system in 2024 and beyond’

Distinguished guests, dear friends from the sporting community, ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon. It gives me great pleasure to be back in Lausanne for this edition of the International Federation Forum. On behalf of the World Anti-Doping Agency, I would like to thank SportAccord for inviting me to address you here today.

The theme of this year’s IF Forum is “Ensuring your IF is match fit and future-ready”. This resonates deeply at WADA. As many of you know, the Agency marked its 25th anniversary this year. While we have celebrated the moments that have led us to where we are today, we have always had an eye towards the future. All good organizations must continually evolve. WADA is no exception. Later, I will expand on the work WADA is doing to address the challenges we all face in strengthening the anti-doping system.

WADA is acutely aware of the importance of IFs in the protection of clean sport. The World Anti-Doping Code places a lot of responsibility on IFs. You all have an integral role to play in implementing anti-doping policies and rules which conform with the Code and International Standards. Your role within the Sport Movement is and will continue to be crucial, as you unite your member federations in promoting the values of fair play and clean sport around the world. Without the day-to-day work of the International Federations, sport as we know it would simply not exist.

Of course, managing all of these responsibilities takes a lot of resources. For many IFs, anti-doping can take up a sizable part of your budget. There are indeed many requirements that must be carried out. And with good reason. Without them, we risk diminishing the integrity of the very competitions you have worked tirelessly to organize. IFs are tasked with ensuring that the policies, rules and programs of their National Federations and other members are in compliance with the Code and the International Standards. They require all athletes and their support personnel, to agree to and be bound by compliant anti-doping rules.

Code Signatories must vigorously pursue all potential anti-doping rule violations within their authority. On top of that, you are responsible for the implementation and promotion of anti-doping education in line with the requirements of the International Standard for Education.

Simply put, the list is extensive. As the leaders of IFs around the world, I call on you to support your organizations and be attentive to their needs with regards to their anti-doping efforts. I also encourage you to collaborate with other IFs and with your umbrella organizations. It will go a long way in ensuring that your federation, and its members, build and maintain a robust anti-doping system. Your leadership and commitment to anti-doping will have a tangible and positive impact on your stakeholders, most importantly, the athletes. WADA remains ready and willing to support you in this important venture.

I believe it is fair to say that we all share a common motivation for all the effort we put into our respective organizations. We do it for the good of the athletes, so that they can maximize their potential and compete on a level playing field. At WADA's Executive Committee meeting in September, we had some insightful discussions regarding athletes. The ExCo underlined its commitment to engaging the athlete community in the Code Update Process, supporting the Athletes' Anti-Doping Ombuds Program, and ensuring the success of the ongoing Human Rights Impact Assessment. WADA's Athlete Council has also been working diligently to represent, support, and promote the voices of athletes on anti-doping matters. As an athlete-centered organization, it is important that WADA continues to prioritize these important initiatives.

I would like to take this opportunity to remind you all that in July, WADA invited Athlete Commission chairs of all eligible International Federations to present their candidates for the upcoming Athlete Council election. WADA is excited about continuing to progress athletes' role and representation through the Athlete Council and within WADA. This election process, and your support of it, is crucial to achieve that. As such, I implore you to actively promote this amongst your athletes and via all your communication channels. By joining the Athlete Council and contributing to its important work, your federations' athletes can directly contribute to clean sport and ensure that, together, we continue to improve and strengthen the global anti-doping system.

Of course, this year has not been without its own unique set of challenges. The fallout from the Chinese contamination case has dominated the discourse around anti-doping for months. At all times, we have continued to follow the rules in our efforts to deliver clean sport for the athletes of the world. Unfortunately, politically motivated criticism from a small number of governments and National Anti-Doping Organizations, as well as some dishonest reporting in sections of the media, has proven to be very damaging to the global anti-doping system.

We have also had to confront the realities of politicization that have surfaced around anti-doping efforts this year. Let me be clear: any attempts to politicize our mission

undermines the core principles of sport and jeopardizes the integrity we all strive to protect. Our focus must remain on athletes and ensuring a level playing field – not on allowing external influences with their own geopolitical agendas to cloud our judgment. We must continue to apply the rules fairly, consistently and without fear or favor, regardless of what sport or country is involved.

While there were a number of difficult issues to address in 2024, the highlight of this sporting year was, without question, the Paris 2024 Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games. I commend those of you managing summer sports for your tireless efforts and all the hard work put in the leadup to Paris 2024. It took a huge effort on the part of International Federations and National and Regional Anti-Doping Organizations, the International Testing Agency and the International Olympic and Paralympic Committees. I have no doubt those of you preparing for the Milano Cortina 2026 are primed and ready to do the same over the next couple of years. WADA always has an important role to play at major sporting events such as Paris 2024. In the lead-up, WADA worked closely with anti-doping partners to make sure everyone was ready. We focused on ensuring that the Olympic and Paralympic Games were protected and that athletes were afforded the level playing field that they deserve. Thanks to your unwavering commitment, that goal was achieved.

As always, WADA had an Independent Observer team present in Paris to monitor the anti-doping activities of the Olympic and Paralympic Games. In due course, the IO team will publish its report, which will include recommendations for future major events. We also had an Athlete Engagement team stationed in the Athlete Village, delivering our 'One Play True Team' awareness campaign. These Games marked the first time that the team was entirely led by athletes. Paris 2024 really was a wonderful spectacle and a huge success.

Now, it is time to look forward. Over the last few years, WADA has taken deliberate steps that will impact the future of anti-doping. This is evident through the Agency's core business and ongoing projects. Recent successes and collaborations have allowed us to deliver real results for athletes in the areas of:

- Science and medicine. Research is the bedrock of discovery and improvement. Each year, some of the great scientific minds of our time work 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. Since 2001, we have committed US\$90 million to helping hundreds of researchers around the world develop breakthroughs in anti-doping science.

- Education. This has become a key pillar of anti-doping. We are rebalancing the system. We want to support athletes to make the right decisions so we can prevent the rules from being broken in the first place. Earlier this year 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.
- Social Science Research. Social science research is an integral part of the anti-doping system. Using it to better understand doping as a human behavior helps support the prevention model that underpins the anti-doping system. WADA’s Social Science Research Grant Program is key to ensuring a continued investment in research, so that anti-doping programs can be designed using an evidence-based approach. Since 2005, WADA has invested more than USD 5 million in SSR grants for more than 150 projects.
- Legal Affairs. Another pillar of WADA is legal oversight. Our hard-working team of in-house lawyers review around 3,000 anti-doping cases each year. WADA always reserves the right to take appeals to the Court of Arbitration for Sport, as appropriate. This ensures that cases are being dealt with in a harmonized fashion in line with the rules, regardless of the sport or country.
- Digital Insights and Engagement & Development. In the process of developing our 2025-2029 Strategic Plan, we considered what adjustments would best enable us to deliver on the expectations that we set for WADA’s future. In this regard, we created two new Impact Areas—Engagement & Development and Digital Insights—to respond to the following priorities:
 - To put in place the structure to better leverage data and strategically develop our digital assets, which will help us deliver insights to improve the effectiveness of the global anti-doping system; and
 - To consolidate our engagement and development strategies through greater coordination and the use of insights to identify priority activities and regions.

Another significant development is the progress of WADA's Intelligence and Investigations Department. 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.

In 2022, WADA won an EU grant to strengthen the capability of the European National Anti-Doping Organizations and law enforcement agencies in this area. The result has

been to remove potentially harmful drugs from circulation. This brings massive associated health benefits for society. It will surely reduce the prevalence of doping in Europe. 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. And this is only just the start. The project in Europe will continue and we are expanding globally with Asia being the focus for 2025.

In addition to what I have already outlined, we are also advancing work in areas such as compliance monitoring, laboratories, and partnerships across sectors. By engaging with all our partners, we can tackle the multi-faceted challenges posed by doping. Our collaborative efforts are essential in creating an ecosystem where clean sport thrives.

One important collaboration we are prioritizing is the 2027 Code and Standards update process. We are actively listening to our Signatories around the world, and share their desire for a more modern, robust version of the Code that will propel us into this next era of anti-doping. In keeping with our commitment to ensure the rules evolve in line with the times, the Code and Standards have undergone various reviews and updates over the years.

The numerous drafting teams are hard at work putting together the updated version of the Code. To date, we have received thousands of stakeholder comments. In March of next year, WADA will invite stakeholders to submit more feedback on the second draft of the 2027 Code. I implore you to engage with this process. Every comment sent in is a valuable piece of insight. The 2027 Code will be the sixth edition. It is a testament to the anti-doping community as a whole. It is important to remember that we are talking about the World Anti-Doping Code – it is not WADA's Code. It belongs to all of us, and over the years we have continuously come together to adapt, improve and advance. I urge you to all to participate in the next consultation phase. That way the rules can best reflect the views of your stakeholders.

In conclusion, I invite you all to use this year's Forum to reaffirm your commitment to collaboration and solidarity in this mission. Together, we can build a future where every athlete, regardless of their background or nationality, has the opportunity to compete on a fair playing field. I thank each of you for your ongoing dedication to this important cause. The work of WADA is only as strong as the partnerships we forge, and I am confident that through our collective action, we will make meaningful strides toward a cleaner, fairer sporting world. Let us commit ourselves to this important endeavor, so that future generations can enjoy the true spirit of sport.

Thank you.