



Management Report

Operation Obsidian

9 March 2026

# Management Report

## 1. Background

In August 2023, World Rugby contacted the WADA Intelligence and Investigations (I&I) Department to seek assistance regarding two cases of sample substitution.<sup>1</sup> Subsequently, World Rugby and the WADA I&I Department entered into a joint investigation agreement and the WADA Investigations Unit formally initiated Operation Obsidian.

This joint investigative effort allowed the WADA Investigations Unit and World Rugby to combine their respective capacities. The WADA Investigations Unit provided investigative guidance, forensic expertise, and laboratory expert coordination. World Rugby led and covered the costs related to sample shipment, forensic and digital analyses and legal counsel. The structured exchange of forensic and digital evidence strengthened both World Rugby's results management procedures and WADA's compliance-related investigation. Overall, Operation Obsidian represents a strong example of the effectiveness of close cooperation between WADA and ADO.

## 2. The Investigation

Operation Arrow, an investigation conducted in 2020 into cases of sample substitution in weightlifting, demonstrated that sample substitution often occurs in cluster. As such, the workflow developed during Operation Arrow to detect new cases of sample substitution (the "Workflow") was applied to Operation Obsidian.

The Workflow begins by identifying the characteristics of the previously confirmed cases of sample substitution. Samples matching with these characteristics are secured by requesting their transfer to long-term storage (LTS).

In the present case, the two athletes (the "Two Athletes") who engaged in sample substitution were of Georgian sport nationality, affiliated with the Georgia national rugby union team (the "National Team") and part of the testing pool (TP) of World Rugby. The sample substitution cases occurred during out-of-competition (OOC) testing missions in 2022, when the Georgian Anti-Doping Agency (GADA) was acting as Sample Collection Authority (SCA) on behalf of World Rugby. Consequently, the investigation focused on samples matching these criteria; in particular, those collected by GADA from athletes of Georgian sport nationality affiliated with the National Team and included in the TP of World Rugby since 2018 (the "Pattern").<sup>2</sup>

The next step of the Workflow is for a laboratory expert to review the steroidal passports of athletes having samples which fit the Pattern. A prioritisation was made initially to focus on the most likely cases,

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<sup>1</sup> In this report, sample substitution is referring specifically to the substitution of urine samples.

<sup>2</sup> Samples collected from 98 athletes matched with the Pattern.

based on insights from Operation Arrow, before extending the assessment to the entire group.<sup>3</sup>

When a sample is assessed as suspicious for sample substitution, DNA analysis and comparison must be carried out.<sup>4</sup>

If sample substitution is confirmed, it becomes crucial to secure the doping control forms (DCFs). These forms contain key information such as the identity of the doping control officer (DCO), athlete representative(s) and other relevant details that help clarify the circumstances of the doping control process. Following the identification of the athletes and other individuals who were present during the testing mission, they were contacted for interviews. During these interviews, several items of digital evidence relevant to the cases of sample substitution were uncovered.

## 3. Findings

Operation Obsidian investigated two allegations. Firstly, whether the two cases of sample substitution were isolated (the “Allegation One”), and secondly, whether GADA had breached the World Anti-Doping Code (WADC) and the International Standard of Testing and Investigations (ISTI) (the “Allegation Two”).

### 3.1. Allegation One

#### 3.1.1. Summary

Operation Obsidian discovered three additional cases of sample substitution when applying the Workflow. As such, five instances of sample substitution were identified between 2019 and 2023.<sup>5</sup> Six athletes of the National Team, as well as a member of their entourage (the “Entourage

Member”), were found to be involved. All athletes admitted to engaging in sample substitution.<sup>6</sup> The Entourage Member confirmed having facilitated several of these instances of urine substitution.

#### 3.1.2. Impact

The six athletes, as well as the Entourage Member, were found to have committed anti-doping rule violations (ADRVs) under the WADC, related to sample substitution and associated actions.

## 3.2. Allegation Two

#### 3.2.1. Summary

The five instances of sample substitution all happened OOC, with GADA acting as SCA. Six sample collection personnel (SCP) of GADA were identified based on their documented presence at doping controls when sample substitution occurred. More specifically, these individuals are Manager One, Manager Two, DCO One, DCO Two and two chaperones.<sup>7</sup>

Operation Obsidian found evidence that Manager One, as the sole recipient of testing requests from World Rugby, had established a practice of providing advance notice to the Entourage Member regarding scheduled testing missions. This advance notice was typically delivered via text message prior to the testing mission. This practice is a clear breach of the ISTI Article 5.3.1.

Upon receipt of the advance notice from GADA, the Entourage Member was then sharing this information with the National Team via text message in a group chat, which included athletes and staff members of the National Team.

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<sup>3</sup> The laboratory expert reviewed the 98 steroidal passports between November 2023 and September 2024.

<sup>4</sup> Operation Obsidian coordinated DNA analysis and comparison of 11 available samples.

<sup>5</sup> One of the Two Athletes engaged twice in sample substitution (ie during two different testing missions).

<sup>6</sup> The level of cooperation and the information provided varied across the interviewed individuals.

<sup>7</sup> DCO Two and the two chaperones could not be interviewed.

In addition, Operation Obsidian found that GADA does not monitor athletes after notification, which is a breach of ISTI Article 5.4.2a, nor does it witness the passing of urine, which is a breach of ISTI Annex C Article 4.8. According to the athletes and the Entourage Member, this practice stood in contrast to the doping control procedure they were typically experiencing when tested abroad.

When confronted with these allegations, Manager One, Manager Two and DCO One rejected all findings and asserted compliance with the ISTI. They further cited the international DCO (IDCO) accreditation issued by the International Testing Agency (ITA) as supporting evidence of compliance and professional standards.

Operation Obsidian also identified two instances in which Manager One and DCO Two conducted testing missions one day earlier than the date requested by World Rugby and falsified the date on the DCFs to match the originally requested date by World Rugby. Additionally, in one of these two instances, Manager One provided false documentation to World Rugby to justify why one of the athletes World Rugby had requested to test could not be tested. These actions constitute tampering, as defined in Article 2.5 of the WADC.

The behaviour observed, marked by lack of professionalism, extending to falsification of DCFs and deliberate misrepresentation to the Testing Authority (ie World Rugby), raises serious concerns about the integrity of the anti-doping programme of GADA.

### 3.2.2. Impact

On 25 September 2025, Operation Obsidian met with World Rugby to present the findings regarding the allegations of tampering. World Rugby is still

determining whether the SCP of GADA is subject to the anti-doping rules of World Rugby.

On 12 November 2025, Operation Obsidian presented its findings to the WADA Compliance Taskforce. Providing advance notice, not monitoring athletes and not witnessing urine passing are non-conformities with a critical requirement, as per the International Standard of Code Compliance by Signatories (ISCCS) Article A3.e.iv. Given the continuous risk for the integrity of the anti-doping programme in Georgia, WADA has brought Operation Obsidian's findings to the knowledge of the public authorities of Georgia to address the aforementioned issues in GADA. Depending on the measures adopted by the Georgian government, the WADA Compliance Taskforce may consider a fast-track procedure against GADA, as per the ISCCS Article 8.5.1.1.

As the next steps are currently being determined, WADA I&I asserts that, considering Operation Obsidian's findings, it has lost confidence in GADA's anti-doping programme, in particular with the involvement of Executive One, Manager One and Manager Two, as well as DCO One and DCO Two.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, the athletes and the Entourage Member who agreed to get in an interview and to provide evidence to Operation Obsidian and World Rugby did so on a voluntary basis. Should they not have cooperated, the various breaches of the WADC and ISTI of the SCP of GADA could not have been proven. This illustrates the outcomes and impact of investigations if signatories were obliged to cooperate, demonstrating that effective investigations rely on voluntary evidence-sharing rather than on the WADA I&I Department's constrained ability to obtain evidence independently.

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<sup>8</sup> It must be determined whether the two chaperones are still active at GADA.

## 4. Follow Up

In September 2023, mindful of potential broader issues related to sample substitution, Operation Obsidian proactively requested from ADAMS (anti-doping administration and management system) an extract of all samples which fit the Pattern, collected from athletes in all sports in Georgia.

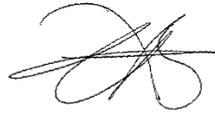
Operation Obsidian has initiated the expert review of the steroidal passports related to these samples. If samples are flagged as suspicious for sample substitution, Operation Obsidian will inform the relevant ADO and guide them through the DNA analysis and comparison process.

Finally, Operation Obsidian is currently developing a dedicated guideline to investigate cases of sample substitution.

## 5. Report Dissemination

Operation Obsidian recommends the following:

- (i) A copy of this report be shared with the WADA President and Director General.
- (ii) A copy of this report be provided to the WADA Executive Committee for its information
- (iii) The report be published on WADA's website.



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