

Montreal, 6 September 2024

**Dr. Tobie Smith**  
Chair, Board of Directors  
USADA

*By email*

Dear Dr. Smith,

We are writing to you today concerning matters connected with the anti-doping system and the protection of clean sport in the United States. In July of this year, the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) received a letter from the Central European Anti-Doping Organization on behalf of a group of 32 National and Regional Anti-Doping Organizations from Europe, Asia and Africa, seeking clarity and understanding on the extent of the implementation of the World Anti-Doping Code (Code) globally<sup>1</sup>. The letter expresses alarm that athletes competing at a very high level, such as within the college sports system and professional leagues, do not receive the protection of the Code and are not bound by its provisions. In addition, the signatories to the letter appeared to be concerned that the U.S. was sending athletes to major events, such as the Olympic Games and World Championships, without being sufficiently tested in advance. Just this week we received further correspondence from a representative of this group seeking our response on this matter, which he describes as “highly important for athletes and the anti-doping community”.

As part of that response, we have undertaken to write to you as USADA is the organization with primary responsibility for clean sport in the U.S. We wish to highlight this issue with you, as we have attempted to do with USADA Management on a number of occasions, in an effort to spark some meaningful progress in this area. In short, it is surely time to address these issues that directly concern USADA and U.S. athletes.

The fact is 90% of American athletes compete outside the protection of the Code. Specifically, we are referring to the professional leagues and college sports. Of primary concern is the matter of college sports, which account for so many athletes who go on to compete at the very highest levels, including the Olympic Games. According to figures released some weeks ago by the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee (USOPC), 75% of U.S. athletes competing in Paris came through the collegiate system<sup>2</sup>. That is three-quarters of American Olympians who were at one time part of an elite system that operates far below the globally recognized clean sport standard.

Even USADA's CEO Mr. Travis Tygart has admitted that the college system is substandard. Just last year, he said: “*The NCAA [anti-doping] program is a complete and total joke. There is no blood testing, there is no out-of-competition testing, there is no whereabouts testing... the rules are so bad. They don't protect the athletes in the way that they ought to be protected and they certainly don't protect, ...in our opinion, based on the loopholes in the program, the playing field.*”<sup>3</sup> It is WADA's view, and one that you no doubt

---

<sup>1</sup> [NADOs statement on anti-doping situation in professional leagues and academic sport \(ceado.org\)](https://www.ceado.org/)

<sup>2</sup> In Paris, 75% of U.S. Olympians competed collegiately as part of their journey to Team USA <https://www.usopc.org/team-usa-2024-collegiate-olympic-footprint>

<sup>3</sup> Unlocking the Cage podcast, October 2023 <https://x.com/MMAonSiriusXM/status/1712621612518834466>

would share, that these young student athletes – the stars of tomorrow – deserve a gold standard anti-doping program.

And this issue goes far beyond the U.S. athletes. According to media reports, the National Collegiate Athletics Association's (NCAA's) schools sent more than 1,000 former, current and incoming student-athletes, representing more than 100 countries, to the Paris 2024 Olympic Games. 272 of them won 330 medals for 26 countries.<sup>4</sup> Speaking before the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation in 2020, Mr. Tygart said he was concerned that foreign athletes were coming to the U.S. for “a doping vacation where they are subject to, I think, a pretty weak anti-doping program in the NCAA”.<sup>5</sup> It should be hugely concerning for USADA that so many top athletes are competing in a U.S. system that fails to protect their interests, their performances and, ultimately, their health. We are sure it horrifies you to know that top overseas athletes may be taking “doping vacations” on U.S. soil. WADA has raised this matter on many occasions for more than 10 years, but our concerns have not been addressed. Our question today is: What has USADA been doing about this situation over the years and, in particular, since 2020?

At the time of that Senate hearing four-and-a-half years ago, Senator Richard Blumenthal indicated that he would like to follow up on this issue with the NCAA. However, we are not aware of any progress having been made in the intervening period. Despite several approaches in recent years, it remains a concern for WADA that USADA seems unwilling or unable to do anything about this. Unfortunately, despite our repeated attempts in recent years, we have not received any cooperation from USADA in dealing with this. It is a concern that the CEO of USADA appears to admit that the system for 90% of athletes in his country is broken but then does not take meaningful action to fix it. Let us be clear here, the athletes are in no way to blame for this situation. USADA, as the authority responsible for anti-doping in the U.S., must accept responsibility for this and take the appropriate action to fix this obvious gap in the system.

Moreover, we know through our collaborations with law enforcement agencies in Europe and other parts of the world that the U.S. is a huge market for the sale and distribution of performance-enhancing drugs, which is a societal issue as well as a sporting one.

Generally, USADA's overall testing performance is far from optimal. In 2023, according to its own figures, USADA collected just 7,773 samples from 3,011 athletes.<sup>6</sup> This is a disappointing number when you consider the country's population, high number of athletes and size of their Olympic team. With more than twice the budget, USADA collects fewer than half the number of samples as its counterpart in Germany. The French National Anti-Doping Organization (NADO) also collects significantly more samples than USADA with a little more than one-third of USADA's budget. USADA also collected fewer samples than the NADOs in China, Russia, Italy and Great Britain. Taking a closer look proves to be even more alarming. USADA's testing figures show just how little attention is paid to many high-profile Olympic sports. For example, USADA carried out only 31 tests in ice hockey during 2023, 29 in soccer, 22 in tennis, 13 each in sailing and artistic swimming, nine in badminton, six in equestrian and just four tests in golf. In more than half the sports (40 out of 75), there was no in-competition testing carried out at all. How can this be explained? While it is not the only tool available, smart, intelligence-led testing remains a cornerstone of any good anti-doping program and, at the moment, USADA's record does not compare favorably up

---

<sup>4</sup> U.S. universities that won the most medals in Paris 2024 <https://www.insidethegames.biz/articles/1147930/us-universities-that-won-the-most-medals>

<sup>5</sup> Athlete Safety and the Integrity of U.S. Sport <https://www.commerce.senate.gov/2020/2/athlete-safety-and-the-integrity-of-u-s-sport>

<sup>6</sup> USADA 2023 Annual Report <https://www.usada.org/about/annual-report/>

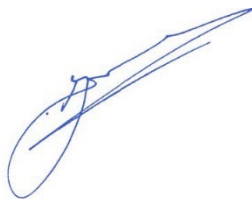
against its peers in other countries. Yet, to distract from these serious issues with the state of the U.S. anti-doping system, USADA apparently tries to undermine U.S. athletes' confidence in the integrity of their rivals overseas.

In addition, as was made public recently through media reports, USADA has run a scheme in breach of the Code by allowing certain athletes who committed serious doping offences to go undercover and continue competing for several years without prosecution on the promise they would try to obtain and provide incriminating information on others. In 2021, when WADA's legal department found out about this practice, which was deeply unfair for clean athletes, it immediately took measures to shut it down.<sup>7</sup> These were not cases of unintentional doping or no-fault contamination - certain of these undercover informants were serious doping cheats (having admitted using steroids and EPO) who were sent back out to the field of play to compete (including in international and Olympic qualification events) against their clean and unwitting counterparts. In addition to jeopardizing the safety of the co-operating athletes, this scheme threatened the level-playing field that is at the core of the fight against doping in sport. There is simply nothing under the Code that would allow for such a scheme to be operated.

More generally, athletes of the U.S. and their opponents all over the world deserve better protection and support. Therefore, WADA is calling for root and branch reforms of the anti-doping system within the U.S., especially when it comes to college sports.

WADA will keep encouraging its anti-doping partners in the U.S. to address this situation. Of course, we stand ready to collaborate. In the meantime, and in the face of ongoing geopolitical interference, WADA will continue applying the Code without fear or favor, working with athletes, the sport movement, national and regional anti-doping organizations and governments. It is our mandate to ensure the rules are upheld consistently, regardless of which country or sport is involved. Your support in that mission would be greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely,



**Witold Banka**  
President



**Olivier Niggli**  
Director General

cc: Dr. Rahul Gupta, Director, Office of National Drug Control Policy  
Mr. Gene Sykes, Chairman, U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Committee

---

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.wada-ama.org/en/news/wada-statement-reuters-story-exposing-usada-scheme-contravention-world-anti-doping-code>