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# Opinion: Doping decision shows figure skating needs fixing

*Canada and its athletes deserve redress before the world championships land in Montreal next month.*

Robert Weiner • Ting Cui and Gene Lambey

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Kamila Valieva, of the Russian Olympic Committee, is shown at the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing. Her case "underscores the randomness of sports drug enforcement." PHOTO BY DAVID J. PHILLIP / THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

On Jan. 29, the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) banned Russian figure skater Kamila Valieva for four years due to a positive drug test for Trimetazidine. The controversy arose during the 2022 Olympics when Valieva's sample from the Russian Nationals Championships in December 2021 revealed the doping violation. The ban, effective retroactively from Dec. 25, 2021, nullifies all results after that date.

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The prolonged two-year case has deprived over a dozen athletes of their rightful team medals.

The CAS ruling places the responsibility on the International Skating Union (ISU) to determine the 2022 Olympic figure skating team event results. The ISU's press release on Jan. 30 placed the U.S. first, Japan second and Russia third, with Canada finishing fourth.

Skate Canada said it is considering “all options to appeal this decision”, citing ISU Rule 353, which states that “competitors having finished the competition and who initially placed lower than the disqualified competitor will move up accordingly.”

If the ISU follows its own rule, every woman who finished below Valieva in the Olympic team event would ascend one spot and earn an extra point for their team. Canada would secure bronze.

United States Anti-Doping Agency CEO Travis Tygart told USA Today “it's nonsensical for Valieva to get four years and Russia keep Olympic bronze.”

Canada's intention to appeal is substantiated. With the 2024 World Figure Skating Championships scheduled for March 18-24 in Montreal, Canadian athletes deserve to receive justice before then.



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The Valieva incident underscores the randomness of sports drug enforcement. Athletes traditionally succeed through hard work, willpower and determination. The use of performance-enhancing drugs by nations disrespects the efforts of clean athletes.

Russia, in particular, has a notorious history of doping through its state-sponsored operation. That country has had more than 150 athletes caught doping at the Olympics and 48 medals stripped, according to the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA). This is four times the number of the next highest country and more than 30 per cent of the global total.

A 2016 New York Times interview with Grigory Rodchenkov, former director of Russia's national anti-doping laboratory, exposed state involvement. Rodchenkov said he "developed a three-drug cocktail of banned substances that he provided to dozens of Russian athletes" for the 2014 Sochi Olympics.

WADA reports in 2015 and 2016 revealed Russian athletes at the Sochi Olympics showed failed tests, tampered urine bottles, destruction of samples, and instructions from Russian government accounts.

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At just 15 years old, Valieva represented the Russian Olympic Committee with banned substances in her system during the Beijing competition. Considering it's a state-sponsored doping program, it's evident she couldn't have acted alone. The adults around Valieva allowed and caused her to fall victim to a system of abuse.

Where are the bans for the coaches who conspired, the team doctors who supported cheating, and government officials who condoned and urged it?

As WADA rightly declared in a statement on Jan. 29, "the doping of children is unforgivable."

It's ridiculous that Valieva alone faces punishment, while her teammates and perpetrators are not penalized. The 2022 Olympic gold medallist in the women's individual event, Anna Scherbakova, and silver medallist, Alexandra Trusova, were both students of coach Eteri Tutberidze, like Valieva. There were likely other athletes who weren't caught.

And yet, many of Russia's top athletes could compete, medal and win without cheating? Why not do a real cleanup?

Since the days of many nations hiding dirty vials, the Olympics have evolved to create enforcement mechanisms for clean athletics. The IOC, national governing bodies, athletes, fans and sponsors collectively yearn for a fair and honourable Olympics in 2024 and beyond.

The Olympics should stand on its rules of elevating un-doped athletes. Canada deserves better.

Robert Weiner is a former spokesman for the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy and participated in meetings at WADA's Montreal headquarters. Ting Cui, the U.S. 2019 World Junior Figure Skating bronze medallist, and Gene Lambey are policy analysts at Robert Weiner Associates and Solutions for Change.

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