

# Coe: I'll limit tenure of IAAF president to eight or 12 years, if elected in August

By Callum Murray

Sebastian Coe, the double Olympic champion, former member of the UK parliament and former chair of the organising committee for the 2012 Olympic Games, today revealed that, if elected president of the IAAF at an election in August, he will seek to amend the world governing body of athletics' constitution to limit the presidency to two four-year terms, plus an option for a third term.

In words that might return to haunt him, if elected, he said that a presidency should last "not more than 12 years. If you can't make your mark in probably four years – certainly in eight – you probably shouldn't be there."

Coe, who is facing competition for the position from Sergey Bubka, Ukraine's former pole vault Olympic gold medallist, world champion and world record holder, and an International Olympic Committee executive board member, was addressing a select group of journalists this morning at the London headquarters of the British Olympic Association, of which he is also president.

Both men are seeking to succeed Lamine Diack, the 81-year-old veteran IAAF president from Senegal who has held the post for 16 years. Last July, Diack claimed that he will recommend a successor, expected by many to be Coe, saying: "I will say who must be my successor and the reason why. Then the house can decide whether they want to follow or not. If they say yes, then OK. If not, I will organise a fair competition, but expecting the one I believe to the best will win."

The IAAF has never previously held a contested election for its presidency.

Diack is himself once again in the news after admitting in an interview that athletics faces "a crisis" over a continuing doping scandal in the sport in Russia. Diack told the BBC that he was "shocked" and "disturbed" when he first heard the claims, but insisted that allegations that 99 per cent of Russian athletes are doping were "a joke" and "ridiculous".

Diack added: "We face a difficult situation in Russia... we have to clean up what is going on in Russia now.

"OK, in Russia there are some cheaters and if it's demonstrated that cheating is organised we have to take action, not only on the athletes, but on the leaders.

"It's our job to clean all this and take all the measures we have to take.

"It's a crisis, absolutely. We have to put this behind us but we will arrive to make it."

The scandal today claimed a new victim after Valentin Balakhnichev, the president of the Russian athletics federation, stepped down after almost 25 years in office. Balakhnichev had been the sole president of the federation since it split from the Soviet track and field authorities.

Balakhnichev said of his resignation (which he had earlier suggested was imminent) that "the president takes full responsibility, so I decided to resign."

When the scandal first broke in December of last year Balakhnichev branded as "a pack of lies" allegations of widespread doping and cover-ups among the country's track and field athletes, made in a German television documentary.

However, Coe today sought to play down the use of the word 'crisis' in relation to the scandal, insisting (as Diack did) that the vast majority of athletes and national athletics federations are clean.

He said: "The allegations are serious, and it's the role of the incoming president to act on what you can act on with certainty. We do need an independent review to draw conclusions [one is already under way], and if it supports the allegations. They have to be dealt with seriously.

"I believe the vast majority of the sport and its federations are clean and want to deliver a sport with integrity. The journeys I've been on [lobbying and canvassing opinion for his presidential campaign] overwhelmingly show that. It's not a widespread crisis. I'm actually pretty gratified with what I heard from the Russian sports minister. He's right."

Vitaly Mutko, Russia's sports minister, said last month that a new government post specifically aimed at tackling doping is to be created, following news that five more Russian racewalking stars, including Olympic champions Valery Borchin, Sergei Kiryapkin and Olga Kaniskina, had been banned for doping.

The news, which brought to 25 the number of Russian racewalkers suspended for doping in the last six years, according to local media, provoked a furious response from Mutko. Suggesting that heads would roll after the announcement, Mutko wrote on his department's website: "We've already told the Russian Athletics Federation (VFLA) more than once to get their house in order and clean up their act.

"It's turning out that the VFLA is not keeping in tune with our state anti-doping policy, which we have done a lot to try and get off the ground."

However, Coe rejected talk of banning Russia from competing in athletics, saying: "It's not about tap dancing on the graves of federations. It's about helping federations. It's really important that in the next 10 to 20 years, Russia, given its history in the sport, remains a formidable partner in the development of the sport. I don't think it makes sense to ban Russia from the sport; you don't resolve problems by ostracising."

In December, the World Anti-Doping Agency announced that a three-person independent commission had been set up, chaired by Dick Pound, the outspoken Canadian International Olympic Committee member and former WADA president, to investigate the allegations of widespread doping and cover-ups in Russian athletics aired in a television documentary by ARD, the German public-service broadcaster.

The election for the IAAF presidency is scheduled for 19 August at the IAAF Congress in Beijing.

The deadline for the IAAF to receive nominations is 18 May, so other candidates might yet emerge.

The IAAF's 213 national member federations are eligible to vote, with one vote per federation.

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