

With Paris Games looming, Chinese doping scandal rocks Olympic sport

Warm-up question:

What are your thoughts on fairness in sports competitions? Have you ever witnessed or heard about cheating in sports?

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A MARTÍNEZ, HOST:

Fewer than a hundred days before the opening ceremony of the Paris Summer Olympic Games, a new **doping** scandal has erupted. It involves **elite** and gold-medal-winning swimmers from China. There have been suggestions of a potential **cover-up** and questions about the international testing system that's meant to keep banned drugs out. Brian Mann is part of NPR's team covering the Olympics. Brian, what did these swimmers test positive for?

BRIAN MANN, BYLINE: Well, A, it's a powerful performance-enhancing drug called trimetazidine, known commonly as TMZ. Chinese officials and the World Anti-Doping Agency now confirmed 23 Chinese athletes tested positive ahead of the Tokyo Olympics in 2021. They say their investigation found these athletes were **contaminated** accidentally. They said it wasn't deliberate, but here's the thing - they didn't notify any other countries or sports officials. They didn't temporarily suspend these Chinese athletes. Those appear to be violations of World Anti-Doping rules. Some of those swimmers who tested positive are star athletes in China. They went on to win gold medals in Tokyo, and some are expected to compete again in Paris.

MARTÍNEZ: All right. What are U.S. sports officials saying about this?

MANN: They're **furious**. Travis Tygart heads the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency. He called the decision by China and the World Anti-Doping Agency to keep this investigation secret devastating. He says it's a potential cover-up.

TRAVIS TYGART: It's a collapse of the global anti-doping system, and now here we are, just a few months away from the 2024 Paris Olympic Games, and, you know, athletes are really frustrated and upset.

MANN: And, A, he's not the only one **crying foul**. One British gold-medal swimmer, James Guy, posted on social media over the weekend that these Chinese swimmers should be banned from the sport. After news of the scandal was first reported by The New York Times and a German news agency, one top German sports official called this a slap on the face of all innocent and honest athletes.

MARTÍNEZ: All right. Now, how are the Chinese and World Anti-Doping officials responding to all the criticism?

MANN: Yeah. This has gotten nasty really fast. The World Anti-Doping Agency released a statement accusing their critics, including Travis Tygart, of making outrageous and **defamatory** statements. They're basically threatening lawsuits here. Tygart, in turn, fired back.

TYGART: Those threats are obviously a **tactic** to try to bully people into silence.

MANN: And he says China's story that these athletes were exposed accidentally to this drug, TMZ, he says that's just not believable.

MARTÍNEZ: Brian, weren't the last Olympic Games in China also **marred with** a doping scandal?

MANN: Yeah. That's right. At the Winter Games in Beijing in 2022, Russian skater Kamila Valieva was allowed to compete despite having tested positive ahead of those games for this very same performance-enhancing drug, TMZ. Her doping test also wasn't revealed at first, and her presence at the games wound up throwing everything into **turmoil**.

MARTÍNEZ: All right. So what does this say about the Paris Games? I mean, realistically, Brian, how drug-free can it be?

MANN: I just spent days with Olympic athletes in New York City, and they were already worried about doping. This raises more big questions about the ability of sport to be clean. The head of the U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Committee, Sarah Hirshland, released a statement saying China's case will cast a shadow of uncertainty over Paris.

MARTÍNEZ: All right. That's NPR's Brian Mann, who will be in Paris covering the Olympics for NPR. Brian, thanks.

Vocabulary and Phrases:

- **Doping:** The use of banned performance-enhancing substances by athletes.
- **Elite:** Referring to the best or most skilled members of a group, especially in sports.
- **Cover-up:** An attempt to prevent people from discovering the truth about a serious mistake or crime.
- **Contaminated:** Made impure or harmful by the addition of a substance.
- **Furious:** Extremely angry.
- **Cry foul:** To complain about something because you believe it is wrong or unfair.
- **Defamatory:** Damaging the reputation of someone by saying or writing something untrue about them.
- **Tactic:** An action or strategy carefully planned to achieve a specific end.
- **Marred with:** Spoiled or impaired by an unwanted or negative quality.
- **Turmoil:** A state of great disturbance, confusion, or uncertainty.

Comprehension Questions:

1. What substance did the Chinese swimmers test positive for?
2. What did the World Anti-Doping Agency and Chinese officials claim about how the athletes were exposed to the drug?
3. What actions did U.S. and other international sports officials take or suggest after learning about the doping incident?
4. How did the World Anti-Doping Agency respond to criticisms about the handling of the doping case?
5. What previous Olympic event was also affected by a similar doping scandal involving the same drug?

Discussion Questions:

1. What do you think should happen to athletes who are caught doping?
2. How do doping scandals affect your view of professional sports?
3. Do you think it's possible to completely stop doping in sports? Why or why not?
4. Have you ever had a situation in sports or games where fairness was questioned? What happened?
5. Why do you think athletes might choose to use banned substances in sports?