

This Sporting Summer's Diary by Derek Wyatt



What is it about our world sporting leaders? What disease do they have which gives them the right to siphon £millions and £millions and £millions to their private bank accounts at a click of a mouse? What is it about a nation like Russia which thinks it is okay to reinvent its drug abuse on an industrial scale almost an exact replica of what the USSR (and East Germany) did between 1952 and 1978?

Wait a minute.

A large number of these sporting organisations are headquartered in Europe and come under the toughest finance regulations anywhere in the world. Except. Except if they are housed in Switzerland (IOC and FIFA) or Monaco (IAAF/Track & Field). In Switzerland part of the gift of the Cantons and part of its attraction to sporting bodies is that normal rules have been suspended or so it seems. Yet these organisations also have boards of trustees or boards. But it is clear that there has been a failure of regulation and a failure of governance.

The problem is there is no world body which could become the "checking" organisation. You would not want it to be the UNO or the WTO and the IMF and World Bank do not fit the job description. There is a Court of Arbitration based in Lausanne which has recently dealt with the banning of some Russian athletes at Rio. There is the World Anti-Doping Agency but as it says on the tin this regulates (or makes an attempt) the use of banned substances.

The time is right for the UK to take the lead and to propose a World Sports Governance body. It would be headquartered here and come under UK law. It would be open and transparent an unusual quality in most international sporting bodies.

I was concussed twice as a rugby player.

The first time I was knocked out by an opponent. I was carried off to the changing rooms where extraordinarily I undressed and then put my blazer and slacks on. But instead of heading for the bar, I must have thought it was a good idea to have a bath because when the players came in from playing I was still in it with all my clothes on.

The second time I was tackled and my head hit the ground (it was September) and when I came round I had no idea where I was and why I was wearing a rugby jersey.

I have recently been scanned and I am happy to report I have no brain injury. But that will not be the case for many others sportsmen and women. The burden of care on the NHS for those with dementia arising out of their playing days will be enormous.

Today, concussion is on every front and back page. The NFL is all over the place with its strategy and allowing players to wear helmets which damage a opponent's head is simply not on. The UK Army has reacted slowly to the number of soldiers who have been so seriously injured by the impact on their heads of the power of IEDs which explode under their feet or close by. Boxers, polo players, rugby and soccer participants need to start to think about what is happening to their head now not in forty years time.

This is why with Professor Mark Wilson, a consultant in Neurosurgery and pre-hospital care at Imperial NHS, I have been trying to raise the discussion about brain injuries in the NHS, with the Government and with leading global sports bodies. We want to create the first world Brain Injury Charity which deals with Education, Policy, Leadership and Research. It would have as its focus the Armed Services, Sport and Civilian (e.g. car crashes and stabbings) injuries.