Scientific research using elite athletes: WADA point of view

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Dear Dr. Wagner,

In response to your e-mail dated 18 January 2013, I am pleased to provide you with the following information:

1. WADA carefully read the article entitled “Live high-train low” using normobaric hypoxia: a double-blinded, placebo-controlled study” co-authored by Dr Carsten Lundby and published in your journal;

2. Combining the information provided in the Method sections of the article referred above as well as of the article entitled “The role of haemoglobin mass on VO2max following normobaric ‘live high-train low’ in endurance-trained athletes” published in November 2012 in the British Journal of Sport Medicine, it appears clearly that the 16 athletes involved in this study are of national or higher (i.e., international) levels in various disciplines of cycling and triathlon;

3. It should have been known to these authors that these competitive athletes are subject to the World Anti-Doping Code, and in particular to the List of Prohibited Substances and Methods (the List);

4. The List clearly prohibits re-infusion of blood (or saline if more than 50 mL) and administration of plasma expanders;

5. It is stated clearly in the article entitled “The role of haemoglobin mass on VO2max” (see Methods, paragraph on Isovolumetric haemodilution, page 2) that some athletes received such prohibited treatments as part of the isovolumetric haemodilution approach;

6. WADA believes the above-mentioned study could potentially result in a violation of the anti-doping rules for the athletes on whom such interventions were performed;

7. It should also be made clear whether the athletes were informed that they underwent protocols that potentially lead them to violate the anti-doping rules;

8. WADA considers that conducting research studies with elite athletes should not expose them to prohibited substances and methods unless specific dispositions are made such as retiring the athletes as active athletes for a considerable period;

9. WADA is extremely careful with investigators conducting research activities on its behalf to ensure they work with occasional or recreational athletes to circumvent the risk of exposing elite athletes to prohibited drugs or methods;

10. Even when working with occasional or recreational athletes, WADA ensures that sufficiently long wash-out periods are applied to guarantee that no unfair advantage is provided to volunteers participating in research studies.

I trust this position of WADA is clear and will respond to your questions.