Contaminated Meat a Worry at Shanghai Swim Worlds

ANDREW DAMPF, AP Sports Writer

ROME (AP) — With more than 2,000 swimmers, divers and water polo players converging on Shanghai this week for the world championships, teams are taking precautions against the threat of contaminated Chinese meat.

Australia is shipping in all its meat from home and avoiding all pork products. Other teams plan to eat only in hotels accredited by swimming's governing body.

Chemical additives have been linked to cattle and pig raising in China. A recent study by a World Anti-Doping Agency-accredited lab in Cologne, Germany, found that 22 of 28 travelers returning from China tested positive for low levels of clenbuterol.

Clenbuterol is on WADA's list of banned substances as an anabolic agent that builds muscle and burns fat, and athletes who test positive can face bans of up to two years.

The worlds, with diving starting Saturday and swimming on July 24, already face a doping issue. Cesar Cielo of Brazil might be allowed to defend his 50- and 100-meter freestyle titles despite testing positive for the banned substance furosemide. An appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sport is pending.

Alberto Contador tested positive for clenbuterol en route to winning last year's Tour de France. He blamed contaminated meat, and the Spanish cycling federation accepted his explanation. He is awaiting a definitive ruling from the CAS.

"You cannot control everything you eat all around the world," FINA executive director Cornel Marculescu told The Associated Press recently from Shanghai. "Probably the price is going to be to mostly consume at the hotel. But that doesn't mean that outside the hotel it's a problem."

Still, Australia has decided to lodge its athletes at a hotel with an Australian general manager.

"All of our meat will come from Australia," head coach Leigh Nugent said last week. "And we won't be eating any pork products."

USA Swimming normally provides food and protein sources for athletes at major competitions.

"This is provided outside of what is served at the venue and hotels in order to ensure the athletes have sufficient energy sources to perform at the optimal level,"

said Stacy Michael-Miller, USA Swimming's athlete services manager.

Cameron van der Burgh, the 50 breaststroke world record-holder from South Africa, is confident that FINA and local organizers will make sure the food is safe.

"Obviously, the hotel we'll be at in Shanghai will be catering for the athletes," Van der Burgh said at a meet in Rome last month. "Maybe don't go out to a local bar and eat some meat or something, which we don't really do anyway when you're racing because you want to prepare and stay in your room and rest."

Italy isn't worried, either.

"Pasta isn't a problem," said Italy team coordinator Marco Bonifazi, also a professor of physiology at the University of Siena and the head physician for the Italian swimming federation's study and research center.

"We're not going to go inspect the meat," said Bonifazi, adding the Italians will be urged to avoid red meat and to eat more fish or certain packaged meats.

Bonifazi was not aware of athletes testing positive for clenbuterol in China, but there have been numerous cases.

On the day after his return from a meet in China last year, German table tennis player Dimitrij Ovtcharov tested positive for clenbuterol traces. The 2008 Olympic silver medalist blamed food eaten at his hotel. Hints of clenbuterol showed up in the urine of four other German players who competed at the same tournament, supporting his claim.

The German federation decided not to ban Ovtcharov, and WADA chose not to appeal.

Polish canoeist Adam Seroczynski claimed that his positive test at the 2008 Beijing Olympics was the result of "food tampering" by organizers who fed him contaminated meat, but the CAS rejected his claims and upheld his two-year ban.

As far back as 1999, Chinese swimmers Wang Wei and Xiong Guoming blamed a dish of stir-fried pig liver for their out-of-competition clenbuterol positives.

They had compelling evidence: Tests on 60 liver samples bought subsequently from the same stall in Shanghai detected clenbuterol in 11 of them, according to the report from the swimmers' disciplinary hearing, which FINA provided to the AP this year.

The panel agreed there was "some likelihood" that the swimmers didn't deliberately take clenbuterol but still ruled that if liver was the cause, the swimmers were negligent. They were banned for three years.

As Michael Phelps' butterfly rival Milorad Cavic pointed out, "It's always an issue but the Chinese cannot afford to have this kind of embarrassment, and I'm confident

they will do everything in their power to ensure our food is clean."

So is Cavic taking precautions?

"I'm not worried about it," the Serb said. "If anything I'll eat more fried food to make sure it's all clean even though it's more unhealthy."

Dutch coach Jacco Verhaeren wasn't sure whether he would tell his team to change its diet.

"I really hope common sense will (prevail)," Verhaeren said. "FINA guaranteed us that the meat in Shanghai is safe."

About 2,220 athletes from at least 181 countries will compete in Shanghai, down from the 2,438 athletes at the last worlds in Rome two years ago after new qualifying standards were introduced for swimming.

Athletes will be subjected to blood and urine tests, although Cavic would like to see more extensive testing year-round.

Until he had back surgery last year, Cavic posted his blood test results online and he wants a biological passport program for swimming like the one used in cycling.

"I believe there is a lot of doping in this sport. And unfortunately everybody agrees with the idea of blood passports but very few are actually willing to volunteer for this," Cavic said. "I think there's a lot of hypocrisy."

AP Sports Writers Dennis Passa in Sydney and John Leicester in Paris contributed to this report.

Source URL (retrieved on *04/16/2014 - 2:00am*):
http://www.chem.info/news/2011/07/contaminated-meat-worry-shanghai-swim-worlds?qt-most_popular=0