

## Analysis

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## Nike risks being burned by scandal

With Nike-backed athletics coach Alberto Salazar subjected to a four-year suspension for doping, the US sportswear giant risks being caught up in the scandal - its CEO is even quoted in the suspension ruling. Citing experiments with testosterone, fat-burning amino acid injections and falsified medical documents, the American anti-doping authority USADA published a list of blemishes on the record of the highest-profile track and field coach in the world.

In that document - prepared by an independent panel for USADA - was none other than Mark Parker, the CEO of Nike, which has backed Salazar for decades. Parker was copied on several emails about research done by Salazar and the Nike Oregon Project (NOP), a group created in 2001 by the three-time New York Marathon winner to promote elite long-distance running in the US. The alleged enhancing program was for athletes competing at 5,000 m, 10,000 m but not for sprint races, according to the agency.

In a 2011 email to Parker, Salazar explains he had given one of the NOP coaches a test injection of a liter of an amino acid and dextrose (glucose) mixture - a dose clearly above what would be allowed under World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) regulations. And in another email to Parker two years later, Jeffrey Brown, a doctor who worked with the NOP, described experiments with testosterone gel. Parker responded to Brown. "It will be interesting to determine the minimal amount of topical male hormone required to create a positive test."

Nike has not responded to requests for comment by AFP. A spokesman for the brand told the Wall Street Journal, "Mark Parker had no reason to believe that the test was outside any rules as a medical doctor was involved." These tests were ostensibly carried out in response to Salazar's concern that an athlete might be sabotaged by someone secretly contaminating them with the gel. "Mark's understanding was that Alberto was attempting to prevent doping of his athletes," the Nike spokesman told the WSJ.

Salazar's best-known athlete is Britain's Mo Farah, who won four gold medals at the 2012 and 2016 Olympics at 5,000m and 10,000m. Farah has never tested positive and said in response to Salazar's ban he had left the NOP in 2017 and that he has "no tolerance for anyone who breaks the rules or crosses the line".

### "Swooshes on time bombs"

Nike stock fell 1.75 percent Tuesday, minimally more than the overall market movement (-1.28 percent), the day after the company closed the session on the highest price in its history. The brand has posted glowing results for several quarters, bolstered by its reorientation towards online sales and its performance on the Chinese market. Could the Salazar slam the brakes on Nike's upward movement?

"Nike's history is full of supporting dopers, of doped federations," former runner Lauren Fleshman, who was sponsored by Nike for more than nine years until 2012, said on Twitter Tuesday. "They look the other way even when it's clear to everyone else that something is rotten," she said. "They put swooshes on the time bombs. And when they blow, Nike is often the last to leave."

Nike continued to officially support cyclist Lance Armstrong in 2012 immediately after the publication of USADA's report showing damning evidence of doping against him and his team - before dropping him a few days later. In June 2016, Nike maintained its contract with tennis player Maria Sharapova, who was suspended for two years for doping. The clothing brand also stood by basketball player Kobe Bryant, who was accused of rape in 2003, and golfer Tiger Woods, who was involved in an adultery scandal in 2009.

In the world of athletics it has stood by US sprinter Justin Gatlin, who served a ban for doping before returning to win world titles. In September 2018, Nike made waves when it released an advertising campaign featuring US football player and activist Colin Kaepernick, criticized for kneeling during the US national anthem at games in protest at racism. "Nike is having a public reckoning right now," tweeted Fleshman, who competed at 5,000m in three world championships.

She also recalled that Nike was revealed to have been penalizing pregnant athletes, a policy it revised in May after coming under pressure from track veteran and new mother Allyson Felix. And she criticized their ads, including one featuring Serena Williams and other female athletes in light of the recent scandal. "If you make ads about moms kicking ass but you suspend pregnant women without pay while preventing them from making money elsewhere - If you make ads about the purity of sport while funding the underbelly that erodes it - that's a problem." — AFP

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French cattle breeder and tobacco producer Patrick Maury, providing tobacco leaves to France Tabac plant, checks his production in Mazeyrolles, southwestern France on Sept 20, 2019. — AFP

## Final puffs for France's last tobacco factory

Gerard Chanquoi looks sadly at the conveyor belts of France's sole remaining tobacco processing factory as they whirl for the last times ahead of its final closure, a victim of changed economic times and a different public health landscape. Anti-smoking campaigners may cheer its demise, but for its workers and local tobacco growers, the closure of the France Tabac factory after 34 years of operation is a devastating blow to the Dordogne region of southwest France.

"It's a fine mess," lamented Chanquoi, 61, who has worked for over 30 years at the factory in the town of Sarlat-la-Caneda. "It makes you well up a bit, it's hard. I am at the end of my career, but for my friends... who have a decade of career ahead of them, it is tough," he added. In its heyday after opening in 1985 in one of France's main tobacco growing regions, the factory was a mainstay of the local economy, extending over 10 hectares and processing 20,000 tons of tobacco leaves from France and Europe every year.

"Our know-how is recognized across all of Europe," said Chanquoi, looking ruefully at an almost empty warehouse where only years ago bundles of processed tobacco would have stretched to the ceiling. "This used to be a hive of activity." The hometown tobacco used in cigarettes like Gauloises, beloved of French film icons and philosophers, used to be a symbol of France. But the country's last cigarette factory, la Seita in Riom in the

Puy-de-Dome region, closed in 2017 and the Gauloises brand is now produced in Poland.

The number of smokers in France remains above the average for a developed country, with 32 percent of adults aged between 18-75 smoking in 2018, according to official figures. But the number of people describing themselves as daily smokers has fallen sharply in recent years as the price of cigarettes has risen.

### "Doomed"

The production line at the factory in Sarlat-le-Caneda finally came to a halt just before midday on Monday. Some workers remain in the plant this week for a final clean-up before a meeting with the director next week ahead of being laid-off. The factory's director Eric Tabanou said that announcing the closure to the employees was painful, while insisting there was no other option. "We stood up in front of 200 employees. It was dramatic... The factory was on borrowed time, the end was inevitable," Tabanou said.

Trouble began in 2010 when the European Union announced that, as part of its drive to cut smoking, tobacco producers would no longer receive subsidies from the bloc. "Tobacco production diminished from year to year and certain products were not in line with the demands of the market," Tabanou said. "Also, we had to submit to increased competition from tobacco manufac-

turers who would do anything to save a single cent."

In 2016, the factory was processing over 5,300 tons of tobacco a year, far below the 20,000 tons processed in the 2000s. "French production makes up just one percent of Europe's output, and it is doomed," Tabanou said. French tobacco will now be processed outside the country, notably in Croatia. "It is the turning of a page in our agricultural history," Jean-Jacques de Peretti, the mayor of Sarlat-la-Caneda, said when the closure was announced in late August.

### "New opportunities"

But some producers hope that all is not lost, and say they will focus on the high-end market and also producing the raw material needed to create vaping cartridges. "It is a tough blow, but we will try and find new opportunities," said Patrick Maury, who grows tobacco and also runs a dairy farm in Mazeyrolles, around 35 km from Sarlat. "Along with my son, we need this crop to live, it makes up 40 percent of our revenues," he said.

Laurent Testut, head of the local Perigord Tabac cooperative, said the industry had managed to adapt before, for example by moving to lighter tobacco blends in line with changing tastes and regulations. "We risk having to come closer to world prices, but it is up to us to focus on production niches. We have some leads already," he said. — AFP

## Hidden for 21 yrs, Ethiopian crown set to return home

A priceless 18th-century Ethiopian crown is set to be returned from the Netherlands to Addis Ababa after a onetime refugee found it in a suitcase and hid it in his apartment for two decades. The ornate gilded copper headgear, featuring images of Christ and the Twelve Apostles, was unearthed after refugee-turned-Dutch-citizen Sirak Asfaw contacted Dutch 'art detective' Arthur Brand. Brand, dubbed the "Indiana Jones of the art world" for his discoveries of missing works, said the crown, which is currently being held in a secure location, would soon be handed to the Ethiopian authorities.

Speaking at his apartment in the Dutch port city of Rotterdam, Sirak told AFP the remarkable story of how he came into possession of the crown - which experts say belongs to a series of some of Ethiopia's most important cultural artifacts. Sirak, a former Ethiopian refugee who today works as a management consultant for the Dutch government, fled the country during

the late 1970s during the so-called "Red Terror" purges.

Once settled in the Netherlands, Sirak used to receive a stream of Ethiopians including pilots and diplomats, along with people who had fled a continuous cycle of hardship in Africa's most ancient country. Then, in April 1998, while looking for a document, Sirak stumbled upon the crown in a suitcase left behind by one of his visitors. "I looked into the suitcase and saw something really amazing and I thought 'this is not right. This has been stolen. This should not be here. This belongs to Ethiopia,'" he said.

### "It would just disappear"

Sirak said he confronted the suitcase's owner - whom he did not identify - and told him that the crown "will not leave my house unless it goes back to Ethiopia". Shortly afterwards Sirak posted a message on an Ethiopian chat group on the Internet - still a new phenomenon back in 1998 - asking what people thought he should do with "an Ethiopian artefact". But he did not get a satisfactory answer "and I did not want to return it to the same regime that had made it possible for the crown to get stolen," he said.

The former refugee decided to become the crown's de facto guardian "until such time it could go back". For 21 years the crown was hidden in his apartment as Ethiopia continued to be ruled by an iron-fisted one-party government.

## Gabon juggles competing demands to protect nature

The lush green canopy stretches over the Akanda National Park - one of the many forest jewels that Gabon is fighting to conserve. But those living in poverty in the shadow of the park are ambiguous. They see the forests less as a global treasure to be cosseted and more as a resource that they need to use to survive. A bank employee, making his arduous daily commute to the nearby capital Libreville, glanced up at the immense trees almost with hostility.

"I've lived here for two years and I can tell you that I have no electricity and no water," said the man, dressed in a business suit as he walked along an earthen road to get to work. "Gabon's forests are a source of national pride, but you can't be proud

and live without a roof over your head." Last week, Norway announced a \$150-million contract with Gabon to reduce its carbon emissions. The initiative comes under the Central African Forest Initiative (CAFI), a UN-launched scheme aimed at encouraging Western help for cash-strapped forest custodians.

But the fight against climate change spurred little enthusiasm among local people who spoke to AFP. A retired cook, Luc Boudzanga, said he had no pension. To get by, he had to grow food on land where such activities are banned. "We eat thanks to the forest," Boudzanga says before heading off along the edge of the park, machete in hand. "Otherwise, how would we survive?"

### High-wire act

It is not just poor people who eye the forest as a resource - loggers and miners, too, argue that the trees and the mineral-rich land below deserve to be used, a position fiercely opposed by green campaigners. Faced with these competing pressures, the government has to perform a tightrope act. Under the 10-year deal signed on Sept 22, Gabon - which is still almost 90 per-



In this photograph taken on Sept 27, 2019, Dutch-Ethiopian Sirak Asfaw (left) and Dutch art detective Arthur Brand pose with an 18th-century Ethiopian crown at an undisclosed high-security storage facility in the Netherlands. — AFP

cent covered in forest - will become the first African country to be paid for reducing greenhouse gas emissions to fight climate change. Norway will pay Gabon \$10 for every ton of carbon not emitted, relative to the Central African country's annual average between 2005-2014, and up to a maximum payout of \$150 million over 10

years. The country's forestry minister is British-born Lee White, who rose to prominence as a feisty environmental campaigner, and then as a spell as former director of the national parks. He took office after a scandal erupted over a huge, illegally-logged haul of kevazingo, a rare tropical hardwood. — AFP



Two forest rangers walk on a road in the Akanda forest, a national park a few kilometers from the city centre of the capital Libreville on Sept 27, 2019. — AFP

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