

## **Katusha Defend Doping Record**

[Team Katusha](#), the Russian road bicycle racing team which participates in the UCI World Tour, have defended their record on doping after the world governing body of cycling dropped them from the top flight. The team is now putting its faith in the Court of Arbitration for Sport to regain their elite status.

The license commission of the UCI last week rejected the application of Katusha for competing in the World Tour next year due to the doping record of the team over the past four years. The team that finished second in the World Tour standings this year have appealed the decision to the Lausanne-based CAS.

Katusha General Manager [Vyacheslav Ekimov](#) after the team's official presentation in the Italian city of Brescia said the team received a statement from the UCI, explaining to us the reasons for their decision. Ekimov remarked that the team was told that Katusha have had the most doping cases among all the Pro Tour teams, citing four cases between 2009 and 2012 and added that the case of Alexandr Kolobnev should not be counted because he was later cleared of any doping charges.

At the 2011 Tour de France, Kolobnev escaped a suspension for failing a drug test after the Russian cycling federation took into account extenuating circumstances in his case. Ekimov added that the UCI blamed the team for Denis Galimzyanov's positive test, even though the rider had admitted that it was his own mistake and said the cycling's governing body do not do enough testing within the team for catching doping cheats. Galimzyanov tested positive for erythropoietin (EPO), the banned blood booster, in April. The top sprinter of Russia was subsequently fired by Katusha and said he took the drug by himself without telling anyone in the team and Galimzyanov was banned by the anti-doping agency of Russia for two years, starting from April 13, 2012.

Ekimov, a long-time team mate of disgraced American cyclist Lance Armstrong, when questioned about his own doping record said the cycling's world governing body never mentioned his name, Denis Menchov, or that of Michele Ferrari. Katusha leader Menchov's integrity came under a cloud after French sports daily *L'Equipe* produced its doping suspicion index in which Menchov was rated at 9; the doping suspicion index lists riders who are given a rating of suspicion on a scale from 0 - not suspicious - to 10 - highly suspicious. Menchov denied the allegations and said it was just a case of sour grapes by the French. Triple Olympic champion Ekimov, who was awarded his third Olympic gold medal after American Tyler Hamilton was stripped of his Athens 2004 time trial title because of doping, questioned the methods employed by the UCI.

Every Katusha rider, including world number one Spaniard Joaquim Rodriguez, expressed their loyalty to the team, remarked Ekimov who also added that all our major sponsors are also committed to the team even if we are excluded from the elite. Ekimov said in case the CAS decision goes against them, we'll think of an alternative plan.