

David Bedford has described athletics as having been in a “disaster zone” following the claims of doping, extortion and corruption, but he believes that the increased anti-doping efforts of the World Marathon Majors series can help the sport to turn a corner when it comes to distance running.

The former London Marathon race director and chairman of the IAAF road running commission was speaking on the day that the elite men’s field for this year’s Virgin Money London Marathon was revealed and explained how the protocols that have been introduced by the World Marathon Majors series, which includes the London event, mean that fans can have trust in the elite line-ups.

“I think we can have trust in the field we have,” said Bedford, who is the London Marathon elite race coordinator. “The World Marathon Majors, in association with the IAAF, have financed and extended the testing pool of athletes who are competing in World Marathon Majors events. This is as much out of competition as in competition, so all athletes who are in our fields would be tested far more regularly than probably at any time in the past. With additional funding from us and the support of the testing authorities, that I think takes us a long way forward.

“I think it will take more than one year for us to start to feel that we have perhaps turned a corner, but I think that once we move away from the disaster zone that we have been in and move to a situation where administrators at all levels understand that we have to ensure that we have a clean sport, we have to ensure that there is no corruption around our sport, then I think in years to come we will hopefully see that the Virgin Money London Marathon 2016 really marked the start, in distance running terms, of a new generation.”

Russian marathoner Liliya Shobukhova was last year stripped of her World Marathon Majors titles – which included wins in London in 2010 and in Chicago in 2009, 2010 and 2011 – following abnormalities detected in her biological passport. Her case was detailed in reports following investigation by a World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) Independent Commission which looked into claims of extortion.

Seb Coe, who was elected as IAAF president last August, was backed by the author of the WADA Independent Commission reports, Richard Pound, when the second report was presented last week and Bedford also sees the two-time Olympic champion as the best person for the job.

Part two of the report stated that the IAAF council, which included Coe, “could not have been unaware of the extent of doping in athletics and the non-enforcement of applicable anti-doping rules.” However, Bedford believes that there are things that the former IAAF vice-president would not have known about.

“I believe that Seb Coe is the best person we have in the sport to solve the problems that we have,” said Bedford.

“I believe that he has had a difficult period, because of course he has involvement for many years within the IAAF, but having seen the way the IAAF works as chairman of the road running commission, I can absolutely understand that there are large chunks of things that happen in the sport of athletics at an executive level, and as we now know above that, that members of council and chairmans of commissions just would not be aware of.”