

VANCOUVER 2010

FROM PAGE 1 » JUMPERS



Australian Gregor Schlierenzauer is seen in a qualification round at Whistler yesterday. Male ski jumpers at the Games this week laughed at the suggestion that some men don't want women to compete because it would harm the sport's macho image. JOHN LEHMANN/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Competing in 2014 an uncertain prospect

» The biggest stars are stick-thin, boy-like men whose physiques help them fly farther. Some speculate that women aren't welcome in a sport where they might outclass men, where distance jumped is directly correlated with weight.

With little organizational support, an American woman, Lindsey Van, had the normal hill record jump of 105.5 metres at Whistler until last week, when it was eclipsed by a handful of top-tier men, including gold medalist Simon Ammann of Switzerland, who is five-foot-eight and 128 pounds and jumped only a bit farther: 108 metres.

The exclusion of women jumpers from Vancouver – based on the IOC's ruling that there are not enough countries or competitors involved – sparked a major controversy. Some jumpers took 2010 Olympics organizers to court on Charter of Rights grounds, a fight that ended only two months ago when the Supreme Court refused to hear a final appeal.

Jumpers had enlisted Helena Guergis, Ottawa's Minister of State for the Status of Women, but she failed to get Mr. Rogge's ear, as Ms. Jean did on her own volition, according to Ms. Tanaka. (Ms. Tanaka is one of two women in a group of 20 forejumpers – who make test jumps to ensure the facility at Callaghan Valley near Whistler is correctly calibrated. She jumped yesterday from the 140-metre large hill on which 50 men compete today.)

But even with Mr. Rogge's



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Dick Pound,
International Olympic
Committee

positive words to Ms. Jean, it is far from assured that women will compete at Sochi, Russia.

Dick Pound, Canada's senior IOC member, maintained in an interview that there are still not enough competitors or countries involved in women's ski jumping to get it in the Games. He also said some IOC members took umbrage over the court battle.

"I don't think the IOC had very much pleasure being convicted in absentia of discrimination against women athletes," Mr. Pound said. "It was a lot of bad publicity for the IOC. I know they don't appreciate it and I don't appreciate it."

Mr. Rogge made similar comments in an 11-minute msnbc.com documentary, where he said: "The IOC, in a very predictable human reaction, might say: 'Oh, yeah, I remember them. They're the ones that embarrassed us and caused us a lot of trouble in Vancouver. Maybe they should wait another four years or eight years.'"

While Mr. Pound also said

women might be in "as early as 2014" if more countries and women join the sport, his view has shaken the jumpers who fought in court (a strategy that was not supported by Ski Jumping Canada or joined by Ms. Tanaka).

"A lot of us took it as a direct threat," said Alissa Johnson, an American jumper ranked No. 11 in the world, who will watch today as her younger brother, Anders, competes in the Games. "We didn't go to court to make them look bad. We weren't disrespectful. We never threatened them."

Ms. Johnson said she's feeling good about 2014, noting that Russia is putting money in its women's jumping program, appearing to get ready for the event. "I would be an idiot to think it's a slam dunk," she said. "I am really optimistic but I can't set myself up for that disappointment again. We need a huge push still."

The IOC has made gender equity an express goal of the organization. Women's boxing, for instance, is on the card for London 2012. The percentage of women among athletes in the Winter Games is now about 40 per cent, up from roughly 25 in the early 1990s.

Some officials, such as Vic Method of Women's Ski Jumping USA, have said European men don't want women jumping because it will shatter some sort of macho myth about the sport, where competitors fly down a steep slope at upward of 100 kilometres an hour to leap more than 100 metres – although they're never much more than three or

four metres off the ground.

On Thursday, during training at Whistler Olympic Park, the skinny men who excel at jumping laughed at the suggestion that their masculinity was at stake.

"No, absolutely not," said Martin Koch, ranked No. 8 in the world and one of the five "Austrian Eagles" who dominate the sport. Women at Sochi is "quite a good idea," Mr. Koch said. "If there are enough women who can compete on the same level, they should get the chance."

Stefan Read, the veteran of the Canadian squad, backs the women. "They're our friends, we obviously want them in. It's not really a macho sport, the guys are all pretty skinny. The jumps are big but it's graceful, too."

Women don't jump quite as far as men – the No. 1 woman at last year's world championships would have been 19th if she was in the men's field. The gap could be explained by men receiving far more training and coaching. Still, women aren't looking to compete head to head with men – they just want to jump.

The women's fate is in the hands of the IOC's powerful executive board, which is headed by Mr. Rogge and has 15 members, 14 of them men. The one woman is Nawal El Moutawakel of Morocco.

Mr. Method of Women's Ski Jumping USA has worked relentlessly to get the sport in the Games. "There's no money in this," he said. "The women do this because they love it. They truly love to fly."

FROM PAGE 1 » HALFWAY

Second-place finish would still be an improvement

» Boasting and ribbing aside, the bigger issue for Canadian Olympic officials is whether the failure to deliver a first-place finish could jeopardize the future of Own the Podium, or OTP.

The five-year program started in 2005 with a goal of developing medal winners at the Vancouver Games and future Olympics.

Roughly half the money comes from the federal government and the remainder from the Vancouver Olympic Committee, which raised it from provincial governments, corporate donations and public contributions. Once the Olympics end, much of the VANOC funding will disappear.

Chris Rudge, chief executive of the Canadian Olympic Committee, said yesterday that the organization will be seeking \$22-million in annual funding from the federal government to help make up the expected shortfall. That will be in addition to the \$47-million the government has already committed annually to OTP.

Mr. Rudge makes no apologies for setting a lofty target for the Games.

"We established a goal. Businesses establish goals all the time. I think you have to do that in life," he said yesterday. "Have we set unrealistic objectives that Canadians have embraced? I don't think so."

While he acknowledged Canada likely won't finish first, given the strong start by the Americans, Mr. Rudge said even a second-place finish would be an improvement over past Olympics.

"I can't believe that the government wouldn't say this has been a very good investment and a very good experience," he said. "As long as we have a very good performance, I think they are going to say this is a very successful program."

He added that the Canadian team is performing better than it did at the same point during the last Winter Olympics, and could still win several medals in upcoming finals in hockey, curling and ski cross.

But will setting such a high goal make anything other than a first-place finish seem like failure? "I hope not," Mr. Rudge replied.

Before the Games, he predicted Canada would win between 28 and 34 medals, enough to lead the standings. Now he believes it will take 35 or more to finish first.

OTP president Roger Jackson isn't ready to give up on the first-place prediction, saying there are 15 medal chances in the last five days of the Games for Canadians.

"There will be some material gains for Canada. The first goal of VANOC was to build a strong enough team to create pride and engage Canadians. That's been achieved," he said.

"Second, we had to have a target, and if the American team weren't so red-hot at the moment, it would be easier to see we're headed in the right direction."

Judging the success of OTP is tricky because so many factors contribute to athletic performance (there are also other funding programs, such as B2Ten, which fund select athletes).



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Own the Podium President
Roger Jackson

OTP is supposed to target potential medal winners and funding is selective. While speed skating gets \$3.8-million and targets more than 20 athletes, Nordic combined and ski jumping get \$35,000 and \$82,500 respectively and target no athletes.

So far, the results at the Vancouver Games have been mixed. For example, alpine skiing gets \$3.5-million, the second largest OTP sport budget, and targets 11 skiers. None has won a medal.

"It hurts. We wanted those medals, we wanted to deliver them for Canada, but it just didn't happen," said skier Erik Guay, one of the OTP-targeted athletes, who finished fifth in the Super G yesterday. (Norway's Aksel Lund Svindal won the event, followed by two Americans, Bode Miller and Andrew Weibrecht.)

"My heart goes out to all the people who put so much money and time in allowing us to get into the track and spend time on the hill," said Canadian Robbie Dixon, another OTP-targeted athlete, who failed to finish the race.

By contrast, snowboarding, which gets \$600,000 less from OTP, has delivered two medals – gold for Maëlle Rickler and silver for Mike Robertson. Both were targeted for funding.

Canada has certainly been through Olympic angst before. It took eight days for the Canadian team to win a medal at the 2008 Olympics in Beijing. But the team ended up with 18 medals, six more than at the previous Summer Games.

The 2006 Games in Turin were an archetypal come-from-behind performance. The first week prompted doom-and-gloom predictions when Canada's medal count fell short.

But in the second week, a number of surprise medals arrived, a surge that balanced the scales. At the end of the Games, Canada was in third with 24 medals, just one medal shy of its target of 25.

Mr. Rudge cites both experiences as examples showing Canada can come back and still, maybe, win. But he has also started adjusting his goals, suggesting that a truer measure of success might be the number of gold medals Canada wins, instead of the overall number.

"There's been a lot of talk [about] when do you start looking at gold instead of others," he said. "And even now, at seven [medals], I think we're only one bronze. We used to have a propensity to bronze."

BIDEN, OPRAH CAUGHT RED-HANDED



U.S. Vice-President Joe Biden sports HBC's popular mittens at Whistler last Saturday. BRUCE BENNETT/GETTY IMAGES

What has become the most iconic souvenir of the Vancouver Games is also getting snapped up south of the border.

U.S. Vice-President Joe Biden was seen sporting HBC's red mittens last week, and now Oprah Winfrey has got her paws on them.

North America's hottest TV talk-show host wore Canada's coolest Olympic swag on her program yesterday.

Appearing as a guest from Vancouver, NBC journalist Matt Lauer joked on air that he'd scoured the entire country to get her a pair of the mittens, which have a white maple leaf on the palm, but they'd been snapped up off every shelf.

But the daytime TV queen already had her own pair, and proceeded to give away the \$10 "it" item of the Vancouver Games to her entire cheering audience.

An HBC spokeswoman said the company sent a batch of more than 300 pairs at Ms. Winfrey's request.

The retailer stocked store shelves across Canada with three million pairs of mittens; two million of them were sold even before the Winter Games began.

» *The Canadian Press*

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