

After Long Wait, Women Ready to Fly in Ski Jump

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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The Russki Gorki center, where Olympic ski jumping events will be held. **Kai Pfaffenbach**

Women ski jumpers will finally make their debut at the Sochi Winter Games after a lengthy struggle that featured plenty of heartache and culminated in a lawsuit against Olympic officials.

The sport favors light jumpers and although women can often leap as far as men, they were excluded on the grounds there were not enough good athletes to ensure a real competition.

Women jumpers had petitioned to be included in every Games since Nagano in 1998 but it was not until April 2011 that the International Olympic Committee announced female athletes could compete on the normal hill in Sochi.

"Over the past year there has been this building of excitement, 'Wow, this is real, this is actually going to happen', " said Deedee Corradini, president of Women's Ski Jumping USA.

"These women have sat on the sidelines ... watching these boys and their brothers march in as Olympians when in many cases they are the better jumpers," she told Reuters.

In 2009, a group of U.S. and Canadian women jumpers went to court in Canada and sued the organizers of the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver, demanding the right to compete.

The judges ruled against them, prompting a tearful world champion Lindsey Van of the U.S. to quit the sport.

She is now back and will be joined at Sochi by Jessica Jerome and world champion Sarah Hendrickson.

"I was afraid it would not happen until after I had retired from the sport, which is unfortunately what has happened with the generation of girls before us," Jerome told Reuters.

The American Hendrickson, returning to fitness after suffering a bad knee injury last August, looks set to lose out to Japan's Sara Takanashi for the gold. The 17-year-old won the World Cup in 2012-13 and has trounced her rivals so far this season.

"She (Hendrickson) is a competitor whom I admire, so just having her there will make me try harder," Takanashi told the Yomiuri Shimbun daily.

Other potential contenders include Germany's Carina Vogt, Irina Avvakumova of Russia and Austrian veteran Daniela Iraschko-Stolz.

The women still face some discrimination: they will not compete on the large hill or in the team event and only 30 can take part compared to 50 for the men.

Not everyone is convinced they should be there. Alexander Arefyev, the Russian men's ski jumping coach, thinks jumping is potentially too dangerous for women.

Raise Children

"If I had a daughter I would never allow her to jump — it is too much hard work. Women have a different purpose: to raise children, do the housework," he told Izvestia on Jan. 20.

There is no clear favorite among the men, and most of the top 10 in the World Cup standings could in theory win.

Olympic champion Simon Ammann of Switzerland, who won the normal and large hills in 2010, is coming back into form and will once more face off against Austria's Gregor Schlierenzauer, who captured the World Cup last season and has racked up a record 52 individual World Cup wins.

The charismatic Schlierenzauer, 24, was the favorite in 2010 but only won bronzes on both hills. He started this season well but has not won any of the last 13 World Cup events.

Another jumper to watch is Poland's Kamil Stoch, who won the large hill at last year's world championships.

Anders Bardal of Norway, who took the normal hill title in 2013, and World Cup leader Peter

Prevc of Slovenia are also likely to feature.

Austrian Thomas Morgenstern is also set to make the start ramp after the three-time Olympic gold medallist recovered from a nasty fall.

Morgenstern, who won two Olympic titles in the individual and team large hill event in Turin in 2006 and a team large hill gold in Vancouver in 2010, left hospital for a rehabilitation clinic last week and has begun light training.

He was named in Austria's team on Monday.

Austria, Germany, Poland and Slovenia will battle for the medals in the team event.

Both ski jumps at Sochi are new but suffered from delays and cost overruns, which prompted President Vladimir Putin to fire the official responsible last February.

Walter Hofer, race director for ski jumping at the International Ski Federation, has no worries about the facilities.

"From a sporting point of view everything is very well-prepared in Sochi and we are confident we will find the right training program and the right surroundings there," he told Reuters.

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