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Downhill Big Shots Encouraged by Sochi Course

By The Moscow Times

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Two of the contenders for gold in the men's downhill at the Winter Olympics in Sochi, American Bode Miller and Aksel Lund Svindal from Norway, had words of caution and praise for the course after training runs Thursday.

The downhill course at Rosa Khutor is one of the world's longest at a daunting 2.2 miles, but the physical challenge of conquering it seems to appeal to the sport's elite.

"They did some changes compared to a couple of years ago when everybody was complaining," said Miller, who was highly critical after the World Cup test event back in 2012. "They did not ice the top which is understandable. The turns are huge up there."

Back in 2012, Miller, who won a super combined gold in Vancouver, claimed the track didn't "embody anything that a true World Cup course should be."

"The training is challenging, the jumps are big and there are a lot of different places where you can make mistakes," he said Thursday.

Svindal, dominant on the World Cup tour this season and looking to defend his super G title in Sochi, was also positive.

"The track is better than two years ago, it's smoother, the turns are longer and there is more momentum," he said. "The jumps are also smoother and longer than two years ago. The build up" to the jumps "was done very well."

"It is a really good challenge: fast, steep," he said.

Svindal, the reigning downhill world champion who will carry the flag for Norway at Friday's opening ceremony, acknowledged his chief adversaries for gold in Sochi.

"Bode is one of the favorites. Patrick Kueng has been good as well. The Austrians are always good. ... But skiing is always tight. A surprise is possible."

The downhill event is Sunday, with the super combined on Feb. 14 and the super G on Feb. 16.

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