

Sochi Olympics to Have 6 New Events

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LONDON — After an unsuccessful legal battle for inclusion at the 2010 Vancouver Olympics, women's ski jumping won its place Wednesday on the program for the 2014 Winter Games in Sochi.

The International Olympic Committee executive board also approved the addition of men's and women's ski halfpipe, mixed relay in biathlon and team events in luge and figure skating.

"The inclusion of these events ... is sure to be appreciated by athletes and sports fans alike," IOC president Jacques Rogge said. "These are exciting, entertaining events that perfectly complement the existing events on the sports program, bring added appeal and increase the number of women participating at the games."

Proposals for inclusion of slopestyle events in snowboard and freestyle skiing and a team Alpine skiing event were put on hold for further review.

The IOC twice rejected women's ski jumping for the 2010 Vancouver Olympics, saying the sport lacked enough elite competitors. Women jumpers took their case all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada, but failed to overturn the IOC decision.

The women seemingly sealed their case at the Nordic world championships in Oslo in early March, when competitors jumped in heavy fog and strong winds. IOC board member Gerhard Heiberg of Norway said he was impressed by the level of competition and would recommend the event's inclusion to Rogge.

"If you compared the previous world championships with the first one, there was much more quality and depth compared with 2009," IOC sports director Christophe Dubi said. "At the time you had a handful of really good jumpers. If you compare 2009 and 2011, you have a really wide increase of technical capability."

Ski jumping and Nordic combined, which features ski jumping and cross-country skiing, have been the only Winter Olympic events open only to men.

The IOC said in October that it "looked favorably" on all the proposed events but postponed a ruling until after the various world championships this winter.

Dubi said more time was needed to study the technical aspects of the slopestyle and Alpine team events but they could still be added to the Sochi program. A final decision on those events is expected in late May or early June, Dubi said.

In slopestyle, athletes do tricks while going down the mountain and through "features" — rails, big jumps and bumps. American snowboard star Shaun White, who won halfpipe gold in Vancouver, has said he would like to add slopestyle to his schedule if it's approved for Sochi.

Ski slopestyle is similar to the snowboard version.

In ski halfpipe, skiers score points for performing tricks and jumps on the same course used for the snowboard halfpipe.

"The event is extremely spectacular," Dubi said.

Dubi said the IOC decision on which events to accept was not influenced by Sochi organizers or their hopes for Russian medals.

"It never came into the discussion," he said. "They have very successful athletes in slopestyle, snowboarding in particular."

The IOC said the key factor in the decision was whether the changes would increase universality, gender equity and youth appeal.

"Other considerations included the cost of infrastructure and the impact on the overall quota and the number of events," it said.

U.S. women's ski jumpers gathered in Park City, Utah, for a teleconference to listen to the announcement that their sport would be included in Sochi.

"It's a relief," said Lindsey Van, the 2009 world champion. "We worked really hard for this. It feels really good to finally finish it. It's just a big relief for me and I'm really excited for the future of the sport."

At 26, Van is unsure whether she'll still be competing in three years.

"I was fighting for the sport and the future of the sport, not necessarily for my future," she said. "So, it's exciting to see what happens in the future."

Luke Bodensteiner, an executive vice president of the U.S. Ski and Snowboard Association, also welcomed the IOC decisions to include women's ski jumping and ski halfpipe.

"At ski areas worldwide, millions of kids are skiing in halfpipes," he said. "Including freeskiing in the Olympics opens the door to millions of youth to share in the Olympic dream."

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