



ALBERTA SKI JUMPING
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Update – Mar 26, 2009

Female ski jumpers seemingly get cold shoulder from IOC chief Jacques Rogge
ARNIE STAPLETON | AP Sports Writer
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World Champion and United States national team member Lindsey Van, left, and Canadian national team member Katie Willis look on during a news conference in Denver, Wednesday, March 25, 2009. The skiers are bringing a lawsuit against the 2010 Vancouver Olympic games for excluding women's ski jumping from the games. (AP Photo/Jack Dempsey) (JACK DEMPSEY, AP / March 25, 2009)

DENVER (AP) — Female ski jumpers suing to get into the [2010 Vancouver Olympics](#) figured the [International Olympic Committee](#) told them to go take a giant leap.

The IOC said Wednesday night, however, that president Jacques Rogge didn't receive their request for a face-to-face meeting with two of the athletes until they had already left Denver.

World champion Lindsey Van of [the United States](#) and Canadian national team member Katie Willis wrote to Rogge last week requesting a meeting while he was in Denver attending the SportAccord convention of industry sport leaders and the accompanying IOC executive board meetings.

That letter was sent to IOC headquarters in Lausanne, Switzerland, and only made its way to Denver on Wednesday afternoon, too late to meet with them, IOC spokeswoman Sandrine Tonge said.

She said Rogge had "reached out to them" via e-mail but did not know what Rogge told the women regarding a meeting to discuss their concerns.

However, Van told The Associated Press on Wednesday night after returning to her home in Park City, Utah, that she hadn't received any e-mail messages from Rogge or the IOC.

"I just checked. There's nothing there," Van said. "If they say they're going to reach out and don't, that's very disappointing."

The AP left a message with Willis, who was flying home to Calgary, Alberta, Wednesday night.

Female ski jumpers want the IOC to reconsider its 2006 decision to bar them from the 2010 Games.

"The sport is definitely moving forward, but we need the Olympics to give us that final push so that we can be closer to the guys in equality," said Van, 24, who won the first women's ski jumping World Cup, which was held in the Czech Republic last month.

Willis said the success of that World Cup event shows the sport is ready for the Winter Games.

Willis and Van are among 15 ski jumpers who suing because only male jumpers are allowed to compete in the Vancouver Olympics. The IOC says women's ski jumping doesn't have enough international competitions to merit inclusion.

If the IOC doesn't reconsider its stance, the lawsuit filed last May against Vancouver organizers citing gender discrimination will be heard April 20 before a single judge in the British Columbia Supreme Court in Vancouver. Both sides will have two days to make their case. The judge's ruling is subject to appeal.

"At risk of a very bad pun, it's the court of last resort," said Deborah Folka, spokeswoman for the plaintiffs. "These women have paid their dues. We're not being circuitous. We're not trying to jump in queue. We're not trying to get in where we don't belong. We're not trying to be at a level where we can't compete."

The plaintiffs represent 160 elite female ski jumpers from 18 countries who compete at the sport's highest level. They are asking for a single event on the normal hill in 2010.

Ski jumping, one of the original eight events held at the first Winter Games in Chamonix, France, in 1924, is the only event in the Winter Games that doesn't allow female competitors.

Five Canadian ski jumpers were added to the lawsuit recently, joining three Americans and two retired Canadian jumpers, among others.

Willis said she hadn't joined the lawsuit sooner because she hoped the Canadian government would follow through on a promise to intervene with the IOC after the female jumpers agreed to drop a human rights complaint.

The roadblocks have taken a toll, Willis said.

"It's very disappointing and it's hard to take because we've put our lives into this and we're so dedicated and we really want to be at the Olympics," Willis said. "It's just sad because I am from Canada and I was hoping that our government would back us but since that didn't happen, that's why all of the Canadians decided to join" the lawsuit.

Van wasn't surprised that Rogge didn't respond to her request for an audience with the IOC chairman before she had to leave Denver.

"Totally ignored, as expected," she said as she waited at Denver International Airport to fly home to Utah.

Van said she was cautiously optimistic she'll be jumping in Vancouver next winter. But, she said if their quest fails, it will be devastating to her sport because funding would dry up from the U.S. Olympic Committee and U.S. Ski team.

"If the decision goes against us, it's going to be really hard for our sport. There's going to be a lot of funding cut at the top level for the women because the economy's so bad that they're just going to fund sports that are going to get Olympic medals," Van said.

"If it's not in the Olympics, the top level of women ski jumpers will quit and the sport is going to go backward."

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