



Report on the FIL Development Program: 2023-2024 Season

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The 2023-2024 FIL Development Program could be characterized as having a primary focus on youth athletes from underrepresented and underfunded nations. The catalyst for this was of course the PyeongChang YOG in February 2024. As a result of this focus, every nation participating with the FIL Youth A group was able to qualify at least one athlete for YOG and in several cases, two athletes. Though YOG preparation played a large role in the 23-24 season for Youth A, significant levels of support and programs were also in place for Junior and General Class athletes, as outlined below.

Just as every nation is a team, so is the FIL and there are a number of individuals who played a defining role in making the FIL development program a success in 2023-2024. Most notably, Dwight Bell, FIL Secretary General, Claire DelNegro, FIL Vice President of Sport and Christoph Schweiger, FIL Executive Director. Their support, knowledge and guidance throughout the season was invaluable.

FIL Coaches

Leading the FIL Groups was a cadre of coaches with a wealth of experience. Ioan Apostol (ROU) returned as Head Coach of FIL Group 1, with Ivars Deinis (LAT) joining him as Assistant Coach. Father and son team Petr Kinzel and Tomas Kinzel (CZE) continued their long-standing positions with FIL Group 2 as Head Coach and Assistant Coach respectively. And overseeing the Youth A Group was Head Coach Bogdan Macovei (ROU) and Assistant Coach Martins Lozbers (LAT). The FIL is very fortunate to have such a skilled, knowledgeable, professional and experienced crew guiding the athletes participating in the FIL development program.

FIL Groups

The FIL Groups have long been a lifeline for National Federations with few athletes, little funding and no luge facilities of their own. This season continued with three separate FIL Groups, which included: Group 1 (General Class), Group 2 (Junior Class) and the Youth A Group, which consists of young athletes who are either brand new or have very little experience. These athletes trained under the guidance of FIL coaches during scheduled training weeks and participated in Continental Cup and YOG qualifying events.

	Nations	Athletes	M/F	Participating nations	age range	total runs
Group 1	5	9	7/2	CZE, FIN, GEO, NED, SLO	18-26	
Group 2	7	9	6/3	AUS, CRO, CZE, EST, GBR, NZL, SLO	18-20	874
Youth A	11	26	19/7	BUL, FRA, CZE, GBR, GEO, IRL, NED, NZL, SLO, THA, TPE	13-17	2246

Luge School

The 2023-2024 season was a unique one regarding the annual FIL Luge School, as there were actually two schools scheduled this season. The first took place Oct 9-17 in Lillehammer and was funded for accommodations, meals and track fees by an IOC Olympic Solidarity Grant. The school was an overwhelming success with 14 nations, 27 athletes and 14 international coaches participating.

The second luge school was the first of its kind and focused on nations from the greater Asia region. Taking place in PyeongChang immediately after the conclusion of YOG, five nations participated. Special thanks must go to the Korean Luge Federation and Mr. Hyunjun Park, as well as the PyeongChang Legacy Foundation and Mr. Arram Kim for their generous support covering the cost of accommodations, meals and track fees. The IOC also provided support for travel costs through an Olympic Solidarity Grant. The support of these organizations and individuals was critical, without which the Asia Luge School would not have come to fruition. Logistics arrangements and coaching were provided by the FIL. Following the school, several of these first-time sliders went on to join the FIL Youth A Group for additional training and racing. A breakdown of the participation at both schools is as follows:

FIL Luge School Lillehammer, Oct 9-17						
Nations	Athletes	M/F	Participating nations	age range	total runs	Runs per ath
14	27	13/14	BUL, EST, FIN, GEO, NED, NOR, NZL, ROU, SLO, SVK, THA, TPE, TUR, UKR	13-19	557	22

FIL Asia Luge School PyeongChang, Feb 2-10						
Nations	Athletes	M/F	Participating nations	age range	total runs	Runs per ath
5	18	11/7	GEO, JPN, NZL, THA	11-16	646	36

YOG

The Youth Olympic Games was of course the primary focus of Youth A age athletes for the 2023-2024 season. Taking place between January 19-February 1, all nations that were part of the FIL Youth A Group qualified at least one athlete for the Games. This was a true testament to the expertise and effectiveness of the FIL coaching staff that contributed to this success. The 11 FIL Youth A Group nations that had athletes qualify for YOG include: BUL, CZE, FRA, GBR, GEO, IRL, NED, NZL, SLO, THA and TPE.

NF Programs

Funding was allocated to numerous National Federations for specific development related projects targeted at athlete recruitment, increasing participation or conducting development level training camps. Budget limitations affected how many projects could be funded, but in total €44,000 was allocated amongst 12 different nations.

New Nations

New nations currently in the process of seeking, or who have already obtained, FIL membership include MGL, NGR, PAK and TUN.

Olympic Solidarity Grants

As mentioned earlier, special thanks must go to the IOC Olympic Solidarity Grant program and specifically to Sheila Stephens Desbans and her team and Marc Faraci for his guidance. The FIL was able to secure several grants benefiting nations identified as underrepresented in the last Winter Olympic Games, including: the Lillehammer Luge School, Asia Region Luge School and travel assistance for disadvantaged Asia region nations.

Partnerships

The popular FIL Partnership Program, in which a smaller developing nation is partnered with a larger, established nation, was again a success in 2023-2024. The FIL supported the program with an allocation to the host nation of €300 per athlete per race, for a maximum of 1M, 1W, 1 MD and 1 WD sled per nation. It is the goal to encourage other large nations to partner with smaller, developing nations in the future.

Host NF	CAN	GER	ROU	USA
Guest NF	AUS 1, GBR 1	ARG 1, POL 6, SUI 1	IRL 2	JPN 1, PUR 1, SVK 8

Vouchers

Another popular program that continued this season was the allocation of track vouchers. Valued at €25 per voucher, most nations received a quantity of vouchers based on number of athletes, length of participation and need. Because of the budget situation, the decision was made to not allocate vouchers to nations that have a home track.

Summer Camp

In order to better prepare athletes for winter training and competition, a summer camp took place in July 2023 in Smrzovka, CZE and Oberhof, GER. In Smrzovka, development athletes from the FIL groups took part in physical testing, physical training and wheel sled training. This was followed by 3 days in Oberhof which focused on start practice on the Oberhof refrigerated start ramp. In recent years, the coaches have observed that many athletes participating with the FIL group have not been properly physically prepared for the stresses involved during in-season training/racing. For both safety and performance reasons, it was determined that young athletes should be

taught the basic off-season physical training skills needed to perform to their highest potential. The summer camp addresses these skills.

Conclusion

While budget issues continue to affect how much support is available through FIL Development, significant effort is made to distribute the limited funds to development level nations in the most equitable way and where they can have the most impact. The specific focus on youth athletes this season was an example of that, evidenced by the success rate of YOG qualifying. However, the sliding experience of many of the qualified athletes was very low, due partly to their young age, but also due to a lack of experience in the months and years leading up to YOG. In the future, athletes in the FIL Groups will be required to participate in more training to gain the experience necessary to perform safely and at a higher level. Available support to NFs, in its various forms, continues to be a concern, and it does not appear that these levels will increase anytime soon. All nations are strongly encouraged to seek out their own funding sources either through sponsorship, government support or other means.

Some initiatives that will be focused on in the coming season include:

- Assist new and development level nations with athlete identification through summer recruitment clinics.
- Encourage and oversee off season physical training of FIL Group athletes to be better prepared physically for the season.
- Continue updating the current supply of FIL equipment.
- Encouraging NFs to be more disciplined with advanced planning.
- Increased participation in the FIL summer camp.
- Work with indigenous winter nations who currently have low participation to increase their involvement.
- Increase fall run volume for FIL Group athletes.
- Assist in creating a development pipeline for nations new to the FIL.
- Standardized coaches training for developing nations.

