

Asian Winter Games: Very topical in tropical East Timor

By Jim Armstrong
The Associated Press

SAPPORO, Japan — For Alpine skier Yohan Goult Goncalves, the chance to be East Timor's sole representative at the Asian Winter Games was too good to pass up, even if it meant missing the world championships.

Goult Goncalves could have taken part in the Alpine skiing world championships in St. Moritz, Switzerland, but chose instead to travel to Japan to become East Timor's first athlete at the Asian Winter Games.

"It was more important to come here because East Timor is part of Asia," Goult Goncalves said in an interview with The Associated Press. "Timorese people feel closer to the Asian Games than any other event — even the Winter Olympics — so that's why I chose to come here."

Born in France, 22-year-old Goult Goncalves is the son of a French father and a mother from East Timor, the tiny former Portuguese colony between Australia and Indonesia.

He qualified for the world circuit in 2013 and had no trouble deciding which country to represent when it came to choosing between France and East Timor.

East Timor's National Olympic Committee was only established in 2007, and two athletes have competed at the Summer Games in 2004, 2008, and 2012.

"My dream of representing Timor came when I was eight," Goult Goncalves said. "I wanted to go to the Olympics and I knew it was for Timor because I think it was



important to show to the world that there is this country. I think that the contrast of having an athlete that skis but is from a country with no snow makes it special."

Goult Goncalves' childhood dream came true when he competed at the Sochi Olympics.

"It was so challenging to get there," Goult Goncalves said, recalling his route to become the first athlete from East Timor to compete at the Winter Olympics. "And when I arrived there you raise the flag of Timor in the opening ceremony. It's the first time in the Winter Olympics so there was a lot of attention on you because people are wondering 'where is this country? Do they have snow? Do they have mountains?'"

Now he has his sights set on qualifying for an Olympic return, this time closer to home in Pyeongchang, South Korea.

"I want to participate in more international events so people get to know Timor better," Goult Goncalves said.

Many of Goult Goncalves' family members live in Australia, where he has based himself for southern hemisphere winter training the past several years.

Goult Goncalves first hit the ski slopes in his father Pierre's backpack when he was a year old, and skied for the first time when he was three.

East Timor was colonized by Portugal in the 16th century and declared its independence in 1975. Indonesia invaded East Timor within weeks and a violent

HOT WEATHER, COOL SKIER. East Timor's Yohan Goult Goncalves skis during the alpine skiing men's giant slalom at the Asian Winter Games in Sapporo, northern Japan, on February 22, 2017. Goult Goncalves could have taken part in the Alpine skiing world championships in St. Moritz, Switzerland, but chose instead to travel to Japan to become East Timor's first athlete at the Asian Winter Games. (AP Photo/Shuji Kajiyama)

period followed.

In 1999, following intervention from the United Nations, Indonesia relinquished control of the territory and East Timor became a sovereign state on May 20, 2002. The country's political situation has become more stable in recent years.

"Right now it is pretty peaceful, the last civil war was in 2006," Goult Goncalves said. "Since then nothing major has happened so I hope tourists will come to Timor."

In 1974, Goult Goncalves' mother, Carolina, and her young siblings boarded a fishing boat in the capital, Dili, and set sail for Darwin, the remote capital of Australia's Northern Territory. Despite being overcrowded, the boat and its 500-plus passengers arrived safely, and the family was granted refugee status.

For now, Goult Goncalves said he is happy to be able to take his campaign to raise awareness of his country to the slopes.

"My uncles that still live in Timor fought during the occupation," Goult Goncalves said. "They were present and in the resistance so I think in my own way I am fighting for my country in a more joyful way."

Uno wins gold medal in figure skating at Asian Winter Games

By Jim Armstrong
The Associated Press

SAPPORO, Japan — Shoma Uno of Japan overcame several early mistakes to win the gold medal in men's figure skating on the final day of the Asian Winter Games.

Uno, who was second after the short program, fell on the opening quad loop of his free skate and stepped out of a triple lutz, but scored 281.27 points.

Two Chinese skaters finished second and third — Boyang Jin with 280.08 points and Yan Han with 271.86.

Despite the early mistakes, Uno earned points with three combination jumps, including his last one: a triple salchow-single loop-triple flip.

"It wasn't my greatest performance but I'm pleased with the result," said Uno, who received 188.84 points in the free skate. "I think the combination jumps helped me to recover."

Jin led after the free skate but his mistake on a quad toeloop and a triple flip late on, coupled with a lower element



score, cost him valuable points.

Japan's Takahito Mura was fourth with 263.31 points.

Sochi Olympic champion Yuzuru Hanyu of Japan did not take part in the competition.

Elsewhere at the games, seen as a

tune-up for athletes ahead of the Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang, South Korea next February, Yuki Kobayashi of Japan won the women's 15-kilometer free mass start to capture her fourth gold in cross-country skiing.

Kobayashi finished in a time of 43

GOLD MEDALLIST. Shoma Uno of Japan performs in the men's free skate during the figure skating competition at Makomanai Indoor Skating Rink at the Asian Winter Games in Sapporo, Japan, on February 26, 2017. Japan finished on top of the medal count with 74, including 27 gold. (AP Photo/Eugene Hoshiko)

minutes, 28.6 seconds in the race that features all skiers starting together.

Kazakhstan beat host Japan 7-0 to win the gold medal in men's ice hockey. South Korea took the silver with Japan settling for the bronze.

Shin Sang-hoon's hat trick led the South Korean team to a 10-0 thrashing of China.

Japan finished top of the medals table with a total of 74, including the most golds with 27. South Korea was second with a total of 50 medals while China was third with 35.

The closing ceremony was held at Makomanai Ice Arena and was attended by Japan's Crown Prince Naruhito.

The games featured more than 2,000 athletes from 31 countries competing in five sports, 11 disciplines, and 64 events.

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