

Holy trees spark debate on future of Olympic downhill course

By Andrew Dampf
AP Sports Writer

JEONGSEON, South Korea — The long-term future of the downhill course for the 2018 Pyeongchang Olympics came under the spotlight at the Alpine skiing test event for the games.

Local organizers are hoping the attractiveness of a completely new venue — the first of its kind in South Korea — will help shape the debate with environmentalists and pilgrims trekking to sacred trees lining the course.

When the venue site was selected a few years ago, the local Gangwon province agreed with environmentalists they would replant the trees cut down and restore the area to its natural state once the games conclude.

“As far as I know today, that plan is still valid,” Pyeongchang organizing committee chief Cho Yang-ho told a small group of foreign reporters near the race finish area.

The 1.7-mile-long Jeongseon downhill course is a rare competition-only venue for a sport that normally relies on resorts with a variety of runs for tourists.

Located about a 45-minute drive from the Alpensia resort that will host the mountain cluster for the games, the downhill venue features only the race course, an adjacent training run, and a slalom piste for the combined event. There are no other runs, no permanent lodge or restaurant, and no plans to expand.

Construction of the single gondola was only completed in January following a series of delays that nearly forced the test event to be postponed.

“We transplanted the trees and plants to another location right now and we will bring back and recover most of it,” Cho said.

Skiers are mystified by the lack of legacy plans.

“I cannot believe it,” said Italy’s Christof Innerhofer, who won a silver in downhill



DOWNHILL DEBATE. Spectators wave South Korean flags as South Korean Kim Hyeon-tae crosses the finish line during a men's World Cup super-G race, also a test event for the Pyeongchang 2018 Winter Olympics, at the Jeongseon Alpine Centre in Jeongseon, South Korea. (AP Photo/Mark Schiefelbein)

Returning the venue to its natural state would entail more than simply replanting trees. Tons of landfill were hauled 500 yards up the mountain to provide a flat finish area over a stream bed that previously carved into a sharp valley.

“There’s 60 meters (yards) of fill,” FIS technical operations manager Mike Kertesz said. “So much work went into making this because we needed a flat area to work with all of our facilities.”

“Hopefully when people come and see what we’ve built and what’s here they could go, ‘Hmmm, maybe we could use that? Maybe there could be a speed program and this could be a great training facility?’” Kertesz added. “The facilities are World Cup class.”

The course in Sochi was also newly designed by Russi and discussions are ongoing about selecting the downhill venue for the 2022 Beijing Games — meaning that the downhills at three consecutive Olympics could be held on completely new courses.

“It’s ridiculous that they’re giving these Olympic events to places that aren’t going to do it sustainably,” said American racer Andrew Weibrecht, a two-time Olympic medallist in super-G. “That should be part of the criteria for a bid — ‘Do you have at least half of the venues or do you have to build them all?’”

For his part, Cho would like at the very least to keep the gondola in place.

“Even if they replant it, still we can use (the) gondola,” he said. “I went to the Dolomites and all of the mountains in the summer are used by hikers going up (lifts). So why can’t we do it? A lot of Koreans love hiking.”

and a bronze in combined at the 2014 Sochi Olympics. “I’m sure it’s a big opportunity for the Korean people to have more passion for skiing, to have more athletes. That must be the goal to do Olympic Games in new states — to have more countries that follow the sport.”

Indeed, bankrolled by a president who also controls the Lotte Group conglomerate, the Korean Ski Association pumped more than \$4 million into the test event and the development of Korean skiers.

One Korean racer, Kim Hyeon-tae, made his World Cup super-G debut in the race, and nearly all of the forerunners were Koreans.

“We needed an additional downhill in Asia,” International Ski Federation president Gian-Franco Kasper said. “We have Japan, we have now Korea, and we will have China very soon, which means the World Cup can have a series in China, Korea, and Japan.”

Kasper added he was “100 percent” sure the course would be kept.

“No question,” he said. “Koreans are intelligent people, they know what to do.”

Part of the problem goes beyond the

concerns of environmentalists.

The venue is also a pilgrimage site for local women praying for fertility at several sacred trees.

“I understand the environmentalists, but it was difficult to explain here why they want to protect it,” said course designer Bernhard Russi, the 1972 Olympic champion. “I went up with them and said, ‘Tell me now where the trees are, because I can go right or left.’”

When locals explained to Russi that there were more holy trees on the proposed women’s course, he scrapped plans for two courses and just cut a single track for both genders.

“We haven’t ruined more than three or four special trees,” Russi said.

One of the sacred trees is adjacent to the downhill course and was left standing.

“It’s strange,” Russi said.

However, the former Swiss racer would not enter into the legacy debate over his creation.

“We should leave that to the Koreans,” he said. “They have to decide what they want to do. ... I can say this mountain (adapts) for much more than racing.”

Furniture giant IKEA loses its trademark in Indonesia

By Niniek Karmini
The Associated Press

JAKARTA, Indonesia — There is Samsung of South Korea, Sony of Japan, BMW of Germany, and IKEA of Indonesia. Wait! IKEA of Indonesia? Yes, at least in Indonesia, if not worldwide.

The furniture giant, founded in Sweden in 1943, has lost a trademark dispute in Indonesia after the country’s highest court agreed the IKEA name was owned by a local company.

Indonesian rattan furniture company PT Ratania Khatulistiwa registered its IKEA trademark in December 2013. It’s an acronym of the Indonesian words Intan Khatulistiwa Esa Abadi, which refer to the rattan industry.

The Supreme Court’s ruling was made in May last year, but only recently surfaced publicly with its publication online by the court.

The ruling said IKEA, which registered its trademark in Indonesia in 2010, had not actively used the trademark in three consecutive years for commercial purposes and it could be deleted under Indonesia’s trademark

law. IKEA’s only outlet in Indonesia opened near the capital, Jakarta, in late 2014.

Supreme Court spokesman Suhadi, who goes by one name, said the ruling was not unanimous. One member of the three-judge panel said in his dissent

that the trademark law cannot be applied to a company as big as IKEA and much larger than the plaintiff, Ratania.

Officials at Ratania, which is located in Indonesia’s second-largest city, Surabaya, refused to comment. Inter IKEA Systems B.V., the worldwide IKEA

franchisor, said its lawyers were notified of the decision in early February and were still studying it. But it said it expected that IKEA operations would be able to continue in the country without interruption.

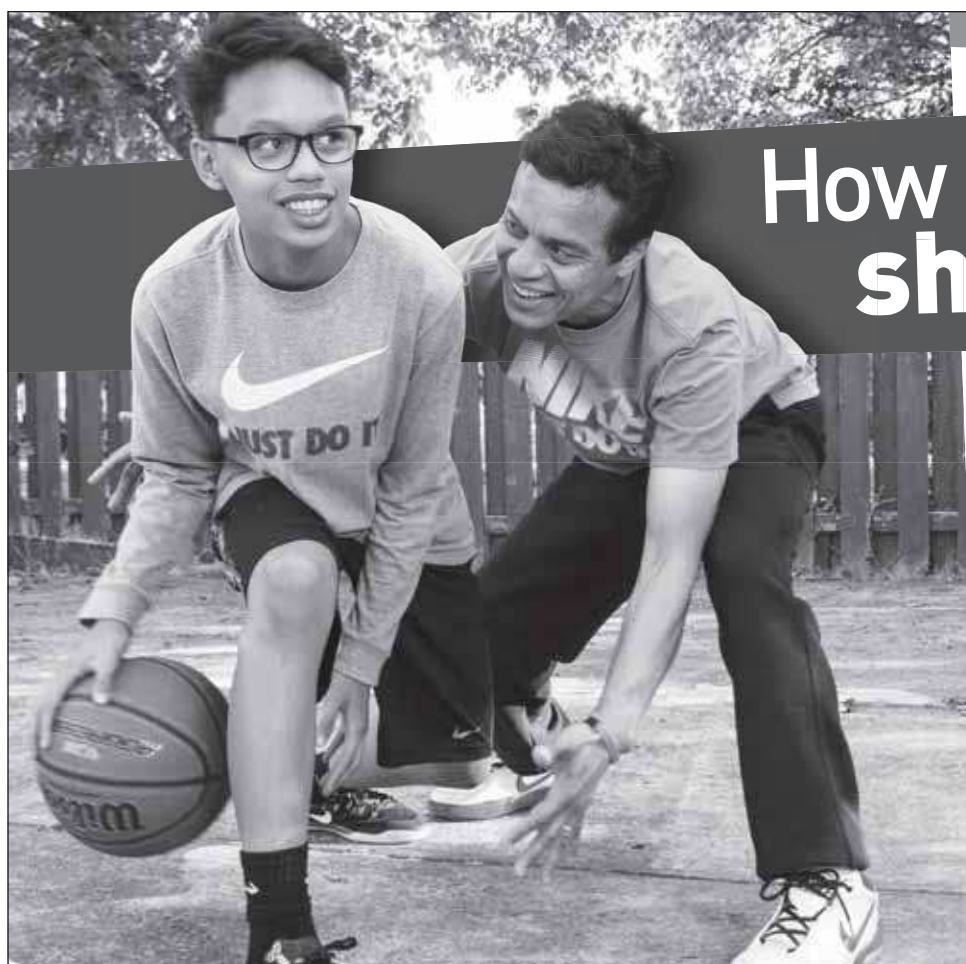
The Indonesian company took its case to the Central Jakarta District Court in

mid-2014, when the first IKEA store in Indonesia was under construction.

The court ruled in September 2014 that the trademark was owned by Ratania and ordered IKEA to stop using its own name, which is an acronym for its founder, Ingvar Kamprad, and the farm Elmtaryd and

village Agunnaryd where he grew up. IKEA appealed to the Supreme Court last year.

IKEA stores around the world are run under a franchise system. Since the early 1980s, the IKEA Group has been owned by a foundation registered in the Netherlands.



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