



Report of the FIL Development Program: 2020-2021 Season 6.9

Submitted by FIL Artificial Track Development Manager Fred Zimny

The FIL Development program is broad in scope and attempts to address the needs of both general class, junior and youth level athletes. As we all know, 2020 was an extraordinary year with the Covid pandemic affecting all facets of life, including a significant impact on the sporting world in general. And luge was no exception. With the entire international junior circuit cancelled, the focus of the FIL Development Program was on conducting a safe yet productive season at the general class level. And I'm happy to say that thanks to the FIL's Covid protocols and health initiatives, members of FIL Group 1 participated in all scheduled training and WC races with no positive cases to report.

Typically, the FIL Development Program attempts to assist NFs through the support application process. Programs that annually receive support include the FIL Luge School, the Patenschaft program, track vouchers, FIL Group 1, FIL Group 2, race accommodation support, coaching, equipment, travel support and individual NF projects. The FIL Development Program will continue to focus on where the need is greatest, that being developing nations without their own track and with few athletes. The entire FIL Presidium and staff should be thanked for their unwavering support of NFs and their athletes operating within the FIL Development Program. In particular, Vice President of Sport Claire DelNegro has been instrumental in helping guide improvements to the program as well as Executive Director Christoph Schweiger. And the assistance of Erika Votz has been invaluable.

What follows is a review of some of the larger support categories administered by the Development Program:

FIL Luge School

An annual staple of the development program, sadly the FIL Luge School had to be cancelled for 2020-2021.

FIL Teams

A corner stone of the entire FIL Development Program are the two FIL Teams, Group 1 and Group 2. For both groups the FIL provides coaches, equipment, transportation and includes weeks that are fully funded for both track fees and/or accommodations. Group 1 was led by head coach Maciej Kurowski and assisted by Yuriy Hayduk, Petr Kinzel, Bogdan Macovei and Tomas Kinzel. Together they led a total of 17 athletes from 8 different nations through the modified training and race schedule in general class. Race results were a mixed bag for the group with a future goal of improving performance and providing enhanced equipment for the more experienced athletes.

Group 2 unfortunately did not participate in any training or racing due to Covid.

FIL Group 3

Planned to roll out in the 2020-2021 season, FIL Group 3 is a program for brand new athletes from developing nations that will focus only on training and learning before moving on to the competition focused Groups 1 & 2. Again, because of Covid and the coming Olympic season, this program has been delayed until 2022-2023.

Patenschaft Program

The FIL provides financial support to larger nations who partner with smaller, developing nations who receive coaching and sled tuning assistance as well as other benefits. Athletes from the smaller nation train and travel with their host counterparts. While Covid affected some of these partnerships, the

nations that were able to participate included: ARG/GER, NED/RUS, POL/GER, SUI/GER, SVK/USA, SWE/AUT.

Vouchers

Valued at €25 each, track vouchers provided by the FIL can be used at any track toward training costs and continues to be one of the more popular forms of FIL support among nations. For the 2020-2021 season, allocations totaling €300,000 were distributed in the form of vouchers. Regretfully, use of the vouchers was significantly affected by the pandemic and the modified racing schedule.

Transportation

Each federation participating in overseas World Cup events receives an allocation toward flight support and often equipment transportation costs. Additional support is provided to some nations through the support application process to ensure their participation in competitions and training.

Equipment and material purchase

Subsidies were provided in 2020-2021 to obtain the necessary equipment to ensure safe and reliable participation in WC events. Support for the purchase of suit/shoe/glove sets are made available to developing teams as are helmets to all nations at no cost. Athletes participating with Group 1 & 2 are also offered a sled to use at no cost.

Coaches

The greatest support the FIL provides in terms of coaching is the FIL coaching staff utilized by developing nations participating with Group 1 & 2. The FIL funds 100% of the cost for 3 coaches at the junior level and 2 at the general class level for nations that do not have the resources to fund their own coaching staff. For 2020-2021 and with the forced cancellation of the international junior schedule, all 5 of the FIL coaches travelled with FIL Group 1, providing the participating athletes with an unprecedented level of coaching and equipment assistance.

Physical Testing

Beginning in 2020, the FIL implemented a new program of physical testing for all athletes participating with FIL Group 1 & 2. Using a battery of 7 tests, the goal is to test athletes a minimum of 3 times per year to ensure their physical training program is effective and they are prepared for the rigors of luge once the season begins. All athletes must achieve required minimum scores in order to participate with the FIL groups.

Race Support

The FIL provides €500 for each athlete at a WC event for up to 4 athletes per nation plus an additional €1000 for nations participating in all disciplines at a competition. This is a significant way for NFs to offset their weekly costs and will continue to be a part of the FIL support program.

Conclusion

The FIL has made significant efforts in alleviating the increasing costs borne by NFs to have their athletes participate in the sport of luge. Though it is financially impossible to address all the needs of every nation, there are many programs in place to help with the cost burden of travel, training, equipment and accommodations for developing nations. Costs will continue to be a main focus of attention moving forward. Other highlights include:

- Introduction of summer training camps for FIL Group 1 & 2 athletes.
- Increased accountability on the part of NFs on voucher usage and financial allocations.
- Provide higher quality equipment to experienced athletes participating in FIL Groups 1 & 2.
- Individualized year-round support and oversight of athlete training by FIL Coach Maciej Kurowski.