

## **State of the FIL Development Program: 2022-2023**

Submitted by Fred Zimny

Approximately mid-way through the 2022-2023 FIL fiscal year, there have been many challenges facing the FIL Development Program and it's goals of providing under represented nations with the tools necessary to create robust, long term and successful luge programs. Below you will find a brief description covering a number of areas within development and their current state of health:

### **Budget**

As in almost all areas of sport, budget is a major driving factor in helping to provide the quality tools necessary to help nations develop in the sport of luge. It is certainly not the only concern, but recent budget cuts have had a significant limiting factor on the support that can be provided to member nations, the programs that can be conducted and the number of athletes they are able to be develop. Decreases in race support, vouchers, partnership support, NF programs and the required 50% funding requirement of NFs have created challenges that must be addressed and overcome by using creative thinking and narrowing the focus on what development means.

### **Change in focus of the development program**

In the past, the FIL Development Program represented support to member NFs at all levels of participation and competitions, from National Team to grassroots athlete recruitment. A new philosophy that will govern future development support will focus more on true athlete development and the goals of the strategic plan to support public/snow luge. The development program will move away from supporting National Team level athletes, equipment purchases and general team expenses. Rather the focal point will be more towards helping NFs find, recruit and develop new athletes while leaving future funding for elite level athletes to the NFs and NOCs.

### **Coaches**

With the beginning of a new quadrennium comes changes in the FIL coaching staff. We are very happy this year to have the following coaches guiding the FIL Groups:

Group 1: Ioan Apostle & Yuriy Hayduk, Group 2: Petr Kinzel & Tomas Kinzel, Youth A Continental Cup Group: Bogdan Macovei & Martins Lozbers. It's a short and long term goal to try to identify and recruit female coaches in to the FIL coaching family.

### **Luge School**

In the 2021-2022 season, the FIL was awarded an IOC Solidarity Grant to conduct a luge school. Unfortunately, covid forced cancellation of those plans, but the IOC generously extended the grant into 2022-2023 season. Thanks to Dwight Bell's close collaboration with the IOC, the camp is scheduled to take place in Sigulda October 14-24 and there are currently 15 nations scheduled to participate, most notably Thailand, India and Ukraine.

### **Natural Track**

Natural track continues to play an important role within the overall FIL sport program, but just like in AT, budget cuts will have their effect on overall support to the NFs. A NT working group made up of Sorin Buta, Andreas Castiglioni, Sorina Ticu and Fred Zimny has been assembled to help guide the FIL NT development program and support for the coming season.

### **Continental Cup**

This entirely new race series was developed for Youth A level athletes and will have its' inaugural season in 2022-2023. The driving force behind the series was to try and reduce the overall number of athletes found previously at JWC weekends. The large number of athletes from the combined Youth A and Junior categories made it extremely difficult for organizers and tracks alike to provide the required training and track conditions for a JWC race. Everyone is hoping the concept will be a success.

### **Development Application Process**

A new streamlined and simpler application process was developed for NFs wishing to apply for FIL Development support. The process now consists of two short-form applications, one for specific funding requests related to development projects within a nation, and the other for requesting inclusion in an FIL group, luge school or partnership with another nation. The first iteration of the new application process appeared to work seamlessly, but as always; tweaks will be made to make the process as user-friendly as possible

### **Summer Camps**

As has been the case now for the last two years, a summer training camp was held for those athletes participating with FIL Group 1 & 2 in Karpacz, POL and Smerzovka, CZE respectively. It is hoped that this model will grow into two camps for each group during the off season, one at the beginning of the spring/summer training period to assess strengths and weaknesses and develop individualized training programs, and one just before the beginning of the fall sliding season to gauge improvements.

### **Track Time**

More than ever before, the ability to find training time for the FIL Groups has become a huge challenge. Demand for training time due to the increasing number of disciplines in all the sliding sports has become a tremendous challenge. Even as early as May, there were tracks already fully booked for the entire season. Of course, this was somewhat exacerbated by the closure of Koenigssee, which everyone hopes will be back online in the near future.

### **Thailand Camp**

A unique summer luge introductory camp was held in Thailand in May designed to present luge to a group of handpicked athletes from around that nation for future involvement. Overseen by Fred Zimny and Maciej Kurowski, the camp immersed 20 eager athletes in a week of wheel sled training, start practice and other activities.

### **Conclusion**

It must be mentioned that the counsel of Vice President of Sport Claire Del Negro has been instrumental in the effort to continually improve the FIL Development Program. It is believed that the current state of the FIL Development Program is a healthy one, but there are still challenges to be addressed, most notably how to increase funding for development in order to expand allocations to deserving nations, identify sources for sleds and how to implement an ambitious strategic plan with diminishing resources.