

Olympic fever remains a bit chilly

Local residents mixed about hosting Games

By DEBORAH HASTINGS
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

TURIN, Italy

No crowd, no snow, no view of the mountains.

Less than 48 hours before opening ceremonies, the expression of Olympic fever in this northwest Italian city was decidedly understated.

Part of this pertains to the reserved nature of the Torinese, to hear them tell it. Part of this is because the weather is not cooperating. And part of it is because many locals find the ever-changing security measures and street

closures just plain maddening.

"For us it's a disaster," said Emma Salomone, co-owner of the Bignet Cafe on Via Genoa, just a few blocks from the Lingotto Oval, the upcoming home of speed skating competition and current site of closed roads and detours.

"It's a problem, it's a problem," she complained. "I'm happy about the Olympics. But Turin isn't used to such radical changes."

A largely unsung city, Turin's predominant reputation was industry and Fiat's assembly line. But officials here, through long-standing revitalization, have heralded the ancient city's architectural and artistic landmarks.

Unfortunately, efforts to dress the place up, coupled with final building touches still under way at nearly every Olympic venue,

leaves a preponderance of construction sites across the city.

In the historic Piazza Castello, the medal ceremony venue is a long way from finished. At the sprawling Lingotto mall, work site of various committees and thousands of journalists, hammers pound long into the night.

Organizing chief Valentino Castellani sees all problems as little.

"We will have always some small problems to solve. What is important is to solve them quickly," he said earlier this week.

After a slow climb over several months, ticket sales surpassed 720,000 Wednesday, about 85 percent of the total. Low-price tickets are being offered to local school children, and extra box offices have been added to sell hundreds of extra, high-end tick-

ets added Wednesday.

For \$130, it was possible to purchase a prime spot to watch the men's downhill Sunday.

It was also still possible to buy tickets for nearly every sport category from snowboarding to speed skating.

Impossible, apparently, was finding a hotel room at the last minute.

Word on the street was that every room was booked for the duration of the Winter Games, said Paola Piacenza, spokesman for Turin Hotels International, which owns four 4-star hotels in the city.

The weather is another matter entirely. Temperatures are predicted in the mid-30s for the next several days, with clouds, meaning the surrounding mountains will remain shrouded, giving no backdrop to this city nestled below the Alps.



AP PHOTO
Kristina Koznick bends a slalom gate during the women's U.S. Alpine National Championships at Mammoth Ski Area in Mammoth Lakes, Calif., on April 3. Koznick is hoping her battered knee holds up for her final Olympics.

U.S. slalom skier holding on to hope

Injured knee could keep Koznick off slopes

By ERICA BULMAN
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SESTRIERE, Italy

It's not the symmetry Kristina Koznick wants. The top-ranked U.S. women's slalom skier is hoping that her Olympic career doesn't end the way it started, on the injury list instead of the slopes.

Koznick partially tore ligaments in her right knee while warming up for a World Cup race in Germany last weekend, and she doesn't know if she'll even participate in Friday's opening ceremony, much less the women's slalom on Feb. 22. She said she won't march if she's on crutches.

"I'm at least working toward a chance, which is better than nothing," she said by phone Wednesday on her way to be fitted for a brace.

Koznick said she should know more today, when she expects to meet with U.S. Ski Team doctor William Sterett.

Then she could face an unhappy choice: Race injured or surrender her spot to another U.S. hopeful.

"Right now, as far as competing, we don't know whether that's going to happen," said Koznick's coach and boyfriend, Dan Stripp. "If she feels like she can't, she's going to say, 'I can't do it.'"

While Koznick's ACL is still attached, Stripp said, her bone was bruised, and the doctor probably will share the decision. Meanwhile, it's rehab and a dose of hope.

It's not the first time Koznick, 30, has confronted hard luck and hard decisions.

A more severe injury to her other knee kept her from what would have been her first Olympics in 1994. Frostbite sidelined her for part of the 1995-96 World Cup season.

This is her final season as a World Cup skier and her final Olympics, the last chances for that elusive big win.

In the 1998 Olympics, she failed to finish the slalom, and in 2002 she was 17th in the giant slalom

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Kristina Koznick
30-year-old slalom skier
on nursing her injured knee so she can compete in her final Olympics

and did not finish the slalom.

As the only independent racer on the World Cup circuit, she first left the U.S. Ski team after her relationship with Stripp led to his firing as a U.S. coach in 1999. She rejoined the U.S. squad in 2003 but returned to independent status last year.

Koznick admits that maintaining her own tiny team, with only a handful of staffers, can be a challenge. Everything becomes a worry, from denting the rental car to an illness on the staff. That constant struggle makes her latest setback even more poignant.

The Minnesota native hasn't won a World Cup race since 2003, but she had two second places and a third last winter. This season, she has been in the top 10 in four of the five World Cup slaloms she entered and twice brushed the podium, finishing fourth both in Maribor, Slovenia, and Lienz, Austria.

In a career that includes six slalom victories but no major championships, "Koz" was hoping Sestriere would be a defining triumph.

Currently eighth in the World Cup women's slalom standings, she is the country's best chance for a women's slalom medal. Because she is ranked seventh on the World Cup Start List, she would be the only U.S. woman with the advantage of starting in the first group, before the course gets chopped up.

The U.S. team is ready with a replacement should Koznick scratch. "She's a great slalom skier, and the U.S. needs to have the best team possible," said U.S. women's technical coach Trevor Wagner. "But we'll be racing four women in every event. If she can't, there are other athletes who would go instead."



AP PHOTOS

Italian police officers stand at the checkpoint of the Olympic village in Sestriere, Italy, on Wednesday. Rising tensions in Muslim communities have added concerns for the 2006 Winter Games security plan, but Turin's police chief says his officers are ready for the challenge.

Police: 'Let us do our job'

Chief says security plan in place as potential threats to Games increase

By DAVID CRARY
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

TURIN, Italy

Fast-changing events, including regional protests and the surge of rioting across the Muslim world, have complicated the task of protecting the Winter Games. The host city's police chief still believes security plans are flexible and thorough enough to avert serious problems.

"Our plan, which has been in preparation for many years, took into account the possible emergence of new problems," Rodolfo Poli said in an interview at his office Wednesday with The Associated Press.

"We're policemen, not altar boys," he added. "We always think more pessimistically than what happens in reality."

Poli, a veteran of Italy's long-running battle against domestic terrorist groups such as the Red Brigades, said authorities are bracing for attempts by leftist and anti-globalization protesters to stage attention-getting disruptions of the games as they get under way Friday.

On Wednesday, for the second time in four days, torch bearers carrying the Olympic flame were forced to change their route because of protests.

The torch was supposed to have passed through Avigliana, about 15 miles west of Turin. But authorities said they diverted the relay to a stage between Buttigliera Alta and Rosta because law enforcement agencies suggested planned protests along the route could turn violent.

Officials said all the planned torchbearers for the Avigliana route ran their legs on the alternate route.

Protests on Sunday enveloped the



Marielle Goitschel, two-time gold medalist in the women's giant slalom, carries the Olympic torch during its passage in Grenoble, in the French Alps, on Monday. On Wednesday, torch carriers were forced to change their route because of protests.

Olympic torch relay as it passed through the northern Susa Valley, which has recently been wracked by violent demonstrations over the construction of a high-speed rail line. Torchbearers were forced to change their route after they were surrounded by demonstrators who unsuccessfully tried to extinguish the flame with a banner.

The torch is due to arrive in Turin on Friday for the opening ceremony. Poli also acknowledged that new security

concerns had arisen because of the recent rioting by Muslims angered over cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad published in several European newspapers.

Asked if athletes from Denmark and other countries targeted by the riots would receive extra security, he replied rhetorically, "What would you do?"

Turin has a substantial Muslim community, estimated at about 10,000, that already has been the focus of security efforts. A local Moroccan-born imam was expelled from Italy in September on grounds that his hardline views represented a danger to public security.

Asked if the recent Muslim rioting in other countries had prompted even tighter monitoring of Turin's Muslims, Poli answered politely, "Let us do our job."

Denmark, where the controversial cartoons first appeared, is sending five athletes and five officials to the Games. The team chief, Jesper Frigast Larsen, said Tuesday that the delegation has been in contact with security forces and "so far they tell us we can act normally" and travel around Turin without any restrictions.

"There's always a list of some countries where security forces look a little closer. That is traditionally countries like Israel and USA and so on, and Denmark has been put on this list," he said. "It is not something that will mean a big change for us."

The vast multinational security plan for the Olympics includes coordination by Italy and foreign security agencies to monitor possible terrorist threats. Poli said the plan involves about 10,000 police officers, reinforced by soldiers to protect Olympic venues. NATO is providing two AWACS surveillance planes to patrol over northern Italy during the games.

IOC: Jones investigation continues

The Associated Press

TURIN, Italy

The International Olympic Committee will continue to investigate doping allegations against Marion Jones despite the five-time Olympic medalist's court settlement with the man who accused her of using banned drugs.

The American sprinter settled her \$25 million defamation suit in U.S. District Court in San Francisco on Monday against BALCO founder Victor Conte, who's serving a four-month prison term for his role in the steroid scandal.

Terms of the deal were not disclosed. Conte attorney James Wagstaffe said the case was settled on "confidential terms."

IOC officials expressed concern Wednesday that case evidence and testimony would be kept secret but vowed to press forward with their inquiry into whether Jones was doped when she won five medals at the 2000 Sydney Games.

"We have to find out what the settlement means," said Thomas Bach, a German lawyer leading the IOC inquiry. "The case is still



AP PHOTO

Marion Jones has been under investigation for reportedly using performance-enhancing drugs during the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games.

on. We want to clear up all the circumstances as far as possible. We're still looking for evidence."

Bach confirmed that, if the IOC determines Jones was using banned substances, she could be stripped of her Sydney medals. Jones won three gold medals (100 meters, 200 and 1,600 relay) and two bronze (long jump and 400 relay). She repeatedly has denied ever using banned drugs.

On another issue Wednesday, Rogge said the IOC was talking with the U.S. Olympic Committee about concerns that the Americans

receive too big a share of television and sponsorship revenues.

Many national Olympic committees have long resented the IOC's deal with the USOC, which receives a 12.75 percent share of U.S. TV rights fees and a 20 percent slice of global marketing revenues.

With the IOC now relying less on American sponsors, there is pressure to cut the USOC's allocation. Without giving details, Rogge said the IOC had opened discussions with the USOC on the issue.

IOC marketing director Gerhard Heiberg denied the committee was trying to renegotiate the deal.

"There is no renegotiation going on," he said. "... There is a contract between the USOC and IOC, and we respect that contract."

Earlier, the IOC ignored the furor over the Prophet Muhammad cartoons published in Denmark and awarded Copenhagen the right to host the Olympic Congress and IOC session in 2009.

At those meetings, the IOC will discuss the future of the Olympic movement, conduct a presidential election and select the host city for the 2016 Summer Games.

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