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STORY HEADLINE: Mongolia head home from Lausanne 2020 proving the Olympic Spirit is well and truly alive

LOCATION: Vallée de Joux Cross-Country Centre

DATE: January 21, 2020

LANGUAGE: French

Broadcast quality footage available at the IOC Newsroom: http://iocnewsroom.com

STORY SCRIPT:
Two years ago the six athletes representing Mongolia at the Winter Youth Olympic Games (YOG) knew nothing about the Nordic disciplines that they took part in at Lausanne 2020.

But they leave Switzerland having experienced competition at the highest level and as living proof the Olympic spirit is well and truly alive.

The best result for the team was a 12th placed finish for Enkhsaikhan Enkhbat in the men’s 12.5km individual biathlon. Byambasuren Chuluunbat competed in the women's biathlon.

The other four athletes Nomin-Erdene Barsnyam, Khongor Batsukh, Urangoo Dulamsuren and Zolbayar Otgonkhagva competed in the cross-country skiing. The competition came to an end on Tuesday, January 21, with Otgonkhagva as the best placed finishing 38th in the men's 10km classic.

It is proof that the considerable amount of time, energy and money poured into a hugely ambitious project has come to fruition.

The skiers are products of a passion project Pascal Gertsch began three years ago in the wilderness of eastern Mongolia.

With wooden sticks for makeshift ski poles, 15 enthusiastic children, and an affection for cross-country skiing and Mongolia, he embarked on a mission to build a team for the Lausanne Games, from scratch.

The retired Swiss doctor had been volunteering his medical expertise in Mongolia since 2013, and putting together a team for a Games held in his homeland seemed an opportunity not to be missed.
Before long, Gertsch had come up with blueprints to build ski tracks in Mongolia, imported hundreds of pairs of skis, and taken the young hopefuls on training and competition trips across Europe – all out of his own pocket.

To introduce the young skiers to where they might be competing, Gertsch brought them on several training camps to Vallée de Joux, the cross-country skiing venue for Lausanne 2020.

To attain sufficient points on the International Ski Federation circuit and be eligible for the YOG, he took them from Italy to north of the Arctic Circle to compete in events.

Lausanne 2020 is the third edition of the Winter YOG, bringing together the world’s best young athletes between the ages of 15 and 18. For the first time in Winter Olympic history the Games will have gender equality, with equal numbers of male and female competitors in the 81 medal events.

1,872 athletes from 79 National Olympic Committees (NOCs) will be in action in Lausanne, 12 of those NOCs for the first time at a Youth Olympic Games - Albania, Azerbaijan, Ecuador, Haiti, Hong Kong, Kosovo, Pakistan, Qatar, Singapore, Thailand, Turkmenistan and Trinidad & Tobago.

As well as the brand new sport of Ski Mountaineering, Lausanne 2020 features five new events, Women’s Nordic Combined, Individual Normal Hill/4km, Women’s Doubles Luge, Mixed NOC 3x3 Ice Hockey, Freeski Big Air, Snowboard Big Air.

The first Winter Youth Olympic Games took place in Innsbruck, Austria, in 2012. The second edition was held in the Norwegian city of Lillehammer in 2016.

SHOTLIST:
00:05 Aerial shot Vallée de Joux Cross-Country Centre
00:13 Various shots of Mongolia delegation

01:00 SOUNDBITE: Pascal Gertsch. Mentor, Team Mongolia (French Language).
“I was in a very cold place in January 2016, in the country of Genghis Khan. I met a border army colonel who showed me a beautiful hill where the spirit of this fierce conqueror was still present.”

01:23 Pascal Gertsch with Mongolian athletes

01:34 SOUNDBITE: Pascal Gertsch. Mentor, Team Mongolia (French Language).
“I met his team (the colonel’s), equipped with precarious equipment. The sticks were made with wood stick and cords. I promised to help them. The thing is, when I came back to Switzerland they just announced the 2020 YOG. I started to think about it and once I started I got carried away, telling myself I will train a team who will participate in these Games. That is how it started.”

02:03 Mongolian athlete carrying skis
02:09 Various Mongolian delegation in team room
"There was no favouritism. People did not get soft telling themselves ‘These Mongolians are nice, all this story is sweet’. No no, they deserved it. We ended up with 2 (men) and 2 (women); It was a dream come true for me. I would have never imagined that this would be possible to get 4. But here we are, thanks to their work."

03:16 Mongolian athletes warming up

"That is the way it is, they help each other, it is a real team, they are brother and sister in a way, in the effort. And this is what I really enjoy. That warms my heart deep inside."

03:53 Mongolian athletes warming up

“They were really good (today). When one of your racer finished 38 during a YOG competition this is not mediocre. They’re all in the 2nd third. Considering they only had 2 years of training, much less than everyone else here, it is really good. I am proud of them and I am happy for them."

04:17 Mongolian athletes warming up

“The future for me is to re implement the ski at school (back there in Mongolia), so they can get the basics, and finish the Nordic centre that already has its FIS (International Ski Federation) track… In Mongolia of course.”

04:22 Aerial shot Vallée de Joux Cross-Country Centre