

Opinion: Skiing officials are wrong in denying Vonn's request

By David Trifunov, Global Post

Saying it's written clearly in the rules – and clearly not understanding the spirit of the request – skiing's international governing body on Saturday denied Lindsey Vonn's request to compete against the men.

The American World Cup champion had asked FIS to let her compete in the men's World Cup downhill skiing race later this month at Lake Louise in Alberta, Canada.

"The council respected Lindsey Vonn's proposal to participate in men's World Cup races and confirmed that one gender is not entitled to participate in races of the other and exceptions will not be made to the FIS rules," an official statement said, according to AFP.

FIS, somehow, has been caught unprepared.

Golf has experimented with allowing women – Michelle Wie and Annika Sorenstam – lineup alongside the men. Danica Patrick continues to challenge men on the racetracks of NASCAR after a successful Indy Car career.

Countless others have already broken that stereotype – Billie Jean King in tennis and golf's Babe Zaharias being the most famous. Heck, even ice hockey allowed men to blast frozen pucks at Manon Rheaume's head in an NHL exhibition game.

Skiing should have seen this coming, you'd think. We're moving past the 24-hours news cycle into an age where social media and smart phones make exchanging views and news instantaneous.

FIS said it considered the request and, not slighting Vonn's skills or accomplishments, flatly denied it.

They could've said tried to say men's racecourses are too dangerous for women (ignoring Vonn's two Olympic medals and 53 World Cup wins) but FIS instead tried to say it's just not in the rules.

Wait, isn't racing against 40-odd other cars at 200 mph on a concrete oval more dangerous?

Sure, she's looking for a new challenge after dominating the women's World Cup races these last few years. Vonn won the women's downhill championship from 2008 through 2010 and again last season, and has won the 2010 Winter Olympic downhill in Vancouver.

But this is more about, "Why not? What are we waiting for?"

Organizers of the Lake Louise race said they'd happily welcome Vonn. There's little danger for her there, anyway. She's won nine of her 26 World Cup downhill races on the resort's slopes.

"I saw it as a great opportunity to raise the profile of the sport by attracting interest from people who do not normally follow ski racing, particularly in North America," Alpine Canada president Max Gartner said.

"It would have been interesting to see how she stacked up against the best male racers in the world. Lake Louise is the perfect venue to have that comparison because Lindsey has as much experience on the mountain as many of the men have had.

What makes the whole situation worse, though, is that FIS invited Vonn to apply for a "forerunner" position.

Forerunners test the racecourse before the athletes compete for real.

Suggesting Vonn become a forerunner would be like Yahoo telling Marissa Mayer, "thanks, but our CEO position has been filled by a man, but maybe you want to work in our marketing department?"

Face it FIS, this is going to happen sooner rather than later.

Change your rules now, because the world is changing quickly around you.