

The province of PyeongChang in South Korea is located on the north east side, yet a safe distance from the DMZ of Northern Korea.

To get to the venue was a 3 hr drive from Inichen airport (Seoul). Much anticipation surrounded the hosting of these World Championships as Korea is putting in a very serious bid to host the 2018 Winter Olympic Games. The venue for Biathlon had a test run last year and as a result improvements were made for this year to facilitate a smoother running of the venue, admin and competition tracks.

Our accommodation was within the YongPyeong alpine resort in a large hotel that catered for the 400 persons attending for Biathlon (this is athletes, coaches and other support staff) A regular bus shuttle ran the 3km to the Biathlon Stadium from early morning until late at night.

Other winter venues for the Sliding sports (Alpine, Ski Jumping, Luge, XC etc) are well under way with Stadiums and future Olympic village sites under construction. The Alpensia resort which will incorporate one part of an Olympic Village will also double as prestigious accommodation for the 36 hole golf course and wellness centre already constructed next door to it.

Koreans and other foreign visitors must be very passionate about their golf, within a 5 km radius of our hotel there were three golf course ranging in size from 9 holes to 36 hole courses. The larger ones all have golf buggy tracks around and doubled as a perfect place to go for a run as no one plays golf in the winter in Korea.

Because of the climatic location of winter sport in Korea, they are very reliant on man made snow to succeed. The Biathlon Stadium is only 750mt (asl), the Alpine runs run down from a height of 1600mts (asl)

Making snow is no problem for them as water is plentiful and the seasonal average temperature for February (proposed OWG 2018 timetable) is -10. On our arrival we did see natural snow on the ground and in the trees yet not a substantial amount.



During a conversation with the coach from Korea in early January, he said the main problem athletes would have to contend with in the shooting stadium was wind, our first day there did not prove him wrong and the wind remained unabated for all our training and competition periods. It would range from 9 m/s down to 3m/s, it's a problem to shoot in when it is so variable even if it is coming from the same direction. You try to compensate for it yet at times it comes down to a 'Bingo shoot' pending on your lucky time to come into the stadium and shoot.

The first few days there the cold weather disappointed us. The average temp jumped to heat wave proportions of +15 in parts of the day, couple that with rain that came through for 36 hrs and it spells disaster for man made snow. In essence the ski course lost 20cm of snow cover leaving behind a 20cm base of ice to ski on, the surrounding rivers and walkways were a muddy wash and conditions for the first race of the championships were dire to say the least.

With a task force of people from the organizing committee shifting and spreading 2000 Cubic meters of stock piled man made snow, combined with a drop in temp to just below zero on race morning, they were able get the races off the ground. Conditions were more favorable for the women's race that went first, the condition of the softening track meant the groomer could not run over the course and smooth it out for the men's race.

To say we have better conditions in Australia in this instance would be no lie.



The course tracks were tough and demanding with no real area to free ski and recover from the uphill climbs. The corners were steep, fast and rutted out which caused a good number of spills resulting in broken ski poles, snapped rifle stocks and a number of bruised and battered egos. Following coaches and athletes complaints on safety aspects, extra corner work was done to bank them and afford greater run out for the descents.

Our two athletes Mark Raymond and Alexi Almoukov naturally put their best efforts into the races (10km Sprint and 20 km Individual) getting results a little lower than is possible if conditions were ideal. Ideal conditions are hard fast squeaky dry snow with no wind. Man made snow makes for different skiing than on Natural snow and ski choice itself is also crucial. Full results can be found by visiting www.biathworld.com



Alex has one more Biathlon competition at the Open European Championships (U26) that start on the 26 March until 5 April. For a change of pace mark is going onto the XC World Champs for the 50km race followed a few weeks later by a special invite to compete in the Arctic Circle race around Greenland. A tough 180km classic race staged over 3 days.

Not be put off though, they both plan on continuing competition for the remainder of the season as the focus now shifts to the 2010 Olympic Games in Vancouver and the hope that Australia gets a coveted spot for one athlete, which athlete we send I can not say at this stage, there are mores races to be run and more results to be scrutinized.

It has been a busy season and this report signals the end of my European season as I say farewell and head beck home to commence real work again and wait for our winter to start in just a little over 4 months.

Regards Paul Connor Australian National Coach