

WINTER OLYMPICS

President listening to will of volunteers

Complaints down from Games' start

Jim Michaels
USA TODAY

PYEONGCHANG, South Korea — Olympic Games volunteers had a host of gripes, ranging from lousy food to overcrowded accommodations.

So they did what many of their fellow countrymen do: They went to the president.

Petitioning the president has become extremely popular. Last year President Moon Jae-in opened the floodgates by promising the presidential website would become a national bulletin board for citizens who want to be heard.

More than 50,000 petitions have been filed, ranging from a plea to ban eating dog meat to urging the Blue House to publicly sell commemorative

presidential watches. Some have only a few signatures, but others have thousands.

The issue of volunteers is an important one for Moon, whose political career rides at least partly on the success of the Olympics.

"The Blue House is ... very interested in the operation of the Games so they have also received some letters" of complaints, said Nancy Park, the Olympic organizing committee spokeswoman. Blue House is the presidential palace.

About 14,000 volunteers are working at the Winter Games. They are impossible to miss, with their red and gray uniforms and irrepressible cheeriness.

Leaving a freestyle skiing event this past weekend, dozens of young volunteers lined the path to smile and wave goodbye to spectators even though it was late and the temperature was dropping.

"They are the face of the games," Park said. "They're very important to us."



Volunteers enjoy themselves after the women's giant slalom was postponed because of strong winds last week.

ALEXANDER HASSENSTEIN/GETTY IMAGES

They levied a slew of complaints in the days leading up to the Games. Volunteers said they were stranded at venues because of a lack of buses. Many also said they had to stand in subfreezing weather without properly heated cabins to escape the cold during breaks.

They get free housing, but in the early days many volunteers complained of overcrowding and apartments with

leaky pipes and other problems. They also complained of lousy food.

The Pyeongchang Organizing Committee said only 141 volunteers left because of the problems and said the bulk of problems have been resolved.

"We've been doing what we can to address the needs of the volunteers, making sure that they're taken care of," Park said.

It seems to be working. Complaints from volunteers on social media have dwindled in recent days.

Petitions are part of the popular protest culture here. Massive protests led to the impeachment of Park Geun-hye, Moon's predecessor.

South Korea's post World War II history has been marked by turmoil and episodes of military rule, but it has emerged as a vibrant democracy.

Politicians have learned to listen to the voice of the people.

Contributing: Thomas Maresca in Seoul

No showdown for Vonn, just spotlight

Greatest women's skier all in at these Games

Nancy Armour
USA TODAY

PYEONGCHANG, South Korea — Lindsey Vonn has the spotlight all to herself.

Rather than a showdown with young American teammate Mikaela Shiffrin, the women's downhill is now all about the Speed Queen and her pursuit of another gold in her signature event. The spotlight will be squarely on Vonn on Wednesday, regardless of where she finishes.

"I've tried not to think about it as being my last Olympic downhill and just focus on the moment, the right here and the right now," Vonn said Monday.

It's that here and now that had made the prospect of Vonn and Shiffrin in the downhill so intriguing.

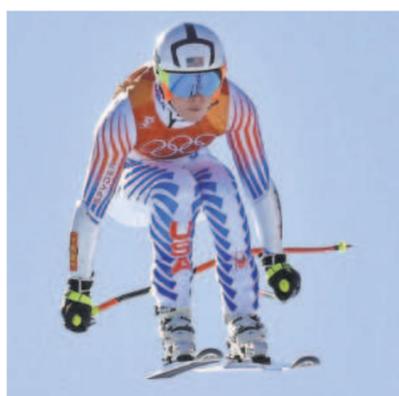
Vonn is the greatest female ski racer of all time, and it won't be long before the modifier becomes irrelevant. With 81 World Cup victories, she needs six more to surpass Swedish male Ingemar Stenmark's record.

And Shiffrin might one day pass them both.

A month shy of her 23rd birthday, Shiffrin has 41 World Cup wins. But most of those have been in the tech events, meaning she and Vonn rarely crossed paths on the World Cup circuit. That changed this season, as Shiffrin began adding speed events to her schedule.

She got her first career downhill win this season — at Lake Louise, in all places, which has been dubbed "Lake Lindsey" for all of Vonn's success there — and last month shared a podium with Vonn in Cortina, Italy.

With Shiffrin hoping to do all five events in Pyeongchang, the idea of seeing her and Vonn, 33, go head-to-head with Olympic gold on the line was one of



Lindsey Vonn says she plans to compete in the downhill and the combined, which will be held on back-to-back days.

MICHAEL MADRID/USA TODAY SPORTS

the most tantalizing story lines of the Games. But the fireworks keep fizzling.

First was Saturday's super-G, which Shiffrin dropped after racing the giant slalom and slalom the two previous days. (And taking gold in the GS, for those keeping track.) Now it's the downhill, which Shiffrin is skipping to focus on the Alpine combined that was moved from Friday to Thursday.

There's still the combined, where both are expected to be in the medals hunt. But that's not quite the same as the downhill, the premier ski race in the Olympics. What could be better than seeing a torch passed at 90 mph?

Then again, it feels right that Vonn gets the spotlight to herself in the race that's defined her.

For all that she's achieved, Vonn's luck at the Olympics has been stunningly bad. She was eighth in the downhill in Torino, two days after she had to be airlifted to a hospital following a scary crash in training. She missed Sochi after reinjuring her knee about six weeks before the Games.

Even in Vancouver, where she won

gold in the downhill and bronze in the super-G, she was skiing with a badly bruised shin.

With one last chance to have the Olympics she wants, Vonn has poured every bit of herself into these Games. The death of her beloved grandfather, Don Kildow, on Nov. 1 only hardened her resolve.

"This time I have a more important mission; win for my late Grandpa," Vonn said in an Instagram post the night before the super-G. "He will be watching from the best seat in the house, hopefully looking out for me and guiding me down the mountain."

Vonn didn't win the super-G, tying for sixth after making a mistake in the last turn. But she was upbeat afterward, knowing her best race was still in front of her.

"In general, this season, I feel like I've been much better in downhill than super-G," Vonn said Saturday. "And this hill, it suits me really well for downhill."

She's backed that up. She had the fastest time in Sunday's training run. Despite backing off a bit Monday, she still finished third, 0.35 seconds behind Austria's Stephanie Venier.

"I'm not looking to do anything special here in the training runs," Vonn said Monday. "I just want to get a feeling for the line. I'm trying some different skis every day to seeing what's running. But, in general, I'm really happy."

It is only a matter of days before Vonn's Olympic career is over, and she can see the finish line ahead. But as she's done for the better part of two decades, she will not let up until she's crossed it, pushing hard until the very end.

"You can't get too sentimental right now because I still have to race, I still have to be focused," she said. "Afterwards I'll do some reflecting."

And savor that one last race that belted all to her.

Vonn ignores social bullies

Josh Peter
USA TODAY

PYEONGCHANG, South Korea — Lindsey Vonn, the target of hateful comments on social media, said she has no plans to change her social media strategy and disengage.

"No, that's what bullies want you to do," Vonn said Monday after her training run at the downhill course. "They want to defeat you. I'm not defeated. I stand by my values, and I'm not going to back down."

"I may not be as vocal right now with my opinions, but that doesn't mean they've won. I haven't changed my mind."

Vonn, the American ski racing star, came under harsh attack on Twitter after her sixth-place finish in the super-G Saturday; many of the comments referred to Vonn's criticism of President Trump.

Before the Olympics, Vonn said she would not visit the White House if invited. In December she told CNN, "I want to represent our country well. I don't think that there are a lot of people currently in our government that do that."

On Monday, Vonn sighed while saying, "I always try to remember that it's people talking behind a computer and they're going to say anything. The most important thing is that I'm having a good time."

"I'm enjoying being at the Olympics. My family's here. They love me, and of course there's going to be people that hate me and hope I ski off a cliff and die. But that's fine. I'm not going to do that."

"I just take it for what it is. At some point you have to laugh and say this is just completely ridiculous."

Vonn is scheduled to race in the women's downhill Wednesday and the combined Thursday.

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