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Lewis to run for FIS presidency following ‘serious consideration’

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Sarah Lewis, the former secretary general of the International Ski Federation (FIS), has announced her intention to run for the presidency of the organisation in this year's election.

Lewis, who was deposed from her previous role at FIS following a [no-confidence vote](#) in October last year, has officially launched her bid to return to the governing body as president, following speculation dating back to last year that she would run.

The Royal Belgian Ski Federation, where she is a member, submitted her candidacy nomination today (Tuesday), following the conclusion of the FIS Ski World Cup season at the end of March. The election, which will be held virtually, is set for June 4 at the FIS 2021 Congress.

Speaking to *SportBusiness* today, Lewis said that she had been considering putting her candidacy forward for some time, but that her removal from the role of secretary general in October gave her the time to fully assess a potential bid.

She said: "During the whole lockdown period, I only had eyes for for dealing with the situation, because we were really in an unprecedented environment and had to try to prepare an upcoming season and somehow scramble that together without any experience or any knowledge, we just had to do it.

"After that, I was kind of blindsided with the decision that FIS took in October. I didn't have any prior warning or notification or information that my position was going to be discussed or there were any issues. So when it did happen, obviously a huge shock.

"But, afterwards, I had just an enormous, overwhelming number of messages and contacts and people saying, 'We really hope that you're going to run for president.' And not just from within the FIS membership and the stakeholders, but absolutely from all over the place throughout sport.

"I thought about it very seriously and considered it very seriously. I realised very quickly that, with the level of support and the messaging that I was receiving, people would judge me on my capacity and what I've done and what I do in reality, as opposed to some unexplained departure without any justification or reasoning that was communicated or even given to me."

Lewis added that she has "no problem whatsoever with any of the council members" who were behind her deposition last October despite the decision not being fully explained to her.

"I've had contact with them since the meeting, some of them fairly regularly, and I don't bear any grudge at all. This was a circumstance which arose, and there is absolutely no issue from my point of view in working and all and every one of them. We always had a great collaboration over many years, and for me that isn't going to change moving forward."

A former Alpine skier who competed for Great Britain at the 1988 Olympics, Lewis joined FIS in 1994 and became secretary general in 2000. One of the few prominent women to serve in a senior position among international sports federations, she became highly influential in the winter sports movement.

Lewis said part of her reason for going ahead with a presidential campaign that she felt a need to "show to other women within sport, if you've got the competence, you've got the skills, you've got the support, no one's saying it's gonna be a walk in the park. But, be brave, show some courage, and there isn't anything to lose. So that's what I'm doing."

Lewis has signalled she will run on a platform to bring change to FIS, saying in her statement that the body is entering a "new era" and pledging "to transform FIS into a global movement for world skiing and snowboarding".

She told *SportBusiness* that there is a need for a greater diversity of voices within FIS to ensure that the organisation is representing "all its constituents", noting

that there is a tendency towards elitism and favouring the sport's traditional markets in the current decision-making process.

"More voices give a broader perspective on the actual situation, and when we need the sport to grow, it's not going to grow in exponentially in the main markets where it's always been a very traditional sport," she said. "It's important to increase its profile and its value, and one of the ways to be able to do so is by developing it a wider outreach, and that means expanding into new markets, it means making better use of the technology."

Among her primary campaign pledges is a promise to implement a Covid Recovery Fund for National Associations to help guide FIS' member federations through the damaging effects of the pandemic, as well as introducing crucial governance reforms to "future-proof" the organisation and further integrating the 135 member National Associations into the governance structure of FIS. She has also said she will renounce her presidential salary and seek greater financial efficiency.

Closer collaboration between the professional and recreational worlds of snow sport will also be key to her programme, she said. "Skiing and snow sports are one of the few, along with golf, sailing, cycling to an extent, where it's a recreational tourist activity as well as a sport, and there's a massive industry that goes with that.

"The tourism businesses rely heavily on the promotion that they get from big competitions, the high-profile events, the aspirational impressions that they give. But they also contribute massively to the sport. So I'm working very hard in terms of really evolving those connections that we can reach out and have a much more formalised approach and partnership so that everybody is benefiting to grow the sport."

If successful, Lewis will become only the fifth president in FIS' 96-year history, as well as its first female president. The current incumbent, Switzerland's Kasper,

has been in the role since 1998, and had [initially outlined](#) his intention to leave the role at the end of the 2019-20 winter sports season.

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent cancellation of FIS '2020 Congress pushed this plan back by a year, however.

The previous president, Kasper's countryman Marc Hodler, held the reins for almost 50 years, between 1951 and 1998.

Last year, Swiss-Ski president Urs Lehmann [declared](#) his intention to run to replace Kasper, while Johan Eliasch, the chairman and chief executive of sportswear company Head, was also thought to be among the other likely candidates.

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