

***Hello again, and welcome to AS IT IS from VOA Learning English.***

I'm June Simms in Washington.

From wrestling to racketlon, let the games begin. Today, we get ready for the World Sports Festival 2013.

Also, skateboarding is becoming more popular around the world. But finding a safe place to ride a skateboard or perform tricks often can be a problem. We hear about a group of skaters in Burma who are trying to get skateboarding recognized as an official sport in the country.

Four years ago, a small community of skateboarders lost their skate park in Rangoon, Burma's largest city. They now have made a film in an effort to win support for their dream of building a replacement park.

The 20 young people share a love for skateboarding in a country where the devices are rare. They call themselves the Speed Ring Skate Club.

The skaters first learned their tricks at a park in Rangoon. But four years ago the grounds were destroyed. The reasons are not clear. Now, the skaters work at perfecting their skills on crowded streets or roads in need of repair. Some make a five-hour trip to the capital, Naypyitaw, to a skate park built by Japanese donors.

Akar Bo says the distance means he rarely visits.

“We need a good place to skateboard. They should have built this in Rangoon.”

The group has made a film about their cause. They hope to win the support of Burmese officials and get other people interested in skateboarding.

Filmmaker Ali Drummond was saddened by the loss of the Rangoon skate park. He says the film has helped the group believe their goal is possible.

“This is Myanmar (Burma). And no one is going to sponsor us as skateboarders. And, in the past, no one has shown any interest in them. In fact, they'd actually just shown hostility toward them as a group of people. So they had no belief in themselves that anyone was going to help them from Myanmar. So I think this film essentially changed that to a certain extent.”

To get approval to build a new skate park, the skaters must become an officially recognized sporting organization by the sports ministry.

Former sports ministry director general Aung Din is already a supporter of their cause.

“Of course skateboarding needs a park, so that they can exercise and they participate and they become in fellowship, meeting each other. But, first of all we need the blessing from the sports ministry so that they can help us out.”

The skaters hope to win permission for at least a temporary park when Burma hosts the Southeast Asian Games in December. They say this kind of publicity could help persuade Burmese officials and introduce a new generation of Burmese youth to the sport.

You are listening to As It Is. I’m June Simms.

More than 2,500 boys and girls from around the world are preparing to demonstrate their athletic ability at the World Sports Festival 2013. The festival takes place three months from now in Austria. Skateboarding is not one of the featured sports. But, as we hear from Avi Arditti, festival organizers have included competitions in taekwondo for the first time ever.

The festival is open to young people between the ages of 11 and 21. There is American football and soccer, basketball, bowling, squash, swimming and yes, taekwondo. This form of martial art was invented in Korea more than a thousand years ago. Since then, it has spread worldwide. Daniel Drobil is one of the festival organizers. He says hundreds of athletes are expected to take part in the World Sports Festival’s first taekwondo competition.

“Let’s say from zero to hero, the biggest event of them all. We expect 500 to 700 people in taekwondo from all over the world. And we expect many more nations than we had in the last few years.”

The organizers say more than 25 countries will be represented at the competition in July.

“Most countries do come from Europe. But, in the last few years it has spread out more and more. We had, I think two years ago first time Chinese delegation. We had last year people from Canada. We always have people from USA. And this year we will have quite a big delegation from India for the first time.”

In addition to the more traditional sports, there are also other less well known ones, like racketlon. This event combines badminton, squash, table tennis and tennis. One match has four sets or games, with one in each racket sport.

As with the other events, players do not have to be top athletes. Beginners, school teams and groups are all invited to take part. The World Sports Festival will take place from July 4<sup>th</sup> to July 7<sup>th</sup>. Daniel Drobil describes it this way.

“Olympic games for everyone. We have no limits. In general, everyone can compete. You can be a school team and it doesn’t happen to a school team very often that they can compete in an international tournament. And we also have professional teams, national teams, first league teams. It’s not only a sports event, it’s also an event of many different cultures that come together with many many activities to do. We have a nation’s corner where the children can present their countries and their culture so there is a lot of inter-culturalism.”

The organizers say this cultural sharing is what makes the World Sports Festival so special. I’m Avi Arditti.

Just as taekwondo is making its first appearance at World Sports Festival 2013, just maybe the Burmese skaters will have a chance to show off their skills next year.

That’s AS IT IS. I’m June Simms. Thanks for sharing your time with us today.

We invite you to share your ideas with us as well. Send an email to [special@voanews.com](mailto:special@voanews.com). Or visit our website at [learningenglish.voanews.com](http://learningenglish.voanews.com) and click on “Contact Us.”

Stay tuned for VOA world news at the beginning of every hour Universal Time. And tune in again tomorrow for AS IT IS with Kelly Jean Kelly. Good Day.