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Colombian cycling team praises Rock Hill velodrome plans

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ROCK HILL -- Members of the Colombian National Track Cycling Team say Rock Hill's the Giordana Velodrome is sure to attract world-class cycling events.

The velodrome will feature a 250-meter track with a maximum of a 40-degree bank. Gita Sporting Goods, a Charlotte-based bicycle distributor, has signed a 10-year, \$20,000 sponsorship agreement with the city and plans to donate bicycles to the city for use at the center.

Residents can visit the velodrome when it opens early next year and learn how to ride like Maria Luis Calle and Juan Esteban Arango, the two members of the Colombian team who stopped by Tuesday.

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Andy Burriss - aburriss@heraldonline.com -- Maria Luisa Calle, left, and Juan Esteban Arango, both members of the Colombian National Track Cycling Team, visit the site of the planned Giordana Velodrome in Rock Hill on Tuesday.

"It's a beautiful place," Calle said looking at the velodrome's design. "It will be very attractive for people in distance competitions."

Arango said it reminded him of European counterparts they've competed in. The Giordana Velodrome is part of the \$4 million Rock Hill Outdoor Center. The center will encompass 250 acres of trails, athletic complexes, a mountain bike course and BMX/Supercross and Cyclocross tracks.

The center of the velodrome track will feature grass and concrete areas for visitors and cyclists to work on their bikes, similar to the infield of a NASCAR speedway. The area could also be used for other types of events, such as small

concerts or flea markets, city officials have said.

Having all of those things together is something that makes it stand out, Arango said.

Jose Julian Velasquez, the cycling team's director, said the center is important.

"It's very important for the kids and everyone to practice, not only for races, but for their health. The BMX, the track, it's good for everyone in town, but especially the kids."

Children from the city's Parks, Recreation and Tourism Department summer camps at Boyd Hill and Emmett Scott Recreation Center and junior cyclists from the Charlotte-based Carolina Break asked the cyclists questions about competitions and how they prepare.

Calle and Arango had competed in the Presbyterian Hospital Invitational Criterium over the weekend.

Both have won at the Pan American Games and Colombian National Championships. Calle focuses on women's individual pursuit, a 3,000-meter course, and points racing while Arango focuses on men's pursuit races.

Arango began cycling at the age of 16, and Maria at 23. They train for several hours a day, focusing on resistance work, and eat plenty of salad and pasta.

Asked what was the most difficult obstacle they've had ever encountered while racing, Calle said through a translator, "On a track, the hardest thing is racing the other teams because they are prepared as well. On a road race, it's difficult because it's not the type of race we usually do."

Asked if they have a lot of problems with the bikes they ride. Arango said, "Bikes break down when we travel. They get more damage during travel than when we're actually using them."

But they are fragile bikes and can malfunction during races, he said. added.

Asked how they feel after a race, Arango joked, "After we win or after we lose?"

"We're happy if we win," Calle said. "But if we lose, we want to be more prepared for the next race."

"Even if you win, you want to keep that pace and win again," Arango said.

The next goal for the Colombian team is qualifying for the 2012 Olympic games in London.

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