

FIRE ON ICE

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HOPE: THE SUBSTANCE OF GOLD MEDALS UNSEEN

Are you ready for this?" I had been asking myself that same question during the forty-five minute drive from Sandy to Park City, Utah. As we drove up through Parley's Canyon on February 5, 1997, I thought that of all the things I had imagined for my life, what I was about to do never crossed my mind: I was about to take a four-man bobsled ride down the 2002 Olympic track.

All I knew about bobsled was A.) apparently the Jamaicans aren't terrible at it, and B.) it looks like a crazy rollercoaster on ice except on this ride there are no safety bars or guide rails and you can fall out, get ice burns, break bones, and even die. Plus, what's with the superhero skintight suits?

I had seen the sport up close on January 25, 1997 at the track's grand opening. The start area was a mad house of spectators, politicians, camera crews, reporters, athletes and sport administrators. The snow was coming down pretty heavy that afternoon, but I remember watching my future coach, three-time Olympian Randy Will, and his brakeman, Chris Coleman, push and load into a two-man bobsled. I never imagined that a week and a half later I'd be riding down the same course.

Arriving at what was then known as the Bear Hollow Winter Sports Park, we drove through the old gate at the top of the track and parked. Introductions were made and the ensuing safety speech sounded like the rules of a roller-coaster, which is ironic considering I hated those things growing up (proof that heaven has a sense of humor). Basically, "Please keep all arms, legs, and heads inside the sled at all times. Stay in your seat (like that was a problem at four Gs) and enjoy the ride!" That ride changed my life.

So how did this Pennsylvania-born- Oklahoma-raised boy of sixteen end up experiencing what has been called "The Champagne of Thrills"? I

blame my parents.

Dad's company, High Performance Coatings, Inc. (HPC) had recently become a sponsor for the US Olympic Bobsled Team. Because of the sponsorship, the director for the program at the Park City track set up a four-man bobsled ride for my dad. But the ride was for two and when my mother quickly declined, I agreed to take her spot. Only later did I think, "Wait, what did I just agree to?"

I felt calm as I watched the staff pull a cherry-red four-man sled to the starting line, the same sled I would drive a decade later. If this had been a theme park, I would have had a stomach full of butterflies by now, but instead I felt a surreal peace, one that I later understood to indicate that this was something special. Not special in a worldly view, although the sport is amazingly cool. No, I knew in some part of my soul that bobsled was part of my life's mission. This experience was for me.

Pulling on my helmet, I climbed into the number three spot and tried to contort my legs around my dad who sat in front of me. I pushed my feet against tiny metal pegs on the sled's frame and wrapped my arms around myself so I could grab the handles by my sides. I did the "bobsled shrug," which means shrugging your shoulders to lock your head and helmet in place—which in theory was supposed to allow us to watch the ride, but reality had other plans (when we hit the first major curve on the track, I turned into a bobsled bobble-head).

"Are you ready for this?" With a nod we were slow-walked to the crest of the track and released. Back then there were no start buildings or covers over the track. All we could see was a tunnel that dropped down and curved to the left. We began to pick up speed and I thought, "Okay, this isn't so bad." Then gravity laughed in my face.

People always ask what going down the track feels like. Well, take your favorite roller-coaster, blend in a fighter jet, then add what astronauts feel on takeoff, all done while whipping through turns at over eighty miles per hour as you are smashed down like there are four of you sitting on your shoulders. It's awesome.

After the ride, we exited the sled at the bottom where Mom was waiting to make sure we had survived. When she asked what I thought of the experience, I responded, "Forget soccer (my sport of choice since age five). This is what I'm going to do!"

I've heard that your life flashes before your eyes right before you die. Maybe that's why as bobsled pilots, we visualize the track in our mind

before we drive, because despite the countless safety precautions, that tiny chance you might not make it off the hill alive is always there. I recently read through one of the track waivers that I've signed over the years, and my favorite part says, "I understand that by signing this Release, I will forever preclude from suing or otherwise claiming against any of the Sponsoring Parties, for any . . . death I may sustain while participating in any of the activities." Because, you know, suing a place after you're dead is at the top of your list.

I'm not trying to make it sound more dramatic. I'm just trying to make a point. We are thrill-seekers. I mean, who in their right mind throws themselves down an icy chute at faster-than-freeway speeds in a fiberglass or carbon fiber sled without a seat belt, airbags, or drag chute while wearing spandex uniforms and specialized shoes that cost a couple hundred dollars a pair?

We do, and we do it because we have three things: 1.) Competitive natures, 2.) A craving for the thrill of our sport, and 3.) Faith. Faith in bobsled? Absolutely.

Faith in sports is described as confidence, optimism, or a winning attitude. These attributes are an athlete's lifeblood, and without them, he or she won't have the emotional, mental, or physical strength and stamina to meet the requirements for success. The pursuit of excellence in sport, or any chosen field, requires a healthy dose of consistent effort, hard work, adaptability (the capacity to learn new habits and skills and eliminate bad ones), and often great sacrifices. What is it that allows a competitor to give that much, try that hard, and put it all on the line on the day of the big event? Faith.

Faith is "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1), which is what helps an athlete have dreams and goals. The Bible Dictionary teaches that "Faith is a principle of action and of power." But spiritual faith and athletic faith both have to start somewhere.

The ancient Greeks had a word, *pistein*, which means "to believe" or "I know." But what do we believe in? Another Greek word, *notitia*, means "to believe in the information" or the topic, doctrine, philosophy, and so on. For faith to be faith, it must be faith in something or someone. The first step to diligently seeking God is to have *pistein*, or belief, that he exists. Once we have this belief, then we will have *notitia*, or belief in the information and teachings that comes through his servants (Doctrine & Covenants 1:38). Once this occurs, we will give *assenus*, or "our consent." We choose to accept

and believe, which is a decision that can be confirmed through the Holy Ghost (Moroni 10:3–5).

But is belief alone enough for exaltation, or is confidence enough to win the gold medal? Not a chance. Many well-meaning religions teach that we are saved merely by believing in Jesus Christ. However, when we dig deeper into the roots of faith, we find that belief alone won't save us. No athlete, no matter how much they believe they can win, will win without putting in the work.

Plus, true faith—the kind that gets winning results—must be based on true principles. For this reason, “A man is saved no faster than he gets knowledge” (*History of the Church* 4:588). How can we be baptized in the correct manner if we have never been taught? How can we drive a bobsled correctly unless we are coached? As Paul asked, “how shall [we] believe [in truth that we] have not heard? and how shall [we] hear without a preacher?” (Romans 10:14). As an athlete, you spend a lot of time listening to and acting upon the words of your coach—your preacher as Paul said—and at the end of the day, you hope and pray they are teaching you the truths that will help you win the game and take home the gold medal. That takes faith.

I think that as Latter-day Saints we forget how blessed we are to have the knowledge of true principles and doctrines that help us win the eternal game. We don't have to guess; we don't have to wonder. When we develop faith in our Savior, we can “henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive” (Ephesians 4:14). We have the winning game plan!

The necessity for basing faith on true principles is essential for athletes as well. Imagine what would happen if your coach trained you all summer like a sprinter when the goal was to compete in the marathon. Or what if you truly believed that eating a gallon of ice cream along with a chocolate cake right before a soccer match would improve your performance? In sports there is a reason for all the research to discover new techniques, nutritional improvements, and more effective training: correct knowledge applied correctly is power. Incorrect knowledge, even if applied correctly, brings about a loss of power. This is why Olympic Training Centers, college athletic departments, and professional sports teams are filled with some of the greatest minds in strength and conditioning, sports medicine, sports psychology, nutrition, kinesiology/biomechanical analysis, physical therapy, and other related fields. The discovery of true principles, that when followed

can improve athletic performance, is worth gold! Well, gold medals at least (or trophies or championship rings if that's your thing).

When I began coaching the US Adaptive Bobsled Team program in the winter of 2009, one of my first tasks was to educate myself on the levels of disability of each participant. Were they above-knee amputees (AKs) or below-knee amputees (BKs), and what was the level of spinal injury for our seated (wheel chair) drivers? Most of the athletes were very open and patiently answered my ignorant questions. It was a new world for me, but the information was crucial as it allowed me to move on to the next step: translating all that data into the procedures necessary for success. I needed to evaluate their biomechanics (movement of their bodies) and the mechanical limitations of their prosthetics and then figure out how best to adapt bobsled techniques to match. I took what I knew worked for able-bodied athletes (ABAs), athletes with no disability, and changed those methods and procedures to serve athletes with physical disabilities. For example, during a push start involving an ABA brakeman, the athlete would stand behind the sled and drop into a crouch with their hands on the back handles. Their hips would be low, their back straight, and their feet would be on top of the push block so that when they leaned forward they would roll over the block's edge, thus providing a solid base.

But let's take a look at one of our above-knee amputees, Cody Reese, who ended up an amazing driver but began as a brakeman. Cody's prosthetic fit into a special socket at his hip, but since the prosthetic did not have a full hip joint, he had a little trouble getting as low as a brakeman normally does. So we tried several different angles to see if his push would be faster this way or that way. In the end, when Cody received a new J-foot (a lower-leg prosthetic shaped like a big "J"), he tried putting the curved prosthetic behind the push block and shoving off with his beastly strong natural leg, which ended up taking over a tenth of a second off the push time.

This condensed version gives you an idea of the revolutionary efforts we made together in our search for "the truth," or the truest form of a brakeman's push for his unique situation. Cody truly was a pioneer in the field of adaptive bobsled, and I feel blessed to have been there for his journey. However, that doesn't mean that another above knee amputee athlete and their coach won't come up with a better technique in the future. When that happens, the technique we developed will no longer be a "saving" principle. We will have to put our faith in and act upon the newer, more current "truth."

This example demonstrates the huge difference between having faith

in mortal “truths” and trusting in those found within the gospel. Worldly opinions change all the time, but the doctrines of salvation are eternal. We need not worry that what leads us toward the spiritual gold today (exaltation) will be discredited tomorrow (though occasionally the Lord may ask us to change some things).

Do we realize the great endowment of knowledge that our eternal coach, even our Father in Heaven, has provided through the saving truths of the gospel for “the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Ephesians 14:12–13)? Since our coach has given us these game winning truths, we can have full *fiducia*.

Fiducia is the Greek term for “commitment” or dedication to a cause. We call it conversion, but when we reach the *fiducia* stage of belief, we begin to experience the power of faith, which I believe is tied directly to the meaning of religion. The word religion comes from the Latin word *religare*, which means “to bind.” When we have faith in Jesus Christ and his gospel, we become bound to it, not by force, but by choice and covenant. Once that occurs, faith becomes a powerful source of motivation, which is something that both champions in sport and the champions of the Lord need to succeed.

One of the first things you learn in sport like bobsled is that you must have faith. The pursuit of excellence on the ice requires *pistein*, or belief, in your goals and in yourself. Once you have that fundamental faith, you need to seek out trustworthy and experienced coaches and trainers who are willing to share their knowledge and experience. If their teachings about the sport are true then you can have *notitia* in them, or trust and confidence. When this happens we give our coaches our *assenus*, our consent. We embrace our athletic pursuits and dreams and give them our *fiducia*, our complete commitment. But we can’t stop there; the battle is just beginning and it is faith that will see us through to the medals podium finish . . . if we act accordingly.

The apostle James said it best: “Faith, if it hath not works, is dead” (James 2:17). What good does it do an athlete to seek out a great coach and then ignore their counsel? Faith alone, belief alone, even knowledge alone cannot save or earn them the gold medal unless it is acted upon in the correct manner. Faith, like dedication to a sport, is a way of life.

The ancient Greeks believed that by obeying their religious and philosophical dogmas, they would be living “enthusiastically,” which means “to be filled with the gods.” As Latter-day Saints we believe that by having faith

in Jesus Christ and remaining true to the principles of the gospel and the covenants we make, we can live “enthusiastically,” but we will be filled with the Spirit of God, and that is even better (1 Corinthians 2:9–12).

Whether as a bobsled athlete or a Latter-day Saint (or both), faith can be explained by a simple reverse formula. Without a desire to believe, a teacher will not matter. Without a teacher, there can be no knowledge to trust in. Without that trust, there will be no motivating power to act. And without action, there can be no results. Ultimately our level of conversion and dedication to the gospel is in direct correlation to our level of faith and obedience.

Hold to your faith, cling to your faith, stand firm in your faith. As the motto of the Athlete Outreach Project (www.athleteoutreach.com) that I founded states, “There Is Always Hope.” Why is there always hope? Because we have an eternal coach who knows how to win, wants to help us win, and is willing to share every moment of our journey with us. That is the stuff that spiritual gold medals are made of. As long as our faith is based in the Lord Jesus Christ, there is always hope.

FIRST, FAITH IN OUR COACH, JESUS CHRIST

When you're a young rookie athlete, you constantly look for opportunities to learn and grow, which means you take a lot of things on faith. While you hope that the sources you're listening to help you become a better competitor, sometimes even new athletes wonder when faith is being misplaced.

On December 23, 1997, a fire destroyed an auto-body shop in West Valley, Utah, wherein lay a beautiful \$30,000 four-man bobsled belonging to decorated sled pilot Bruce Roselli. Bruce and his team spent Christmas with their loved ones only to find their hopes for competing in the upcoming US Olympic trials literally burned to ashes. Or were they? This group of dedicated athletes rallied together and, with the help of numerous donors and sponsors, were able to obtain a replacement sled. No matter the adversity, Bruce always knew where to place his faith. He always had "Luke 1:37" displayed on his sleds, which reads, "With God all things are possible."

But remember what I said about wondering when faith is misplaced? When Bruce received his new sled, he brought it to the Park City track and I got to ride in it. Was my faith misplaced in Bruce as a driver? Absolutely not; I trusted Bruce completely, but my faith in the newbies who were riding with us was rather thin. I was to act as the brakeman for the group while Bruce drove, but the two guys he brought up to push and load from the sides had never ridden in a sled before. A push start for a four-man team is a bit of a process, and I worried these two would not make it in.

Surprisingly they made it into the proper positions for the number two and number three seats. *Okay, not so bad*, I thought. I tucked down in the brakeman's seat, counting the turns as we made our way smoothly down the track. As we crossed the finish line I sat up quickly and tapped the number

three guy on the back, which is the sport's universal sign for, "Get your behind off the brake handles."

Only he didn't budge. In a four-man sled, once you cross the finish line the number three guy normally pulls himself up out of his seat so the brakeman can have full access to the brake handles. With this guy still tucked, I had to reach around trying to find the handles and pull them out from underneath him, all while watching the finish area come rushing toward us. I managed to find and pull one handle while trying to shove this guy forward to get him up. The brakes were starting to dig into the ice and slow us down but not fast enough. We flew past the finish area's takeout point and into a pile of half-snow-half-ice that lay beyond. At the end of the day, hope and trust are only as good as the sources in which they are founded, and unfortunately on that occasion, the number three guy fell a little short.

Luckily, as Latter-day Saints we know a better object for our faith since we believe that the first principle and ordinance of the gospel is "Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ" (Articles of Faith 4). What other being or "thing" in the entire universe is worthy of such trust, outside of our Father in Heaven? Part of the reason the Israelites, and all of us for that matter, were commanded to "have no other gods before [him]" (Exodus 20:3) is there are no other gods made by man's hands or his mind that can save us from our sins and physical death (John 14:6) or in whom we can have complete trust (1 Nephi 21:14–16).

Jesus Christ is the perfect teammate. He is Holy One of Israel, (Isaiah 1:4), the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6), our Advocate with the Father (Doctrine & Covenants 45:3), and most important of all, our Redeemer (Job 19:25). It is because of Christ that we can "lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith" (Hebrews 12:1–2).

Without faith we will ignore his invitation to come unto him (Mathew 11:28) and follow his teachings (Mark 8:34). Without faith we will miss all the temporal, spiritual, and eternal blessings "which God hath prepared for them that love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9). Unless we embrace the Lord as our Savior, our spiritual gold-medal desires are going to fall short because he is the only true source of strength, comfort, peace, and forgiveness. He is the only coach that never fails.

For an athlete to have complete faith in a coach, that coach needs to have 1.) The proper credentials (certification), 2.) The correct knowledge,

3.) Good Communication Style, 4.) Shared Goals, and 5.) Mutual Respect. When these attributes exist within the coach-athlete dynamic, the athlete has a much higher opportunity for success. I have seen and had coaches that met every single one of these qualities, and the results were very constructive. On the flip side, I have seen coaches that lacked some of these traits, and the desired results were harder to come by. It is difficult to maintain faith in your coach when you feel they do not know, do not care, and do not try.

So let's apply these five coaching qualities to our eternal coach, Jesus Christ.

1. The Proper Credentials

When you look for a coach, you want one that has credentials, which indicates they have the experience or training required to meet the demands of the coaching position. This certification usually comes from a governing body for the sport—an organization that you can trust. The Savior's credentials began with the declaration in the Council in Heaven when our Father selected Jesus to be the Lamb of God (Abraham 3:27) and were eternally cemented in place through his atoning sacrifices in Gethsemane and on Golgotha. We can have complete faith in Christ's "credentials" because there is no other name given (credentialed) under heaven wherein we can be saved (Acts 4:12).

2. The Correct Knowledge

In sports, to do your best you need a coach who understands the game and comprehends how to coach you to your highest potential. Without faith that your coach knows what he or she is talking about, it can be difficult to apply yourself to the teaching. The Savior's knowledge of the game of life is perfect. Because of his experience in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus understands our lives completely and knows best how to coach us on the "field" of life (Alma 7:11–12) and help us reach our highest potential.

3. Good Communication Style

Good communication is a game changer. Without it a coach cannot transfer his or her knowledge and winning techniques and game plans. The Savior established his church so we can receive his instructions and coaching through the mouths of his "assistant coaches," our Church leaders (Doctrine & Covenants 1:38). We also have the gift of the Holy Ghost, which communicates the Lord's desires for us personally (Doctrine & Covenants

8:2–3) while we are playing the game. The Savior has an open door policy for each and every one of us, no matter where, when, or what. We just need reach out to find him waiting for us with open arms.

4. Shared Goals

To be able to put faith in your coach, you need to know that they share or respect your goals enough to help you achieve them. This can be crucial when we feel discouraged, and our coach(es) must step in to help us get back on track. Our coach Jesus Christ loves us more than we can comprehend, and his greatest desire is to help us lead a life full of blessings and joys. He shares our goal of exaltation so much that he gave his life and suffered in Gethsemane so we could repent of our sins and return to our Heavenly Father's kingdom (3 Nephi 27:14–16). He will be there when we want to give up on our dreams or even ourselves (Isaiah 49:14–16). On days when the game gets rough, Jesus will rush onto the field when we need him.

5. Mutual Respect

A coach's ability to instill confidence in their athletes can mean the difference between victory and defeat. This power of inspiration is based heavily on the respect the athletes have for said coach and vice versa. Without mutual respect, team chemistry and cohesion begin to break down. When it comes to the Savior, the amount of respect and love he has for us cannot be measured. The Lord reveres us even when we do not respect ourselves, and our potential is constantly before his eyes. He may chasten, but he never berates, belittles, or betrays that respect.

It's important to comprehend these aspects of the Savior's personality and divine role because to have faith means we must first believe that he exists and have a correct understanding of his character. Without this knowledge and faith, we can never find the eternal results that we so hunger after. Jesus said, "I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst" (John 6:35).

Just as a coach is the center point of a sports team, Jesus Christ is the foundation we must build on if we want to enjoy eternal victory. He is the standard of our faith that we must look to if we are to stand on the celestial medals podium.

The Olympic flag made its official Olympic debut in 1920 during the Antwerp, Belgium Olympiad. Created in 1913, the flag, with its iconic five rings, has become a standard for the Olympic movement. It represents the

ideals of Olympism, that we should seek a balanced development of the mind, body, and character and that we should find joy in our efforts, or as Latter-day Saints we would say, “joy in the journey.” It reminds us that we should value the opportunity to be a good role model for others, to “let our light so shine” and treat others with a spirit of brotherhood, tolerance, and friendship. There is something beautiful about seeing those five rings on a sea of white floating in the breeze.

Just as the Olympic flag and the five rings are central symbols of the modern Olympic movement, our Savior and his atonement are the central points of our religion. He is the symbol of our faith and the reason we have hope for eternal life (John 3:14–15).

Likewise, Christ is the guiding light that can lead us through this life and safely back to God’s presence. Jesus proclaimed, “I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12).

On February 5, 2003 I attended a relighting ceremony for the 2002 Olympic cauldron at Utah’s Rice Eccles Stadium, site of the opening and closing ceremonies for the Salt Lake City games. The event was fantastic. I considered it a bit of a consolation prize since I missed the Utah Olympics while I was serving in the Honduras San Pedro Sula Mission.

Anyone who has witnessed an Olympic cauldron being or already lit can tell you that it is an awesome sight. There is a spirit to the torch, a fire that does more than warm the air around it (Salt Lake’s cauldron burned at 900 °F); it warms the heart, something I find completely appropriate for the Utah cauldron since the motto for the 2002 Games was “Light the Fire Within.” But the difference between the Olympic flame and the Light of the World is that while one is only lit and then extinguished every two years, Jesus is “a light that is endless, that can never be darkened” (Mosiah 16:9). Our goal is to make our faith so strong that it becomes less like the Olympic torch, able to be extinguished, and more like the light of Christ: endless and so strong that it can never be darkened.

I know of no coach more supportive, more respectful, more credentialed, more knowledgeable or more loving than Jesus Christ (Ephesians 3:19). He is our mentor, our brother, and our friend. Have faith. Trust him. Believe in him. Accept his instruction. Come unto Christ and be coached, be healed, be lifted, and be saved.