



Israel's first-ever Olympic bobsled reached speeds approaching 120 km/h at a practice session at Calgary's Olympic Park.

Canadian pushing for Israel's first bobsled team

PRACTISING IN CALGARY

BY LES PERREAUX

David Greaves was ready to sprint down the bobsled track at Calgary's Olympic Park when the announcement on the public address system sent a chill down his spine: "The track is clear for Israel One."

Moments later, Mr. Greaves and his driver, Aaron Zeff, were hunched in a sled tearing down the icy run at 120 km/h. Near the bottom, Mr. Greaves broke into joyful hysterics, pounding on his driver's helmet. Israel One had completed its first successful run, one small step toward becoming the first Israeli team to qualify in bobsled for the winter Olympics.

"It was my proudest moment. I'm sure people could see the grin through my helmet. It was so exhilarating coming down; it felt like my eyeballs might pop out of my head," said Mr. Greaves, 35.

Mr. Greaves, a Winnipegger, has joined forces with Mr. Zeff, a former U.S. Air Force fighter pilot, and John Frank, a former Superbowl-champion tight end, to create their two-man bobsled team.

The men hope their ambitious entry into winter sport will cheer the people of Israel, a country where snow is a rare and the newly formed Israeli Bobsled Federation was forced to invent a Hebrew word for bobsled: "mizhelet bob."

"Israelis have so little to cheer about lately. As a Jew outside of Israel, there is little you can do but send money. This is a different way to contribute," Mr. Greaves said.

The notion of an Israeli bobsled team recalls the Jamaican bobsled team at the Calgary Olympics in 1988, who sold T-shirts to finance their Olympic aspirations but crashed in the third run of the four-man event. However, the Israeli team claims it will be a serious competitor out of the gate.

Ross Dominikovich, a respected bobsled coach in Calgary, has agreed to work with the team. The former member of the New Zealand bobsled team is impressed so far by their commitment and their physical fitness.

"I'm interested in developing elite athletes, not novelty acts," Mr. Dominikovich said. "Aaron is a natural driver; he's got the background. Dave was a top sprinter and an excellent soccer player. John has two Superbowl rings. When you have that base, you're 80% there. Now I have to help them get the other 20% in technique and training methods."

Mr. Zeff and Mr. Frank are Jewish U.S. citizens who reside in San Francisco while Mr. Greaves is Canadian. All three men are in the process of obtaining their

Israeli citizenship.

Mr. Greaves works in computer networking; Mr. Zeff is in real estate; and Mr. Frank became a plastic surgeon after retiring from the San Francisco 49ers in 1988.

Mr. Zeff explained that bobsled combines his three greatest passions: speed, winter sport and Israel. "It sounds funny, but bobsledding is the only thing that could possibly combine all of these things," he said.

Mr. Zeff and Mr. Frank, both elite skiers, began battling around the idea of a bobsled team last year. They brought their friend Mr. Greaves on to the team after each of them suffered injuries last year during the team's early training runs.

Last year, they received the approval of the Israeli Olympic Committee and the Winter Sports Federation of Israel to represent the country.

The team's first competition was the America's Cup in Calgary last autumn. Mr. Zeff was out with a compression fracture in a vertebra that he suffered during training. Mr. Greaves and Mr. Frank competed, but they spilled during their first run, damaging their rented sled.

Last week, the team travelled to Calgary to train at the Olympic park.

Mr. Zeff, the now-healthy driver, and brakeman Mr. Greaves powered the team down 12 successful runs during a local championship meet. Each time they shaved seconds off the trip, achieving a minor landmark, reaching below 60 seconds on the Calgary track. The Israeli team finished ahead of an experienced Armenian crew.

The Israeli bobsled team is still a long way from qualifying for the 2006 Olympics. The team needs to buy a sled

and runners, costing about \$50,000. They will have to meet qualifying standards, both for the international and Israeli ruling bodies.

However Mr. Dominikovich is confident the Israelis will advance far beyond simply qualifying, perhaps competing among the "best of the rest" for a finish among the top-25 in a field of 46. "If the goal is to win a medal, there is no chance. If the goal is to make the Olympics and do well, that is definitely doable," he said.

"My dream is to see that Star of David on the front of our own bobsled," Mr. Greaves said.

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