



Ruben Gonzalez: The Unlikeliest Four-Time Olympian



Vancouver Olympics 2010

Ruben Gonzalez couldn't get the images of his dead friend out of his mind.

Clad in matching blue jackets with white stripes, blue snow pants and black shoes, González and Argentina's Olympic delegation strode through Vancouver's BC Place at the opening ceremony in front of a worldwide audience of more than 100 million.



But instead of getting a rush from the pageantry and the thrill of representing his country, Gonzalez slowly realized what he was feeling: nothing.

As Gonzalez, 47, faced the reality of competing in his fourth – and final – Olympics, the luger couldn't erase the seared image of the tragic death of close friend and training partner, Nodar Kumaritashvili, just hours earlier.

"I realized at the opening ceremony that this wasn't for me anymore," Gonzalez told Reuters. "I didn't know how to celebrate."

Kumaritashvili, a fellow slider from Georgia, was killed on the afternoon of Feb. 12 during a practice run at Whistler Sliding Centre when he flew off his sled and crashed into a metal pole along the side of the track.

Four-time Olympian Ruben Gonzalez is one of the country's leading keynote speakers.

He's the only athlete to compete in Winter Olympics in four different decades.

Ruben trained with Nodar Kumaritashvili, the Georgian luger who died when he flew off the track on Feb. 12 just hours before the opening ceremony of the Olympics.

The horrific accident caused race officials to make changes to the track and adjust the starting line in an attempt to slow racers' speeds, but they did not delay the event or the opening ceremony.

"I didn't know if I even wanted to go to the opening ceremony. I wrestled with it for the two hours on



“Every success you’ve ever had or will ever have is the product of your courage to act and the courage to endure.”

- Ruben Gonzalez

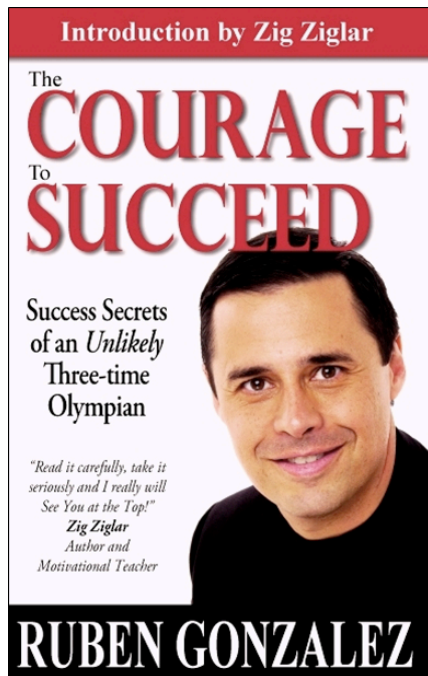
the drive down to Vancouver. It wasn’t until we got there that I thought: Nodar would be just like me, one of the 80%, just happy to be here [because they know they are not good enough to contend for a medal]. If you rewind the tape of the opening ceremony, you’d see me jumping up and down. And I was acting, I was doing it for him.”

Gonzalez, however, couldn’t simply move on. “I saw the crash run through my mind a couple times at the top of the track while I was waiting to go. I was here when Nodar crashed and I saw it,” González told ESPN.com. “I haven’t seen the replays of the crash and I don’t want to ever look at it again. I don’t have to. You try to put that image away when it’s your turn to race. I’ve been in the sport for 25 years and I didn’t think it was possible that someone could fly out of the track.”

Gonzalez entered the 21st Winter Olympiad thinking he had seen it all. The native of Campana, Argentina, moved to New York City when he was 6. He fell in love with the sport while watching the 1984 Winter Games in Sarajevo, Yugoslavia, on TV. As he watched lugers glide across the ice at remarkable speed, he made himself a promise: He was going to represent Argentina at the Calgary Games in 1988.

And that’s exactly what he did. He placed 32nd in Calgary before taking 31st four years later in Albertville, France. He missed the next two Olympics – in Norway in 1994 and Japan in 1998 – because his financial struggles shifted his focus on providing for his wife, Cheryl, and their two children, Gabriela and Gracen.

But Gonzalez, who works as a motivational speaker, returned to the sport’s biggest stage in 2002 in Salt Lake City, where the Houston resident took 39th. But for the man who wrote the book “The Courage to Succeed: Success Secrets of an Unlikely Three-Time Olympian,” it was never about winning a medal.



The bestselling book "The Courage to Succeed" is a manual on how to become a high achiever.

**"I didn't make it
because of superior
athletic ability.
I made it because
I refused to quit."**

- Ruben

It was about realizing his dream by proving he belonged among the world's best lugers.

Gonzalez contemplated quitting after the Salt Lake City Games, but he couldn't. So two years ago, he tried to accomplish something no one in the world had ever done: become the first to compete in Winter Olympics in four different decades.

But in order to punch his ticket to Vancouver, he needed to be ranked among the top 40 in the world. So he headed to Latvia – a hotbed for the sport – and began training at age 45 with a teenager named Nodar Kumaritashvili.

Gonzalez didn't know Russian. Kumaritashvili didn't know English. But they loved the sport, so they used hand gestures to communicate.

"He helped me. He was that kind of kid. A 19-year-old kid helping an old[-timer] like me," Gonzalez told the newspaper The Province. "He was the kind of kid I want my kids to grow up to be."

Kids – that's really what these Olympics were all about for Gonzalez. Daughter Gabriela, 9, and son Gracen, 6, were at the finish line along with Cheryl to greet their favorite Olympic hero as he walked off the ice for the final time.

Did it matter he came in last place? Not at all.

**To watch a video filled with highlights of Ruben's
most popular presentation visit:**

www.FourWinterGames.com

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