



# Gonzalez Makes History on the Luge Track



Vancouver Olympics 2010

When Ruben Gonzalez was a 21-year-old chemistry and biology double major at Houston Baptist University, he remembers watching the 1984 Winter Olympics in Sarajevo, Yugoslavia.

And he remembers, as a former soccer player, seeing U.S. figure skater Scott Hamilton win a gold medal.



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

Gonzalez then uttered a sentence that would change his life forever: "I'll be at the next Olympics no matter what."

But there was just one problem: He needed to choose a sport.

Gonzalez looked at the lists of winter and summer Olympic sports and tried to figure out which one would suit him the best. He admits to never being the most athletic kid, so summer sports were ruled out almost immediately. Gonzalez eventually settled on luge for reasons that might not seem obvious.

"I gotta find a sport that fits me," Gonzalez told Universal Sports recently, referring to what was cycling through his mind at the time. "I'll find something with a lot of broken bones and a lot of quitters, and I just won't quit."

"I contacted Lake Placid and said, 'I want to learn how to luge for the next Olympics.'"



**“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**

Twenty-six years later, the 47-year-old Gonzalez is ready to compete in his fourth Olympics. He'll soon be the first person to appear at four winter Olympics in four different decades -- 1980s, 1990s, 2000s and 2010s, in his case.

"It's cool. As a professional speaker, I talk about becoming unstoppable and reaching your goals," said Gonzalez, who is self-employed as a motivational speaker. "Being able to do this shows my audience that I'm not just talking, I can do this. At my age, I'm happy to make the cover of the AARP magazine."

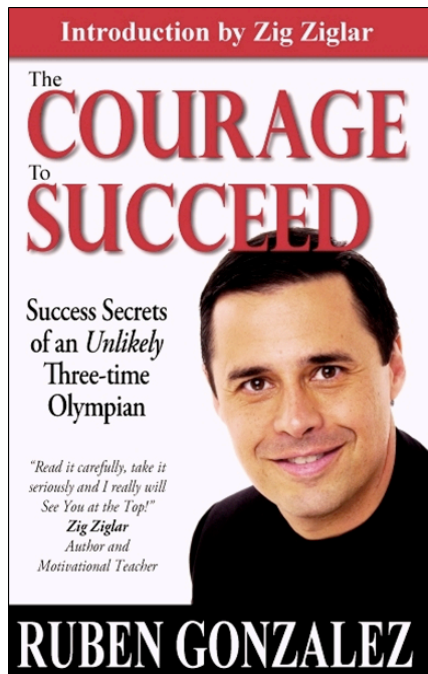
### **'Scared to death'**

Born in Argentina, Gonzalez moved to New York City when he was 6 years old after his father's job as a chemical engineer brought the family to the United States. He loved soccer and had big goals of playing the sport professionally, but never quite got there. He instead decided to become an Olympian.

After watching Hamilton win Olympic gold, Gonzalez was convinced that the Olympic life was for him. But the coaches at the Lake Placid Olympic Training Center needed some coaxing to allow Gonzalez to train with them.

The first time Gonzalez slid down a luge track was actually during the summer, on an old wooden bobsled track. His sled had wheels instead of skids. He wore tennis shorts instead of a skintight rubber bodysuit.

After successfully navigating the practice track, Gonzalez was invited to participate in the winter training. This was the real deal, complete with a slick chute of ice stretching



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



nearly a mile and a sled made of fiberglass and two steel runners.

"The first time on ice it was scary," Gonzalez recalled. "It feels like you're sitting on a bar of soap. It's kinda like skating. You need to lean a little each way to turn. Just learning all that is really hard."

The thing he remembers most about those early days is crashing. All the time. Gonzalez estimates that he would crash during three out of every four runs when he first started in the sport. But one day in the third year, he said, things clicked and he figured out how to steer. How to anticipate a turn. How to properly lay on the sled.

Hurtling down an icy chute at 80-90 miles per hour, however, was never his favorite thing to do.

"For 25 years I was scared to death. I didn't like it at all," he said. "As the speed increased, I would get tighter and tighter. White knuckles. I was doing it in spite of not liking it because of the Olympic dream."

### **'I can't believe I do that'**

In 1988, Gonzalez cashed in on his Olympic dream by competing at the Calgary Games. He finished 33rd out of 38 athletes. Four years later at the Albertville Games, Gonzalez finished 31st in a field of 34.

His goal was not to win a medal. Competing at the sport's biggest stage was enough for him.

At the 2002 Olympics in Salt Lake City, Gonzalez placed 41st in a field of 50.

Why the gap of 10 years between Olympic appearances? He simply could not afford it. Like most Olympic athletes, Gonzalez was balancing training,



**“You have to develop the attitude that you are willing to outwork, outhustle and outdo the competition.”**

**- Ruben Gonzalez**

working and paying bills. It was not easy, and he was forced to sit out Lillehammer (1994), Nagano (1998) and Torino (2006).

"You don't do it for the money," Gonzalez said. "You do it for something inside. I've got this hunger for the Olympics. Some people like to climb mountains and climb Everest. I like to chalk up Olympics."

Gonzalez, who lives in Katy, Texas with his wife Cheryl and children Gabriela (9) and Gracen (5), decided to make a comeback for the Salt Lake City Olympics. A year and a half before the Games, however, he had a serious crash that nearly ended his dream.

He was in St. Moritz, a small resort town nestled in the southeast corner of Switzerland. There was a World Cup race there, and one afternoon Gonzalez found himself sitting near curve 13 of the track, watching the Italian team practice.

"I said, 'I can't believe I do that. I can't believe I do that,' for two hours," Gonzalez noted. "The next morning when I hit [curve] 13, I crashed and broke my hand, foot and totaled my sled. I had a pity party for three days. I didn't have any money for a new sled."

His body healed but his sled was beyond repair. He was eventually able to find another luger with an extra sled, who let Gonzalez borrow it for the Olympics. Crisis averted.

### **'Still have that fire'**

After the Salt Lake City Games, Gonzalez, who worked as a copy machine salesman, was asked to speak to a group of school children in Houston. He told his story, from moving to the United States to appearing in three Olympics, and offered some advice on how to reach your dreams.



The principal was so impressed with the speech that he said Gonzalez should become a motivational speaker. After giving it some thought, he quit his job, started his speaking business and watched it grow.

Eight years later, he's traveled across the globe and has spoken to business teams at companies such as Xerox, Coca-Cola, Shell Oil and Hilton Hotels. His Web site, OlympicMotivation.com, is his marketing tool. He speaks about 50 times every year and has written three books on becoming successful.

He's also not afraid of luge anymore, thanks to his sports psychologist. "For the first time, I'm having fun," he said.

In 2008, Gonzalez tossed around the idea of making a second comeback, this time for the 2010 Olympics. It had been 20 years since he made his Olympic debut, and he could think of no better time to give it one more try. He did a few test runs on the Olympic track in Park City, Utah, and felt strong enough to start a run at 2010.

The top 40 lugers in the world rankings qualified for Vancouver; he was originally slotted at No. 42, but when three Norwegians dropped out of the Games, he moved down to 39th on the list. He was in.

Scott Hamilton inspired Ruben to pursue his Olympic dream. And, perhaps someone will be inspired enough by *his* story to become an Olympian.

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

[www.FourTimeOlympian.com](http://www.FourTimeOlympian.com)

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