

THE VANCOUVER SUN

Adjustments to Luge Track Handicap Favorites



Vancouver Olympics 2010

The decision to lower the start for the men's luge event changed the complexion of the Olympic race and cleared the way for a German to win gold Sunday, said veteran sledder Ruben Gonzalez.

Officials lowered the start position for all luge races, a decision they said was made because of the "emotional" impact of Friday's death of a Nodar Kumaritashvili, a Georgian competitor who crashed on corner 16 at the Whistler Sliding Centre.

Coming into the Games, most predicted Italy's Armin Zoeggeler would win gold, but he is in third place with the first two — of four runs — completed. Zoeggeler, 36, won gold both in Turin in 2006 and in Salt Lake City in 2002.

"The Germans got it," Gonzalez said. "It totally changed the whole race. It used to be Armin Zoeggeler of Italy and Albert Demtschenko of Russia. It was the two them two. But now it's a German race."

Demtschenko is considered Zoeggeler's main rival. He won silver in 2006 and is second, just behind Zoeggeler, in the World Cup standings. With two runs left Sunday in the Luge finals, Demtschenko is fourth. Felix Loch, of Germany, is first and his countryman David Moeller is second.



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



“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

In the wake of Friday’s tragedy, the men are now racing from the women’s start, which takes away most of the 152-metre drop than allowed sliders to achieve record speeds.

"This new start is flat," Gonzalez explained. "The Germans have incredible starts. They can build up really good speed at the top. The men’s normal start is very steep. But the women’s start is fairly flat. So, if you have a fast start, you gain a ton of time. Your start time becomes very important in the top part.

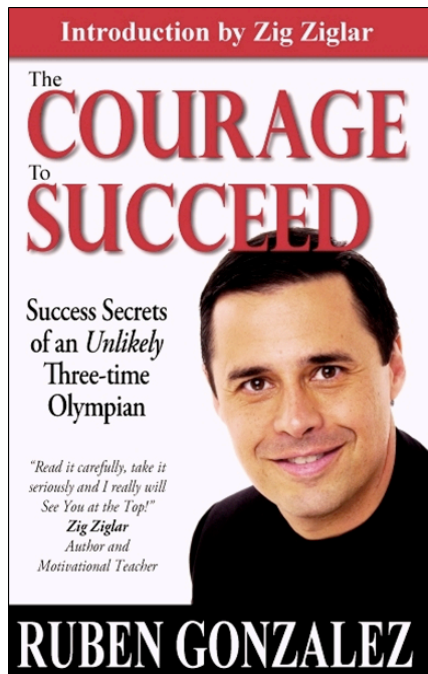
"When you’re going from the normal men’s start, gosh, by turn two you’re going 60 mph. So it’s vroom. Before, the start was really not that important."

Gonzalez is 47-years-old and is the first person to compete in four Winter Olympics, each in a different decade — 1988, 1992, 2002 and now 2010. He suggested there was no need to move the starting location after officials built up the barrier wall where Kumaritashvili crashed.

"Once they got that wall in, I don’t think there was any safety issue. Before? Yes. As soon as they put that wall there, I felt I could handle it," Gonzalez said.

"That wall will take care of the job. If you come out of the curve bounce on to the wall you will come back on to the track. That takes care of it. But it seems they were under a lot of pressure (to do more)."

Born in Argentina, Gonzalez moved to the United States when he was six years old. He took a six-year break from sliding after the Salt Lake City Olympics.



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



He then started a comeback at age 45 and did it in Latvia. Leading up to a World Cup event there, he trained with Kumaritashvili for a week.

"He didn't speak English and I don't speak Russian," Gonzalez said. "It was just hand signals. Nodar would always take it upon himself, since he knew the track, he would always come to me and talk to me with his hands.

"He would say things like, 'On corner six, this is what you do.' Because we can do things like that with hand signals.

"He helped me. He was that kind of kid. A 19-year-old kid helping an old fart like me.

"He was the kind of kid I want my kids to grow up to be."

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

www.FourWinterGames.com

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