

# Olympics-Luge-Broken Bones just Horse Play for “Speedy” Gonzalez



Vancouver Olympics 2010



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

Ruben Gonzalez describes Corner 16 on Whistler's perilous track as akin to a horse stamping on your head so what then drives a 47-year-old former photo-copier salesman to risk his limbs as an Olympic luge slider?

"It's not the sport, it's the Olympics," Gonzalez, who lives with his wife and children in Houston, told Reuters after surviving his first two white-knuckle training runs ahead of the weekend's men's singles competition.

"I didn't even like luge for the first 25 years but it was my ticket to the Olympics. I needed a sport with lots of broken bones because I knew there would be quitters -- and I never quit. I'll be the last man standing."

Remarkably, Gonzalez is still standing and is about to appear in his fourth Winter Olympics dating back to 1988 when he first raced in Calgary.

His life changed direction in 1984 when he was sat at home watching the Winter Games in Sarajevo and was transfixed by Scott Hamilton winning figure-skating gold for the U.S.

"He was tiny and I said if he can go to the Olympics so can I."

From that moment he was obsessed with becoming an Olympian but having acquired no particular athletic skills in his first 21 years he had no idea what sport he could take up.

"I went to the library and read books on all the summer sports but realized you had to be a super athlete," he said.



**“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 problem was I was always the last kid picked for P.E. at school. Then I hit on the idea of luge, it seemed to fit because it overcame my lack of athleticism."

Gonzalez travelled up to Lake Placid but his requests for a try-out initially fell on deaf ears.

"They said I should have had 10 years' experience by that stage," he said. "I didn't take no for an answer."

Despite crashing "four times out of five" in his first two years in the sport Gonzalez persevered and his dream came true in 1988 when he finished 33rd. Four years later at Albertville he was 31st and after a 10-year gap he competed at Salt Lake City.

"For 25 years I was scared every single run, I didn't like the sport," said Gonzalez, whose list of broken bones includes fingers, feet, knees, ribs and elbow. "The broken bones were just a temporary inconvenience."

After setting up a motivational speaking company and having children, Gonzalez left his sled alone for six years after Salt Lake but the lure of the Olympics came calling once again.

"It was the 20th anniversary of the Calgary Games two years ago and I started to wonder if my old body could still handle the luge," he said. "I took a few runs and felt good and took part in several World Cup races to qualify. I made it by the skin of my teeth."

"It's crazy, this is the fastest track in the world and even the good guys are crashing. But I just had to be here and walk into that opening ceremony, that's why I do it."

Gonzalez said this will be his last Olympics - "But don't write it in stone."

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

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