



Game Plans for Success

by Four-time Olympian Ruben Gonzalez

Everyone wants to win. Wanting to win isn't enough. You have to be willing to prepare to win. No matter how many times we've been to a particular luge track, before we train on it we "walk the track" with Coach.

A typical week during the luge World Cup circuit is like this: Tuesday through Friday we take our training and qualifying runs; Saturday and Sunday we race; and Mondays are for traveling to the next track.

Within Europe, we drive from track to track in vans. For races outside of Europe we fly. No matter how long we've been traveling, no matter of how tired we are, whether we've just ridden in a van for twelve hours from Innsbruck to Sarajevo, or flown ten hours from Europe to Calgary, before we go to the hotel we walk the track.

We go to the top of the track and for two hours we literally walk down the track, slipping and sliding the whole way, planning exactly what lines we'll take during training. Coach knows the best lines – he was World Champion three times. Coach knows the shortcut to success. We follow Coach and take detailed notes on everything he says.

Typically it goes something like this; “O.K. guys, this is curve three. You want to enter early. At this point you want to be no more than three inches from the left wall. Over here steer with a force of three (where zero is no steering and ten is all you’ve got). Down there at the expansion joint give it a five, over there by that sign hold it up, then at the end crank it with all you’ve got but remember to counter steer or else you’ll slam into the wall.”

We feverishly write every word he says. Some of us even record Coach as he’s talking. When we finally get to the hotel we don’t go straight to bed; we memorize the fastest lines and start visualizing our perfect run.

What if, on the way to the track I had told Coach, “Coach, I’m not feeling well, will you just drop me off at the hotel?”

You know what would happen? I’d take a hot shower, get a hot meal, snuggle under the warm covers, watch “Friends” or “Frazier” on TV in Serbo-Croatian while sipping a hot chocolate, and drift into a wonderful night’s sleep, all the while thinking, “Those fools! They’re freezing their rear ends out there!” And then the next day I’d kill myself on the track, and have only myself to blame.

Wanting to win is not enough. You have to prepare to win. Winners do whatever it takes to get to the next level. Are you willing to do whatever it takes? If you’re not, then your dream is a pipe-dream.

Put it into action:

Proper preparation prevents poor performance. Your coach or mentor will save you precious time by helping you focus on your strengths as you create your perfect plan.



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