Two Toboggans and a Plank

A Short History of Bobsleigh

From a garden rake on a Swiss road to a two-hundred-thousand-dollar carbon shell, by way of a boxer, a blacksmith, a redhead with a spare bolt and four soldiers from Jamaica.

Compiled September 2026 for the Slidensa project. Sources and disputed facts are listed at the back.

Before We Start

Bobsleigh is the sliding sport with a steering wheel, a brake, a crew and a budget.

Two or four people sprint fifty metres pushing a sled that weighs as much as a small motorcycle, jump in one after another, and tuck down while the pilot steers it through a mile of iced concrete at up to a hundred and fifty kilometres an hour. The pilot holds two rings on ropes. The brakeman holds a lever with teeth, and is forbidden to touch it until the finish line. Everyone in between holds on.

It is the oldest of the three sliding sports to reach the Olympics, the only one where the equipment is openly a technology contest, and the one that has been raced by a heavyweight boxing champion, a reigning prince, a National Football League running back, and a helicopter pilot from the Jamaica Defence Force.

This is an easy read on purpose. Chapters are short. If a fact is disputed, the notes at the back say so.

Chapter 1: Two Toboggans and a Plank

The road to Celerina

In the winter of 1888, or possibly the one after, a visitor to St. Moritz named Wilson Smith wanted to get from the village down to Celerina, a few kilometres along the valley, and did not feel like walking. He had two skeleton toboggans. He lashed them together, one behind the other, with a plank across the top, and rode the contraption down the road. According to the sport's federation he braked with a garden rake.

Nobody is sure whether Smith was English or American. The federation says English, the Olympic historians say American with English relatives, the Swiss National Museum says an American spa guest. What everyone agrees on is that his plank was the first bobsleigh.

The English guests of the Kulm Hotel had already spent a decade racing sleds through the village streets, and had built the Cresta Run in 1885 to stop colliding with pedestrians. Among them was Major William Bulpett, the man behind the Cresta, who saw the possibilities of a steerable multi-seat sled and commissioned one from the local blacksmith, Christian Mathis. Mathis built it from two low American sleds joined by a frame, with a rod for steering. The villagers called it a diabolical-looking steed.

Why "bob"

Early crews believed that rocking back and forth in unison on the straights would make the sled go faster. It did not. But the bobbing gave the thing its name, and the name outlived the technique by a century.

The first club, and the ladies

On 21 December 1897 the St. Moritz Bobsleigh Club was founded, probably at the Kulm, with seven short rules. One of them required that two of the five committee members be women. The following January the club held the first organised bobsleigh race, on the road down to Cresta, and the rules for that were stricter still: crews of five, of whom two had to be women. A sled called *Mildred*, piloted by a Madame Little, won what was probably the first women's bobsleigh race the same winter. Mixed and all-female crews were normal into the 1920s. It would be more than a hundred years before women raced bobsleigh at the Olympics.

A track of its own

By 1903 the bobs were too fast for a road. A gala in St. Moritz raised about eleven thousand francs, and on New Year's Day 1904 the Olympia Bobrun from St. Moritz to Celerina opened with a race. It is still there. Every November about fifteen men rebuild it by hand from snow and water in three weeks, which makes it the only natural-ice track left in the world and, as the town likes to say, the largest snow sculpture on earth.

A plank across two toboggans, a garden rake for a brake, and a blacksmith's diabolical steed. The sport with the biggest budgets began as the cheapest.

Chapter 2: Chamonix to Lake Placid

A federation for the Olympics

The International Olympic Committee announced a winter sports week for Chamonix in 1924. Bobsleigh needed a governing body to be in it, so on 23 November 1923 delegates from Britain, France and Switzerland, with Canadians and Americans in the room, founded the Fédération Internationale de Bobsleigh et de Tobogganing in Paris. It ran the sport for ninety years and became the International Bobsleigh and Skeleton Federation in 2015.

Chamonix, 1924

There was one event, open to crews of four or five. Nine sleds from five nations started. The track was poor and three of the nine crashed. Switzerland's Eduard Scherrer won with the Schläppi brothers and Alfred Neveu, Britain took silver, and a five-man Belgian crew took bronze. It is the only time bobsleigh crews of different sizes have raced each other for Olympic medals.

A sixteen-year-old in St. Moritz, 1928

Four years later the Games were in St. Moritz, on the run the sport was born on. A thaw cut the five-man race to two runs. The winning sled was driven by an American named Billy Fiske, who was sixteen years old and remains the youngest man to win a Winter Olympic gold. His crew, by one account, had never seen a bobsled before that winter.

Fiske joined the Royal Air Force in 1940, one of a handful of Americans to fly in the Battle of Britain, and died that August after nursing his burning Hurricane back to its airfield. The plaque in St.

Paul's Cathedral reads: an American citizen who died that England might live.

Lake Placid, 1932

America built its first track at Mount Van Hoevenberg for the 1932 Games, and two-man bobsleigh joined the programme. Brothers Hubert and Curtis Stevens won it for the hosts. Fourteen thousand people came to watch on the first day, more than any other event drew.

In the four-man, Fiske drove again and won again. Sitting behind him was Eddie Eagan, a Denver lawyer who had gone to Yale, Harvard Law and Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar, and who had won the light-heavyweight boxing gold at the Antwerp Olympics in 1920. Eagan had taken up bobsleigh about three weeks earlier. He told his wife he was on the United States bobsled team before he had ever sat in one. It was, as far as anyone knows, the only bobsleigh race of his life. Ninety-four years later he is still the only person to have won gold at both the Summer and Winter Games in different sports.

Chapter 3: Ice Bricks and Broken Necks

Early bobsleigh killed people at a rate no modern sport would tolerate.

The Riessersee track at Garmisch-Partenkirchen, which hosted the 1936 Games, recorded its first fatality in 1911 and was widely considered the most dangerous in the world. For the Olympics the ice was cut from the lake in bricks and laid on the track, where it splintered easily, so races were run at dawn and dusk to stay out of the sun. The American two-man winner, Ivan Brown, drove without goggles because he said they dulled his eyesight and added wind resistance. One German sled overturned and was eliminated. Pierre Musy of Switzerland won the four-man.

Fritz Feierabend, the Swiss pilot who took silver behind Brown, had built with his father the first all-steel bobsleigh. He won five Olympic medals across 1936, 1948 and 1952 without ever winning gold, and six world titles.

Felix Endrich

The Games returned to St. Moritz in 1948. Felix Endrich of Switzerland won the two-man with Friedrich Waller, ahead of Feierabend, and Francis Tyler's American crew took the four-man.

On 25 January 1953 Endrich won the two-man World Championship at Garmisch. Six days later, in the four-man on the same track, his sled flew out of the Bayern curve, hit the flagpoles and struck a tree twelve metres from the track. Endrich died of a broken neck. One of his crew, Fritz Stöckli, survived by jumping clear.

The deaths continued into the sixties. At Lake Placid in February 1966, Sergio Zardini, the Italian who had taken Olympic silver two years earlier and now raced for Canada, was killed in the corner called Zig-Zag, a month after the German Toni Pensberger died at Cortina. A magazine reporter that week recorded the wife of another American driver begging him not to go.

> *Endrich was world champion on a Sunday. On the Saturday he was thrown into a tree.*

Chapter 4: Heavier Than the Heavyweight

The 1952 Games in Oslo were held on Norway's first bobsleigh track, and they were decided by arithmetic.

Anderl Ostler and Lorenz Nieberl of Germany won the two-man. For the four-man, the German team withdrew its second sled and loaded its two heaviest pushers, Fritz Kuhn and Franz Kemser, into Ostler's. Sled and crew together weighed about 472 kilograms. The four men averaged more than 117 kilograms each, which was heavier than that year's Olympic heavyweight boxing champion. They won by a distance.

Heavier sleds carry more momentum against air resistance, and there was nothing in the rules to stop it. The other nations complained. The federation imposed a maximum combined weight for sled and crew, and the weight limit has been the central fact of bobsleigh selection ever since. Every crew is weighed sitting in the sled immediately after each run, and if a crew is light, ballast is bolted to the frame to bring it up to the line.

The German crew's story became a comedy film in 2006, *Schwere Jungs*, which translates roughly as heavy lads.

Chapter 5: The Flying Redhead

Eugenio Monti was born in the South Tyrol in 1928, was Italy's slalom champion until a knee injury in 1951, and switched to bobsleigh. The Italians called him *il Rosso Volante*, the flying redhead. He won nine world championships. For a long time he could not win the Olympics.

At Cortina in 1956, at home, he took silver in both events behind Lamberto Dalla Costa, a jet pilot who only ever raced on his home track. In 1960 there was no bobsleigh at all, because the organisers at Squaw Valley in California declined to build a track for nine nations.

Innsbruck, 1964

At Innsbruck in 1964 the British two-man crew of Tony Nash and Robin Dixon sheared the bolt that held their rear axle after the first run. Monti, who had finished his own run and was lying second, had the same bolt removed from his sled at the finish and sent up to the start for the British to fit. Nash and Dixon won gold. Monti took bronze. Later in the week Monti's mechanics also repaired the broken axle on the Canadian four-man, which then won too.

"Nash didn't win because I gave him the bolt," Monti said. "He won because he had the fastest run." He was the first recipient of the International Fair Play Committee's Pierre de Coubertin trophy, and there is a corner on the St. Moritz run named Monti's Bolt.

Grenoble, 1968

Monti was forty when he went to Grenoble. In the two-man he and Luciano de Paolis recorded exactly the same total time as the West German sled of Horst Floth and Pepi Bader. The judges first proposed two golds, then awarded it to Italy on the strength of the fastest single run. In the four-man Monti won outright. He was the first pilot to win both events at one Games, and he retired.

> *"Nash didn't win because I gave him the bolt. He won because he had the fastest run."*

Chapter 6: Concrete and the Cold War

The end of natural ice

In 1968 the Bavarian resort of Königssee opened the first artificially refrigerated track. Innsbruck's Igls track, rebuilt with refrigeration for the 1976 Games, was the first Olympic bobsleigh run on artificial ice. A British official is supposed to have looked at its tame new profile and called it a sport for pansies. St. Moritz kept building its track from snow, and still does. Everyone else poured concrete.

The East German machine

East Germany came to bobsleigh late and took it apart with sports science. Meinhard Nehmer had been a javelin thrower, good enough for 81 metres, when he was recruited to bobsleigh at the age of thirty-two. Three years later, at Innsbruck in 1976, he won both the two-man and the four-man. His brakeman was Bernhard Germeshausen, a converted decathlete. At Lake Placid in 1980 Nehmer won the four-man again. Three golds each was the Olympic record for a generation.

Wolfgang Hoppe, another ex-decathlete, took over. At Sarajevo in 1984 East Germany won gold and silver in both events, Hoppe driving the winners. Between 1984 and 1994 he collected six Olympic medals and six world titles, and lost the 1988 four-man at Calgary by seven hundredths of a second to Switzerland's Ekkehard Fasser.

The Swiss were the other power. Erich Schärer won the two-man at Lake Placid in 1980 with Sepp Benz and seven world titles across fifteen years. In 1988 the Soviet Union won its only bobsleigh gold,

Jānis Ķipurs of Latvia driving the two-man, a fact that would matter to Latvia later.

Chapter 7: Feel the Rhythm

Everyone knows the story of the Jamaican bobsleigh team at the 1988 Calgary Olympics, because Disney told it in 1993 and *Cool Runnings* made a hundred and fifty million dollars. Most of what everyone knows is wrong.

The real story begins with two Americans, George Fitch and William Maloney, who watched a pushcart derby in Jamaica in 1987 and thought the pushing looked like a bobsleigh start. They could not recruit sprinters, so they went to the army. A notice in the Jamaica Defence Force's orders asked for volunteers for rigorous and dangerous training. Captain Dudley Stokes, a helicopter pilot, became the driver. Lieutenant Devon Harris, a Sandhurst graduate, and Michael White pushed. Their coach was Howard Siler, an American who had driven at two Olympics.

At Calgary, Caswell Allen was injured in training and the fourth seat went to Dudley's brother Chris, a sprinter who had flown in as a spectator and left as an Olympian. The sled was rented from Canada and repainted a few days before the race, not a cast-off from the American team. There was an eligibility dispute, settled by appeal, not by a coach's dramatic gesture.

In the four-man, on the third of four runs, the sled went over at about 130 kilometres an hour, and the crew slid on their helmets for six hundred metres. It was a driving error at speed, not a broken sled. The four of them got up and walked beside the sled to the finish, to polite applause. They did not carry it. The Olympic-sized ovation was written in Hollywood.

Dudley Stokes says of the film that it is a Disney feature and not much in it actually happened. The director says they kept refining the true story to make a better movie. Both are right. Six years later at Lillehammer the Jamaican four-man finished fourteenth, ahead of both American sleds, and nobody made a film about that.

The Prince

Also at Calgary in 1988 was a two-man sled from Monaco driven by Albert Grimaldi, the heir to the principality, who carried the flag at the opening ceremony and finished twenty-fifth. He raced at five Games in all, his best finish twenty-second. Asked how the Olympic village compared with the palace, he said the rooms did not differ much in size, but there were a few different items on the wall. He became Prince Albert II in 2005 and still sits on the International Olympic Committee.

> *They did not carry the sled. They walked beside it. The ovation was written in Hollywood.*

Chapter 8: Ties and Secrets

Albertville, 1992

Gustav Weder of Switzerland won the two-man with Donat Acklin and would win it again in 1994, the first pilot to defend a two-man title. The four-man at La Plagne was decided by two hundredths of a second, Austria's Ingo Appelt beating Wolfgang Hoppe.

The American two-man was pushed by Herschel Walker, a running back for the Minnesota Vikings who had joined the team that winter. He and Brian Shimer finished seventh. Two days before the four-man, the American pilot dropped Walker for a friend, which caused a row that lasted longer than the race.

A German pilot named Harald Czudaj arrived in France with a confession. Days before the Games he had told a news agency that he had informed for the Stasi, East Germany's secret police, on his own team-mates at the Altenberg club. He said he had been told he would no longer be an athlete if he refused. He was allowed to race and finished sixth. Two years later at Lillehammer he won the four-man gold, and became, uncomfortably, the face of reunified German bobsleigh.

Nagano, 1998

There had never been a tie for an Olympic bobsleigh medal. Nagano produced two. In the two-man, Pierre Lueders and Dave MacEachern of Canada and Günther Huber and Antonio Tartaglia of Italy finished four runs with identical times of three minutes 37.24 seconds, and both crews were given gold. Before the final run Lueders had said to Huber, can you imagine if we tied this thing. In

the four-man, Britain and France tied for bronze. Christoph Langen of Germany won it, the first of what would become a long German habit.

Chapter 9: The Women Arrive

Salt Lake City, 2002

A hundred and four years after Madame Little won the first women's race in St. Moritz, women's bobsleigh reached the Olympics.

The favourites were the Americans Jean Racine and Jen Davidson, best friends, World Cup champions and the faces of a credit-card advertising campaign. Two months before the Games Racine dropped Davidson by voicemail in favour of a faster pusher, who then tore a hamstring days before the race. They finished fifth. The press called her Mean Jean. Racine pointed out, accurately, that nobody wrote about relationships and friendships when men changed brakemen.

The gold went to the second American sled. Jill Bakken drove. Her brakewoman, Vonetta Flowers, was a sprinter and long jumper from Alabama who had gone to a bobsleigh tryout only because her husband saw a flyer. She became the first Black athlete from any country to win a Winter Olympic gold.

In the men's events, Langen won the two-man, and a twenty-eight-year-old German named André Lange won the four-man for the first time. Behind him the Americans took silver and bronze, their first men's medals in forty-six years.

Turin, 2006

Germany won all three golds. Lange took the two-man with Kevin Kuske and the four-man again. Sandra Kiriasis won the women's race. Martin Annen of Switzerland took two bronzes, and Gerda

Weissensteiner of Italy, who had been Olympic luge champion in 1994, won a bronze in a bobsleigh to become one of the few people with medals in two sliding sports.

Chapter 10: Night Train

A pilot who could not see

Steven Holcomb had been diagnosed in 2002 with keratoconus, a disease that warps the cornea. By 2007 his vision had degraded to 20/500 and he was driving Olympic bobsleighs almost entirely by feel. That year he tried to kill himself. A new corneal treatment and then lens implants restored his sight in 2008, and the doctor who performed it renamed the procedure after him.

His four-man sled was built by a project founded by a NASCAR driver, Geoff Bodine, and an engineer named Bob Cuneo. It arrived for its 2008 debut with no time to paint it, so it ran in matte black primer, and Cuneo wrote a name on a bar napkin: Night Train. The black stayed. At Whistler in February 2010 Holcomb drove Night Train to the first American four-man gold since 1948.

Whistler

The Whistler track was the fastest ever built and had killed a luger in training on the morning of the opening ceremony. Bobsleigh crews called curve thirteen fifty-fifty, for the proportion of sleds that came through it upright. Australia's four-man withdrew with concussions. Holcomb's advice to anyone wanting to understand a crash was to imagine tripping in the street, and then to imagine jumping out of a car at ninety miles an hour.

André Lange won the two-man with Kuske for a fourth Olympic gold, the most by any pilot, and took silver in the four-man. Kaillie Humphries and Heather Moyse won Canada's first women's bobsleigh gold at home, with the other Canadian sled second.

The sled was too new to paint, so it ran in black primer and got its name on a bar napkin.

Chapter 11: Sochi's Long Shadow

What happened, and what happened later

At Sochi in 2014 the Russian pilot Alexander Zubkov won both men's events and carried his country's flag. In November 2017 the International Olympic Committee, investigating Russia's state doping programme, disqualified him and banned him for life. The Court of Arbitration for Sport upheld it. A Moscow court then declared the ruling unenforceable in Russia, but the results stood everywhere else.

The medals were handed down. Switzerland's Beat Hefti became two-man champion. Latvia's Oskars Melbārdis, who had finished second in the four-man, became the first pilot from outside the traditional powers to win the four-man since 1992. Steven Holcomb, who had won two bronzes in Sochi, became a double silver medallist.

He never received them. On 6 May 2017, six months before the disqualifications, Holcomb was found dead in his room at the Lake Placid training centre, aged thirty-seven, with fluid in his lungs and alcohol and sleeping pills in his system. The silvers were presented to his parents in 2019. The British four-man crew, whose pilot John Jackson had ruptured an Achilles tendon months before the Games, received their bronzes the same week from Princess Anne. Latvia's crew got their golds in front of a home crowd at Sigulda in 2020, six years after the race.

The unaffected

The women's race was clean and close. Humphries and Moyse repeated for Canada by a tenth of a second over Elana Meyers and Lauryn Williams, after the Americans had led for three runs. Williams, who had won a sprint relay gold in London two years earlier, became the first American woman with medals at both Games. Another summer star, the hurdler Lolo Jones, pushed the third American sled.

Jamaica came back with a two-man crew, the 46-year-old Winston Watts and Marvin Dixon, after an internet community that traded a novelty cryptocurrency raised about thirty thousand dollars for them in two days. They finished twenty-ninth.

Chapter 12: Friedrich

PyeongChang, 2018

Francesco Friedrich, from Saxony, had been the best two-man pilot in the world for four years without an Olympic medal. At PyeongChang he and his brakeman Thorsten Margis finished four runs in three minutes 16.86 seconds. So did Justin Kripps and Alexander Kopacz of Canada. Twenty years after Nagano, the two-man had tied for gold again. Kripps did not know until Margis told him beside the podium. Two extra people, he said, were as happy as they were.

Friedrich then won the four-man outright, while Germany and South Korea tied for silver behind him, Korea's first bobsleigh medal. In the women's race Mariama Jamanka won for Germany, with Meyers Taylor second and Humphries third.

At the back of the women's field, twentieth of twenty, were Seun Adigun, Ngozi Onwumere and Akuoma Omeoga, three American-based Nigerian sprinters who had trained on a wooden sled Adigun built in her garage in Houston, and who were the first African bobsleigh crew at any Olympics.

Beijing, 2022

Friedrich won both events again. In the two-man Germany took all three medals. A new event, the monobob, put women alone in identical one-design sleds so that only the driving counted, and the first champion was Kaillie Humphries.

She was no longer Canadian. In 2018 she had filed a complaint alleging verbal and mental abuse by Canada's head coach. An investigation found it unsubstantiated, she sued the federation, and in 2019 Canada released her. She had married an American, and she was sworn in as a United States citizen two months before the Games. Meyers Taylor took silver in the monobob and bronze in the two-woman, and Laura Nolte won the two-woman for Germany.

The numbers

By 2025 Friedrich held sixteen world titles in the two men's events, more than anyone in history, and had at one stage won every world championship race for five consecutive years. His brakeman Margis rode with him for all four Olympic golds.

Twenty years after Nagano, four runs, two sleds, one time, two golds. Kripps found out on the podium.

Chapter 13: Cortina, 2026

The Games came back to Cortina d'Ampezzo on a track rebuilt, against the International Olympic Committee's wishes and at a cost of around a hundred and twenty million euros, on the site of the run Eugenio Monti had raced on in 1956.

Friedrich did not win. Johannes Lochner, his German rival and occasional co-champion, won the two-man by 1.34 seconds, the largest margin in nearly fifty years, ahead of Friedrich in a German sweep. Then he won the four-man too, with Margis now riding behind him. Margis's fifth gold made him the most decorated Olympic bobsledder ever. Lochner retired on the spot, calling it a moment for eternity. Friedrich said he would normally have to go and get one more gold, and would see.

Elana Meyers Taylor had won her first medal at Whistler in 2010 as a brakewoman. At Cortina, aged forty-one and at her fifth Games, she trailed Laura Nolte for three heats of the monobob, set a track record in the fourth and won by four hundredths of a second. Humphries was third. It gave Meyers Taylor a medal at five consecutive Games and made her, with the speed skater Bonnie Blair, the most decorated American woman in Winter Olympic history. She said there had been many moments when she thought it was not possible.

Nolte won the two-woman for Germany, and Germany went home with eight of the twelve bobsleigh medals. Jamaica's Mica Moore finished fourteenth in the monobob, which equalled the country's best Olympic bobsleigh result, thirty-eight years after Calgary.

Chapter 14: How It Actually Works

The sled

A bobsleigh is a steel frame in two halves, hinged in the middle so the front can steer, under a shell of fibreglass or carbon fibre that is closed at the front and open at the back. The front axle turns. The rear axle does not. Four runners, two on each axle, are the only parts touching the ice.

The pilot steers with two rope handles attached to a steering bolt that swings the front axle. Pulling the right ring turns right. The brake is a toothed steel rake between the brakeman's legs, worked by two handles, and the rules state that it may be used only after the finish line. The push bars retract into the shell once the crew is in.

The rules run to many pages. Two-man sleds may be no more than 2.7 metres long, four-man 3.8. The runners must be at least 67 centimetres apart. The runners themselves must be made from a standard steel supplied by the federation, may be ground to shape but not coated or hardened, and are checked before each run against a reference runner left out in the air: if yours is more than four degrees warmer, you do not start. Cooling them with snow is banned. So are cable ties and tape on ballast, which tells you something about what people tried.

The weights

Sled and crew together may not exceed 390 kilograms in two-man, 330 in two-woman, 631 in four-man and about 248 in monobob. Crews are weighed sitting in the sled immediately after the heat. If

they are light, ballast is bolted in. Athletes may not carry weight on their bodies. All of this dates from the German heavyweights of Oslo in 1952.

The push

The push is about fifty metres. The pilot loads first, the side pushers next, and the brakeman last, still running. A world-class four-man crew covers the timed section in under five seconds. The British federation's rule of thumb is that a tenth of a second lost at the start is three tenths lost by the finish, and that a crew more than a tenth off the fastest start has little chance of winning. This is why bobsleigh recruits sprinters, hurdlers, rugby players and American footballers, and why federations run combines that measure a thirty-metre sprint, a standing long jump and a shot throw.

The pilot

Most of what a good pilot does is nothing. Every steering input scratches the ice and costs speed, so the ideal is to find a line that the sled will follow on its own and touch the ropes as little as possible. Pilots walk the track before every race, memorising curves, and drive it in their heads the night before. Gustav Weder's advice on La Plagne was that you do not look for the shortest way; you drive longer curves to generate speed.

Speed, force and crashing

Race speeds are 130 to 150 kilometres an hour, with forces of up to five times body weight in the big curves. The record is a little over 156 kilometres an hour, set by a four-man at Whistler in 2019. When a sled goes over, the crew is briefly weightless, then upside

down on ice that behaves like tarmac. They wear burn vests. Elana Meyers Taylor describes it as very, very loud, a scraping, piercing sound. The common injury is not the crash but the accumulation: sliders talk about sled head, a fog of headaches and dizziness after a hard day of runs.

The money

A competitive four-man sled costs something between a hundred thousand and a quarter of a million euros. In the last twenty years the car industry has taken an interest. BMW's design studio built the American two-man sleds for Sochi. Ferrari designed for Italy. McLaren's technology arm worked with Britain. Germany's sleds come out of a state-funded institute in Berlin with its own wind tunnel, staffed by eighty engineers. Smaller nations buy second-hand: Canada bought Friedrich's 2018 gold-medal sled, and Jamaica's pilot, asked why he wanted a better one, said they did not want to be drag racing in a Prius.

The monobob was the federation's answer. Every sled is identical, built by one manufacturer in Munich, and the only ballast allowed is the manufacturer's own. It is the one event in which nobody can buy a hundredth.

A Timeline

Year	What happened
1885	Cresta Run built at St. Moritz.
1888–90	Wilson Smith's two toboggans and a plank. Mathis builds the first purpose-built bob.
1897	St. Moritz Bobsleigh Club founded, two women required on the committee.
1898	First organised race, two women required in each crew of five.
1904	Olympia Bobrun St. Moritz–Celerina opens on New Year's Day.
1923	International federation founded in Paris.
1924	Chamonix: first Olympic bobsleigh. Switzerland wins.
1928	Billy Fiske, 16, wins at St. Moritz.
1932	Lake Placid: two-man added. Eddie Eagan's Summer and Winter double.
1936	Garmisch: ice cut in bricks from the lake.
1952	Oslo: the German heavyweights. Weight limits follow.
1953	Felix Endrich killed at Garmisch six days after winning the world title.
1964	Innsbruck: Monti lends Nash and Dixon a bolt.
1968	Grenoble: Monti wins both golds at 40. Königssee opens the first refrigerated track.
1976	Innsbruck: first Games on artificial ice. Nehmer's double.
1984	Sarajevo: East Germany wins gold and silver in both events.
1988	Calgary: Jamaica's debut. Prince Albert's first Games.
1992	Albertville: Herschel Walker pushes. Czudaj's Stasi confession.

Year	What happened
1998	Nagano: two ties, including the two-man gold.
2002	Salt Lake City: first women's Olympic bobsleigh. Vonetta Flowers.
2010	Whistler: Night Train. Lange's fourth gold. Humphries and Moyse.
2014	Sochi: Zubkov wins, later stripped. Medals reallocated to Switzerland, Latvia, USA and Britain.
2017	Steven Holcomb dies at Lake Placid.
2018	PyeongChang: Friedrich and Kripps tie. Nigeria's debut.
2022	Beijing: monobob debut. Friedrich's second double.
2026	Cortina: Lochner's double. Meyers Taylor gold at 41. Margis's fifth gold.

Notes on Sources and Disputed Facts

This book was written from three research fact sheets kept alongside it in the `research/` folder. Each claim there carries a source link. The main sources were the International Bobsleigh and Skeleton Federation's rules and history pages, the St. Moritz Bobsleigh Club and the Cresta and Bobsleigh Museum in St. Moritz, Olympedia, Olympics.com, Wikipedia in English, and contemporary reporting from NBC, ESPN, CBC, CNN, the BBC and others.

Where sources disagree, this book has chosen the plainer or vaguer version. The disagreements worth knowing about:

- **Wilson Smith's nationality** is given as English by the federation and American by the Olympic historians and the Swiss National Museum.
- **The first purpose-built bob** is credited to Bulpett and Mathis in 1889 by the St. Moritz museum, and to Mathis alone copying Smith's design by the federation. The St. Moritz club dates the start of the sport to December 1890.
- **The first race** is dated 5 January 1898 by some sources and 15 January by the museum.
- **The St. Moritz run** is dated 1904 by the club, the federation and the Olympic historians. One general reference says 1902.
- **The 1952 weight rule.** One source says the limit was 420 kilograms for a four-man crew, another 880 pounds. Sources also disagree on whether the rule was announced just before or just after the Oslo Games.
- **Monti's bolt.** Some accounts say bolt, others say axle. The bolt held the rear axle; both are compatible.

- **Friedrich's world titles.** Sixteen in the two individual men's events by 2025. Higher counts include team events.
- **Meyers Taylor's record.** Some sources call her the oldest individual Winter Olympic gold medallist. Others say only the oldest American. All agree she ties Bonnie Blair on total medals.
- **Sled and runner rules** change; the figures in Chapter 14 are the 2025 rules.
- **Bobsleigh's top speed** is given as 156 and as 157 kilometres an hour by different sources.
- **Prince Albert's flag-bearing.** The federation says he carried Monaco's flag in 2002. Wikipedia names someone else.

Corrections welcome. The fact sheets are the place to record them.