



# Feedback: Bobsleigh

**Following a recent morning session of the UK Bobsleigh trials at Lea Valley Athletics complex, Great Britain Bobsleigh Performance Director Gary Anderson is enthusiastic about the level of talent on show. He explains his quest for the next UK bobsleigh star, what it takes, and what he has in his sights for the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi.**

**How did you become Performance Director of Great Britain Bobsleigh?**

I was appointed Performance Director after the Vancouver Olympics and was first approached about the role when we were travelling back on the plane from the games. I've been in performance sport for over 30 years and felt I could make a difference; they signed me on a 4-year contract, up until Sochi 2014.

**What does the role entail?**

I am responsible for preparing the squads and managing staff towards the Sochi 2014 Winter Olympic Games. This involves running the full-time performance centre in Bath and also recruitment of the appropriate athletes, managing all the staff and ensuring the athletes have exactly what they need to prepare.

**What are your objectives – and why did you choose them?**

We have already met one objective, which was to win a medal at the inaugural Youth Winter Olympic Games. Our next major objective is to win a medal in 2014. Olympics sport is the pinnacle of all sport. We have World and European Championships – but everybody would sacrifice them for success at the Olympic Games.

**What makes these athletes exceptional?**

They have to be very athletic and be prepared to subject themselves to a pretty thrilling ride for just over a minute; it takes a special kind of person to do that. They are travelling down the ice at 100km per hour and sometimes the sleigh crashes – that is a concern they have to accept and endure. They also have to be away from home for long periods, for example, 6 months to a year when they are on the circuit. Some venues are amazing, some, not so much.

**How do you promote team work?**

Everybody knows that in our sport there is that element of danger which we have to put up with and everybody

respects that. We have a big thing about teamwork – if one crew wins then everybody wins, that's how we look at it. Whilst there is rivalry amongst the squad for positions, selection and drivers racing against each other, we believe we are all doing it for Team GB and we want Great Britain to be top of the podium.

**Is there room for individualists in the sport?**

Every athlete has an individual responsibility for their physical condition, their behaviour and a responsibility to their team mates. We then have that all coming together, and I describe it as the 'Italian coffee effect'. By this I mean that, say in London, you could have the best coffee machine, the best coffee, and the best quality water to make the coffee, but it never tastes the same as it does in Milan. We want the sum of all the parts to equal more than each individual's worth.



**What are the traits of a good team?**

First and foremost is knowing what they, as a team, want to achieve. They need to know what the objective is and everybody needs to sign up to it. People need to know what their individual responsibility is and what their job is. I tell my staff to do no one else's job but their own – and if they do that, then their contribution is made. If everyone does that, then we will meet the objective.

**How do you know when you have that team?**

We are always striving to reach that utopian point. I believe staffing-wise we are getting there. We are very close to achieving the world-class standard of support team that we need. We are constantly looking to improve it because, as athletes improve, the staff need to improve as well. With the athletes, we will know that once we have them standing on the podium with a medal around their neck. That is the ultimate measure.



**How do you tackle underperformance?**

Most of our athletes will recognise before anyone else if he or she is underperforming, and there is no one more disappointed than that individual. In most cases, the athlete understands the process enough, and do not need reminding. If they are underperforming, we have to look at why that is. Sometimes it is not the most obvious thing, so we have to take it apart bit by bit to find out what the problem is – then rectify that problem and rebuild their performance profile so it doesn't happen again.

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**How do our facilities and funding compare with overseas teams?**

We are always starting from a position slightly behind countries with their own tracks; we don't have an ice track in this country and we are not an alpine nation. So in terms of time on the ice, we try and maximise every minute we have. In terms of funding, we are very lucky. We are a relatively successful winter sport compared to others, and that is recognised by our funding partners, UK Sport, The Talented Athlete's Scholarship Scheme, and the BOA. They support us in a way that allows us to do what we need to do.

**What has been the most memorable moment in your role?**

In the 2 years I have been here, there have been two highlights. The first was winning

the World Junior Championships with our now number one senior driver – that was the stepping stone in winning the World Juniors. Second was the silver medal we won at the Inaugural Youth Olympic Games. Both of those are status-dominated highlights, but in my time there have been many others. I always like seeing athletes coming through the talent identification process and making their first performance on ice; that is always encouraging to watch,

especially when they acknowledge themselves as a bobsleighter. Recently, there was a horrific crash at the start of the season, where brakewoman Serita Shone fractured her spine. At one point she was in hospital very seriously ill, but the fact that she is now back at training sums up how I see the spirit of a bobsleighter. How fast Serita will get now remains to be seen but it's that type of tenacious attitude towards the sport that I like to see.

**What advice would you give anyone who wants to get into bobsleighting? What attributes do they need?**

We are looking for people who are strong and fast! In bobsleighting today, the driver, the brakeman, whoever you are, you absolutely have to be athletic. Gone are the days where you could get away with being semi-athletic in this sport – now top-level physical conditioning is key. If you are fast and strong and wish to do a sport that gives a tremendous amount of pleasure and a sense of accomplishment – then bobsleighting is what you should consider. If people want to win, then we are looking for those winners!

*The final selection phase of the British Bobsleigh Team takes place September so be sure to read our follow-up interview in the autumn.*

**UK BOBSLEIGH LANDMARKS**

- The UK team has won a gold, a silver and two bronze medals at the Senior Olympic Games – making it a real success story for UK winter sports.
- At the Innsbruck Youth Olympics in 2012, GB picked up the silver medal.
- The UK governing body for the sport is British Bobsleigh, which was founded in New York in 1927.

**Interview by Simon Roberts**

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**Fancy yourself as a bobsleighter?**

*Below are listed the standards that had to be met at the trials. Would-be athletes also have to undergo a 1RM bench press and back squat. This really is a strength and power sport – and you also need mental resilience!*

Senior Athlete Standards: Performance Criteria	Men	Women
30m standing start sprint – electronically timed	3.80 seconds	4.10 seconds
Flying 30m sprint – electronically timed	3.20 seconds	3.60 seconds
Standing long jump into pit	2.90m	2.60m
Junior Athlete Standards: Performance Criteria	Men	Women
30m standing start sprint – electronically timed	3.90 seconds	4.20 seconds
Flying 30m sprint – electronically timed	3.30 seconds	3.70 seconds
Standing long jump into pit	2.80m	2.40m

**... think you can compete?**