



## SCHOOL PROGRAM

# THE PASSION

## OLYMPIC MIXED LUGE RELAY TEAM

(Grade 6 and up)



### SPORT DESCRIPTION

Remember the speed you reached when you went tobogganing with your friends? That's nothing compared to the breakneck speeds reached in the luge. Lugers slide down a banked track of ice feet-first on a small sled. They can reach speeds over 150 km/hour.

The mixed team relay is comprised of a women's single, men's single, and men's double luge. The woman goes first, pushing off to break the beam that starts the timer. As she finishes her run, she reaches up to hit a pressure pad hung over the finish line. This releases a gate at the top, allowing the team's male luger to start his race. When he finishes, he punches the pressure pad, setting off the two double luge athletes. The combined time is ranked against the other teams. The race is timed to the 1/1000ths of a second and the teams are separated by a miniscule fraction of a second.



### ABOUT THE ATHLETE

#### OLYMPIC MIXED LUGE RELAY TEAM:

The team of **Alex Gough**, **Sam Edney**, **Tristan Walker** and **Justin Snith** raced to Canada's first ever Olympic medal in the luge team relay at with a time of 2:24.872. The PyeongChang 2018 event ended a lot more joyous for the Canadians than four years ago when the team finished fourth, a mere tenth of a second out of bronze medal position.

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# THE STORY

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*“I was so discouraged. I wanted to quit,” recalls luger Tristan Walker. But for Tristan and the team, passion kept them going through bitter disappointment.*

The 2014 Sochi Olympic Winter Games were agonizing for Canada’s luge relay team. They spent years preparing to chase a medal, falling an excruciating 1/10th of a second short. Fourth place stung like a wound, and the days of media interviews forced them to relive their disappointment.

A tough loss can test the desire and determination of even the best athletes. The team refused to quit. Instead they decided to work even harder. They knew that the best way to put the bad experience behind them was to do better next time.

The sport requires unrelenting training all year round. *“Luge is a full-time job,”* says Walker. *“We are there sometimes up to twice a day, five days a week. Missing by only 1/10th of a second was a huge motivation for us,”* he says. There were days that they didn’t feel like practicing, *“but then you ask yourself, could that be my 1/10th of a second? That always pushed our team to keep going.”*

No one wanted to be the person who let the team down by not giving their best. But they each knew their teammates were always there for them. *“You have the rest of the team to rely on,”* says Sam Edney. *“They’ll be there to support you.”*

Two months before the Pyeongchang 2018 Olympic Winter Games, the Canadian team received some news. Russia’s silver medal team from the Sochi 2014 Olympic Winter Games were being disqualified for cheating. Tests found they had taken banned drugs to improve their performance. The Canadian team would be elevated to the bronze position.

The good news turned bad five weeks later. An international court of appeal ruled that the Russians could keep their medal after all. The Canadians were once again left off the podium. *“There was a lot of anger because it was just unfair,”* says team member Sam Edney.

But with only days before their chance to redeem their Sochi defeat, the roller-coaster of emotions had to be put behind them. It was time to focus on the future and not the past. *“You can only control what’s ahead of you,”* says Justin Snith. *“We decided we had to just push on.”*

Alex Gough achieved Canada’s first big success in PyeongChang with a bronze in the women’s event. Two days later came the team relay event. Thoughts of their disappointment in Sochi were swept aside. The Canadian athletes were determined to win a medal this time.

The Canadians were the third-last team to go down the track. The team pulled into a tiny lead of 7/1000ths of a second during the first two legs. With this small a margin, the pressure was on double lugers Tristan Walker and Justin Snith to clinch a medal. They delivered, expanding the lead to over

2/10ths of a second. They crossed the finish line in first. They had secured a medal for Canada but holding onto first place would be difficult with the two fastest teams coming next. Nervously they watched the final two teams make their runs. Only the Germans were faster. Team Canada had won the silver medal.

*“The moment that you realize you’re going to win an Olympic medal,”* says Sam Edney, *“you can’t describe it. It’s a feeling of pure joy that makes it all worthwhile.”* Edney says.

The Canadian luge team’s undeterred passion helped them overcome defeat and secure an Olympic medal. *“The lesson is that if you find something you love and enjoy that’s something you have to pursue,”* says Sam Edney. *“It’s about finding that thing that you can be passionate about.”*

*“It doesn’t have to be sport,”* says Alex Gough. *“It could be anything. When you find that thing you love, you find this group of people who end up becoming a second family. People who understand you, who get your passion and love, whether it’s for luge or something else.”*







