



Tuesday, February 5, 2002

OU athlete ready for Olympic bobsleigh race

By **Jeff Samoray**, OU Web Writer

Women's bobsleigh will make its Olympic debut at the Salt Lake City Games on Tuesday, Feb. 19, with one of Oakland University's own racing for a gold medal for the United States.

Jean Racine, a freshman performing arts major, and her partner Gea Johnson represent America's best hope for a medal in the two-woman event, which takes place Tuesday, Feb. 19, at Utah Olympic Park. Racine is the top driver for the American women's team and is considered by many a top candidate for the gold medal. Her biggest challenge will be beating German teams led by drivers Sandra Prokoff and Susi Erdmann.

At the Salt Lake City games, the women's bobsleigh competition will consist of two runs. The final standings are determined by the fastest total time over two runs. If two teams end in a tie, they are awarded the same place. The competition between teams is fierce – races can be decided by .01 seconds.

In Olympic competition, the two-woman bobsleigh races are held on 1,300-meter tracks. The total weight of the fiberglass sled and crew cannot exceed 770 pounds, and the team's weight distribution must be considered carefully to reach optimum speeds. The sleds can reach up to 90 mph with 4 G forces in the curves depending on track conditions. Sleds can cost up to \$35,000 to build with steel runners up to \$5,000.

During the race, one team member acts as a pusher while the other acts as a driver. As the driver and team leader, Racine's responsibility is to help push off to a fast start and to steer the sled by gently pulling on two pieces of rope. The ropes are attached to a steering bolt that turns the front frame of the sled. To be successful, Racine will need to display quick reactions and excellent hand-eye coordination.

As the pusher, Johnson will need to get the sled off to a fast start and apply a jagged metal claw into the ice as the brake at the end of the run. Pushers are usually recruited from sports like track – Johnson is a former heptathlon champion. She will wear special shoes with about 500 tiny spikes under the balls of her feet to get her team off to a fast start.

You can watch the women's bobsleigh events on Feb. 19 on NBC and CBC television networks. NBC coverage begins at 8 p.m., following the ladies figure skating short program. CBC coverage begins at 6 p.m., following the women's hockey semi-final.

The opening ceremonies for the 2002 Winter Olympics are Friday, Feb. 8, at 8 p.m. The closing ceremonies are Sunday, Feb. 24, at 8 p.m.

For more information on **Racine**, the bobsleigh competition and the Olympics, visit the official site of the **2002 Olympic Winter Games**.

Watch for a more in-depth story about Racine in the spring issue of OU Magazine.

SUMMARY

Women's bobsleigh will make its Olympic debut at the Salt Lake City Games on Tuesday, Feb. 19, with one of OU's own racing for a gold medal. Jean Racine, a freshman performing arts major, and her partner Gea Johnson are the United State's best hope for a medal in the two-woman event. Racine is the top driver for the American women's team and is considered by many a top candidate for the gold medal.

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