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THE WORKOUT

Training to Bobsled



Video | Training to Bobsled Chris Fogt is a U.S. Olympic Team bobsledder. He demonstrates some of the exercises in his workout, which is designed to improve the skills his sport requires.

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February 5, 2014

Being an Olympic bobsledder is a job that requires a precise balance of speed, muscle and weight. The athletes must explode off the starting line while pushing nearly 500 pounds of bobsled at full speed. They need to be strong enough for a powerful launch so the sled will reach speeds exceeding 90 miles an hour. But the athletes also need to be lean in order to lighten the load and wind resistance as they hunker down in the sled.

To find out how bobsledders achieve this combination of power and speed, we asked Army Capt. Chris Fogt, a member of the four-man American bobsled team that will compete in Sochi, Russia, to show us the bobsled workout.

Captain Fogt, 30, grew up in Georgia and Utah, and is a soldier athlete who

served in Iraq and competed in the last Winter Olympics in Vancouver. We caught up with him at the Olympic Training Center in Lake Placid, N.Y., to talk about the bobsledder's training routine, why beach muscles are not a good thing and the highs and sometimes-painful lows of a 90-miles-an-hour sport. Here's an edited version of our conversation.

Q.

How did you get into bobsledding?

A.

I was running track in college at Utah Valley University back in 2007 when I was recruited for bobsled. There's not much glamor to it, but I love it because it's a lot of fun. It's fast, it's a little bit dangerous, and we get to travel the world and race with the biggest, fastest athletes on the planet.

Q.

What are the basics of a bobsledding workout?

A.

Bobsledding is a very physical sport. It requires a lot of speed and power. We have track guys that try out and some of them are good, but they're not quite powerful enough. We have weightlifters come and try out, but they're not fast enough. That's because it's a hybrid of the sports. We lift three to four times a week, we sprint twice a week, and we push the sled out here twice a week.

Q.

Does bobsledding require some muscles more than others?

A.

It's mostly legwork. So we do a lot of squats, a lot of power cleans, jump squats, box jumps, lunges – everything legs. We also do some upper body stuff but more just for fun and for overall body balance.

Q.

What is your gym routine like?

A.

During the summertime when we're in the off season and we're not out in the

freezing cold four or five hours a day, we usually lift three to four times a week. While we're training and sliding at the same time, we usually lift twice a week. On Mondays we do the heavier, slower lifts, like squats, lunges, and bench press. On Wednesdays we do jumps, cleans and the more explosive lifts. And then we race Friday and Saturday.

Q.

Are there exercises that all bobsledders have to do?

A.

Every athlete has their own program, but a few of the constants will be power cleans, squats, jumps, and deadlifts. Those three to four base exercises everyone does, whether you're on the U.S. team, the British team, German team or Latvian team. Those are the lifts that build the most strength and power.

Q.

So you focus on weightlifting, but you're not exactly building beach muscles?

A.

No. We don't do a whole lot of curls, shoulder type work, biceps or chest. When I was back in college, you'd do curls for half an hour a day trying to get large arms. Here, it's just not functional for us. When you're in the sled, you're trying to get as low as you can, and if you have a huge upper body you become a wind sail. If you have huge massive shoulders and a big chest, the wind is hitting you and the sled is slowing down. Whereas if you're leaner and smaller and flexible, you can get real low and that helps the air flow right over the sled. We want to be strong but lean and mean.

Q.

Do you follow a special diet?

A.

Our diet is basically just to eat everything we want. I try and consume about 5,000 calories a day to maintain weight. So we eat a lot of food. I'm naturally a lot smaller than this. When I first started in the sport, I weighed about 175 pounds. Now I weigh about 215. So I've gained about 40 pounds doing the sport.

Q.

All muscle?

A.

Most of it.

Q.

Is there a specific weight you try to maintain?

A.

Most guys in our sport weigh between 215 and 235 pounds. That's the sweet spot. If you get much larger than that, it's hard to have the speed to push the bobsled. And if you're smaller than that, you don't have the power to push the bobsled.

Q.

Are there certain foods you like to eat while training?

A.

We try to eat a lot of protein and a lot of carbs. To get my hunger and metabolism going, I eat a huge breakfast. And we have a large lunch and large dinner. At breakfast I eat two pancakes, three or four eggs, oatmeal, a glass of orange juice and some yogurt. If I just eat a bowl of cereal for breakfast, I'll burn it instantly while I'm eating it.

Q.

What is your role on the team?

A.

My job as a four-man brakeman is we get to the starting line and we have to push the sled. The sleds weigh between 400 and 500 pounds. You're trying to move that sled from zero to as fast as you can very, very quickly. And that's where the speed and power come into play. So we push for about 50 meters, then all four of us load in very closely together.

Q.

What happens inside the sled?

A.

While we're in the bobsled we try not to move as much as we can. That's very hard to do because we hit around 4 to 5 G's. But you want to be very fluid with the sled, almost like water in a glass. If the sled moves to the right, you slightly lean to the left, and you lean with it as it goes down the track.

Q.

What would you compare the experience to?

A.

It's kind of like a car wreck. Some trips are better than others. Some trips are very smooth and fast. Some trips you crash. At the last Olympics we were going about 92 miles an hour when we crashed on our heads. So it can be very violent and not very much fun.

Q.

Is it difficult competing in frigid temperatures?

A.

That's one of the unique things about our sport. During one of our last races, the temperature was minus five degrees, and we've had races where it's been minus 30 before. So right before the race you're trying to get warm and not pull any muscles. You have to learn how to feel light and fast while you're freezing. It's pretty tough but it's something you learn to cope with.

Q.

How do you manage being an Olympic athlete in the military?

A.

I joined the army in 2005 when I was in school, and I got into bobsledding in 2007. There's a program called the [Army World Class Athlete Program](#), and it allows me to do both. So after the games in 2010, I went to Iraq for a year with my unit and served out there. When these games are over, I'll report to Fort Huachuca in Arizona on May 5.

I get to wear the flag on both my uniforms, as a soldier and as a U.S. athlete. So it's a great honor for me.

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