



Canadian immigrant bobsledder

RACING in red & white

Two Canadian immigrant bobsledders aim for the podium at the 2014 Sochi Olympic Games

BY LISA EVANS

From Feb. 7 to 23, Canada's elite athletes will compete in the 2014 Winter Olympic Games in Sochi, Russia. For two bobsledders, Lascelles Brown and Chris Spring, donning their red-and-white uniforms holds a special significance — an opportunity to represent the country they chose to adopt and give back to the people who have supported them in pursuing their Olympic dreams.

Jamaican-born bobsledder Lascelles Brown

Considered one of the most powerful brakemen in all of bobsleigh, Lascelles Brown has competed internationally for both his native Jamaica and Canada, but has had his greatest success while sporting the maple leaf.

After a rough start as a boxer — “I couldn't handle the punches,” says Brown — a friend recommended he try out for the Jamaican bobsleigh team. “As a kid I was quite muscular and naturally quick,” says Brown, explaining that's a killer combination in bobsleigh, especially

as a brakeman.

All the speed generated for the bobsled happens during the explosive push start. That's why most brakemen (the team members who sit at the back of the sled) are muscular titans who tend to come from sprinting or football backgrounds. At six feet tall and 213 pounds, Brown is a powerhouse in the Canada 1 sled team (Canada has entered three male bobsleigh teams at Sochi).

Brown was 27 years old when he was introduced to the sport, an age when most Olympic level athletes are retiring. “One of the great things about bobsleigh is you can do it when you're older,” says Brown. At 39 years old, Brown will be among the oldest athletes competing in Sochi.

Brown competed for Jamaica at the 2002 Olympic Games in Salt Lake City, but later that year moved to Canada with his wife, who is a Canadian. Lack of funding had left the Jamaican bobsleigh team unable to compete for two years, during which time Brown was training alongside Canadian bobsledders in Calgary.

citizenship in Germany. I was like a rock star," he recalls.

Brown stood on the Olympic podium in Turin as a full-fledged Canadian, snagging silver in the two-man event. In 2010, he graced the podium again, winning the bronze medal in the four-man event. "I'm hoping to get a different-coloured medal in Sochi," he says with a smile.

Brown is proud to sport Team Canada's jersey in Sochi, even though he will be competing against the Jamaican bobsleigh team. "It's not because your mom gives birth to you that means she's a mother. You can have a

sport.

"I was fascinated by the speed and power of the athletes," he says. Being from Australia, Spring had no prior experience with ice sports, but his athletic background in track and field, cricket and rugby gave him good conditioning for bobsleigh. "You need to be big, strong and fast," says Spring, who is the Canada 2 team pilot.

After watching the race, Spring contacted Bobsleigh Canada. "They knew from my accent that I wasn't Canadian, but they were very helpful," says Spring, who credits the staff and

was going to join the Canadian team, a decision that was met with some backlash from his homeland. "There was some negative press," admits Spring, although he says he has no regrets about the decision.

Spring received his Canadian citizenship on Canada Day in 2013. While as a permanent resident, Spring could compete for Canada on the world stage, athletes have to be citizens to compete for a country in the Olympics. Receiving his citizenship meant Spring would be allowed to represent the country he loves at the Sochi Games.

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— Chris Spring

native country, but you can go to another country and love it more," says Brown, who admits he wouldn't have achieved what he has in Canada had he stayed in Jamaica, where support for bobsleigh athletes is limited.

While his friends back home are happy for his success, Brown says it doesn't compare with the support he receives from Canadians. "Canadians are behind their athletes, especially the winter athletes," he says. It's that support that will drive Brown and his team throughout the Games and, he hopes, to the top of the podium. "I love Canada. I cherish wearing the Canadian colours," says Brown.

Aussie Chris Spring

Chris Spring owes his bobsleigh career to a youthful pursuit of adventure. The 29-year-old Australian native came to Canada in 2006 on a whim when he joined a friend on a year-long working holiday trip. While in Calgary, he attended a bobsleigh race and was immediately hooked on the

coaches with giving him his start in his Olympic career.

Although it was love at first sight for Spring, bobsleigh didn't come naturally. "My first time driving a sled down the track, I think I hit every wall and I thought, 'I am absolutely terrible at this,'" he recalls, laughing. The constant struggle for perfection held Spring's interest, however.

"Until this day, I don't think I've ever had a perfect run where I've gotten to the bottom of the track and thought to myself, 'That was 100 per cent perfect. I could not do a thing better,'" says Spring.

He competed for Australia in the 2010 Vancouver Olympic Games, finishing a disappointing 22nd. "I was ranked 16th going into the competition," says Spring, who argues he received little support from the Australian Olympic Federation leading up to the Games. "I felt I was competing more for myself than for a country," he says.

At the end of the Vancouver Games, Spring announced he

Since switching to the Canadian team, Spring says his experience leading up to the 2014 Games has been completely different than his first Olympics. "Now, I have everything at my fingertips: coaching, massage therapy, the best equipment in the world. That's everything any athlete could ask for," he says.

All of this support has not only helped Spring be better prepared for Sochi, but will make competing in Canadian colours a more emotional and meaningful experience. "This country has helped me so much, even knowing that I was Australian and before knowing that I was going to switch countries. I want to give back to the country that has helped me so much in my athletic career and I feel the best repayment for that is getting results," says Spring.

Spring's team is currently ranked third in the world in the four-man event. "I don't expect anything less than coming away with a medal."

Lascalles Brown (left) and Chris Spring.

In 2004, after the birth of his first daughter, he made the decision to represent his new home. "I said I'm going to settle here so I might as well start to compete for the country that I'm living in and the country that I love," he says.

His success in red and white was near immediate. He won gold in the two-man event and bronze in the four-man event at the 2005 World Championships. Brown became one of the most talked about Canadian athletes at the 2006 Olympics in Turin, receiving his citizenship only two weeks before the Games. Since flying back to Canada for the citizenship ceremony so close to the Games would have caused jet lag and affected Brown's performance, the ceremony was performed at the Canadian embassy in Germany. "I was the first person ever to get Canadian

SUCCESS STORY

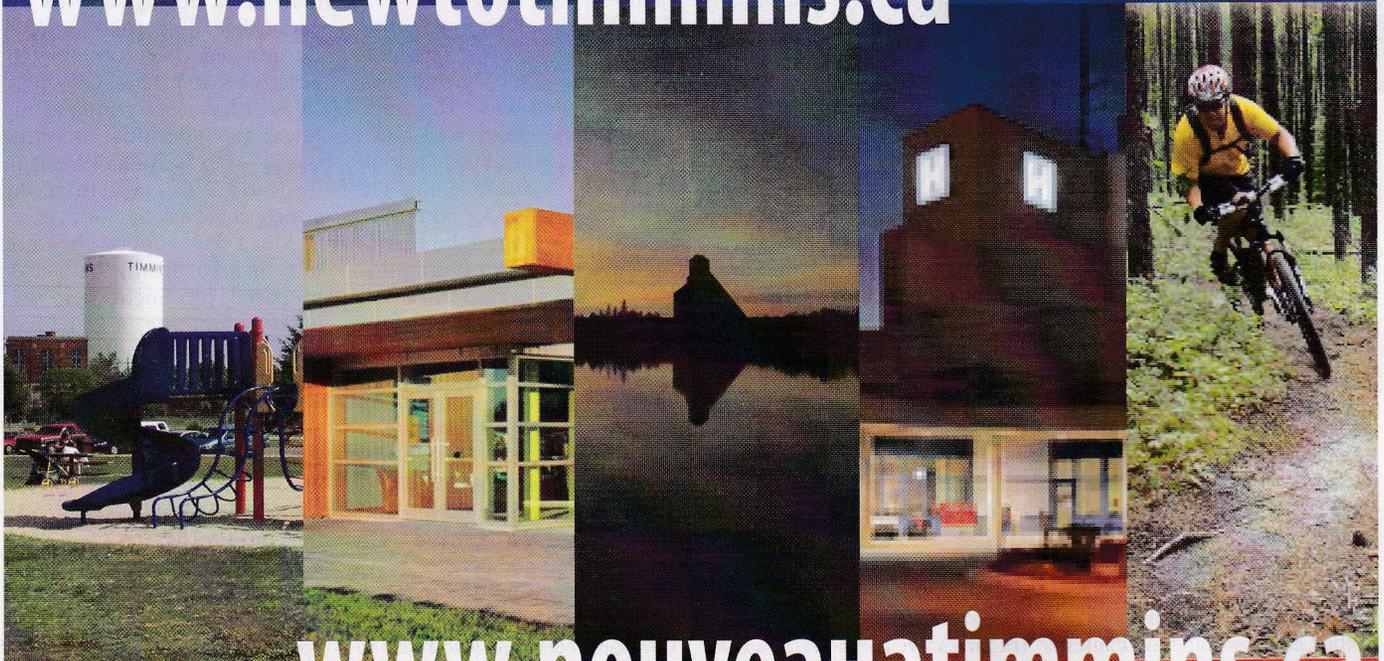
WHAT IS BOBSLEIGH?

- Teams of two or four make timed runs down narrow, twisting iced tracks in a gravity-propelled sled.
- The speed of the bobsled comes from the initial push given by the athletes at the start line.
- The pilot is the first to jump in the sled, which looks like a long bathtub. Before they get to the track's first turn, all team members must be in the sled. The pilot's job is to steer the sled around the track without losing momentum.
- The person in the back is called the brakeman and operates the sled's brakes.
- On a four-man sled, the two middle teammates lean backward and forward, an action called "bobbing," which is how bobsleigh got its name. ❄️



Chris Spring (front) and Lascelles Brown in action.

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