

CHAPTER 24 The Crash

The sled quickly gained speed as it descended the track and zoomed through the first curve a little high on the bank. With each subsequent curve, John Morgan saw that Tal's steering had slipped farther and farther behind. "They don't have the experience! They don't have the experience!" he shouted anxiously into the mic. By the time the Jamaicans reached the treacherous Kreisel turn, almost halfway down the course, Tal had missed too many pressure points. The sled traveled too far up the bank and began "porpoising," or bouncing up and down, as Tal lost control. The sled flipped over on its side, smashing into the retaining wall at 85 miles per hour (136 km/h).

As the pilot, Tal took the brunt of the impact, his head hitting hard against the ice, and it kept hitting again and again as the sled continued sliding down with nothing to stop it. His life flashed before his eyes, where he vividly saw Denise, their kids, Blossom, Pastor Dudley, Terry, and Chris, who was sitting in the back of the sled. He despaired, thinking of the grief his mother would feel if both her sons were killed in the crash.

John's worries about Tal's driving suddenly became real. He barked in the mic as if the Jamaicans could hear him: "Stay in the sled, stay in the sled!"

After ten seconds, Tal's brain snapped into survival mode. He went through the crash drill of trying to protect his head by tucking it under the lip of the cowl in front of him. But the protruding "snout" of the motorcycle helmet he was using prevented him from tucking lower, which also made it harder for his teammates behind him to get their heads out of the way.

The Jamaicans careened down the track with the sled on its side, and their skulls slammed against the wall for another 18 seconds. In what seemed like a crash that would never end, a calm came over Tal.

"There was nothing I could do except watch the ice go by as the sled slid toward the finish line. In that moment of strange relaxation, it occurred to me that what we were doing was not correct. That there's a right way to do it, and here was not the end. I went through in my mind what was needed to become top-class in bobsledding."

The Jamaican Bobsled Captain

By Ben Stubenberg

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