



Within the International Federations

The history of luge

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Luge is the latest sport to be included in the Winter Games. It is however the oldest winter sport for it has evolved over the centuries from a form of transport known back in history, that of the sledge.

The sledge without runners was used in Egypt to transport blocks of stone for the construction of the pyramids. It was also used with runners on ice and snow to transport heavy loads. In the Viking Museum in Oslo, among the objects found on the boat "Oseberg" which was discovered in 1904, are to be found carved wooden

sledges similar to the horsedrawn variety of the 17th century in cold countries. The eskimos still use today a special type of long, narrow wooden sledge drawn by reindeer or dogs.

However, the sledge has obviously not been simply a practical means of transport ; it has also given enjoyment on snow-covered slopes. In 1520 the German poet Hans Sachs described the joys of sledging, and some years later Conrad Schwarz mentions the "Rodel" (luge) in his writings.

The luge was thus already known in the 16th century, but it was not until the 19th century that repeated sliding on a device similar to the present day child's toboggan was seen on the slopes of the Swiss Alps. Thus, the

▲ *Mr. Steler (in the foreground) at the luge track in Lake Placid (USA).*

first luge competitions, usually organised on roads by Swiss hoteliers, took place.

The first official national and international competition was held in 1881 on the road between St. Wolfgang and Klosters. Following this a Davos farrier had the idea of coupling two luges, thus creating the bobsleigh.

But the luge continued its rise to popularity. The first run, the "Schatzalp", was laid out in Davos where the International Luge Club was founded in 1913. The same year the International Luge Sports Union was created in Dresden.

In 1914 the first European championships were held at Reichenberg, in which over 80 competitors from many countries took part.

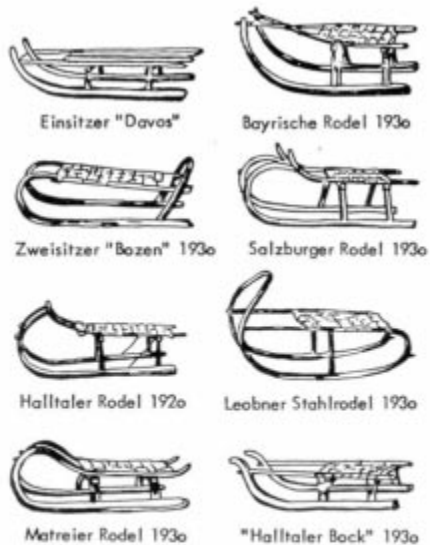
The growth of this marvellous sport was interrupted by the 1914-1918 war, but when peace was restored the International Luge sports Union continued its activities throughout central Europe. It grouped the German, Austrian and Swiss federations, and later that of Poland, where one of the first artificial race tracks was constructed at Krynica.

Bobsleigh developed alongside luge, setting itself up internationally as a federation created in 1924, the Fédération Internationale de Bobsleigh et de Tobogganing (FIBT), presided by the French Comte de la Frégolière.

In 1935 luge was incorporated into the FIBT and a "luge" section created. From then on luge championships took place annually. The section was made up of the national federations of Switzerland, Germany, Austria, Italy, Norway, Poland and Czechoslovakia. A new luge, lower than the previous model, made its appearance ; it was the real racing luge made by Martin Tietze, European champion in 1934, 1935, 1937 and 1938.

In its turn, the Second World War halted development of the sport but from 1945 onward, under the influence of Austria, luge became a very important sport in central Europe.

From 1952 this sport was influenced by one man in particular, Bert Isatsch, President of the Austrian federation. He strove energetically to make luge a sport in its own right



and to have it included in the Olympic events.

When the USA and Canada joined the luge section, the members decided to organise a luge congress every year. The first of these was held at Cortina d'Ampezzo in 1953, when the decision was taken to hold annual world championships, the first of which were organised at Oslo in 1955.

At the second luge congress, held in Davos in 1954, the national federations decided to create an International Federation independent of the FIBT. The same year, the IOC Session in Athens made the major decision to admit luge as an olympic sport.

But it was not until 1957 that the Fédération Internationale de Luge de Course (FIL) was officially created and recognised by the International Olympic Committee, meeting in Sofia, with Mr. Bert Isatitsch as its President.

At the IOC Session in Munich in 1959, President Isatitsch succeeded in having a luge run built for the IXth Winter Games. The Olympic inauguration took place at Innsbruck in 1964, on the artificial track at Igls, with a competition in which twelve countries took part.

In 1969, a remarkable event in the history of luge racing took place—the first refrigerated run was constructed at Königssee in the Federal Republic of Germany, followed by a second at Oberhof (German Democratic Republic) for the 1973 world championships. These runs are not dependent on atmospheric conditions and can accommodate thousands of enthusiasts from autumn to spring.

In February 1975 the first combined Olympic refrigerated run for both luge and bobsleigh was inaugurated at Innsbruck-Igls for the 1976 Winter Games.

In addition to the refrigerated runs, 120,000 licensed amateur athletes now practise luge on some thirty non-refrigerated artificial tracks and on innumerable natural runs over three continents—America, Asia and Europe—where they strive towards Olympic perfection.

Meanwhile, a number of new federations have joined the FIL and today the "luge family" includes the Federal Republic of Germany, the Republic of Andorra, Austria,

Belgium, Canada, Spain, the United States, Finland, France, Great Britain, Italy, Japan, Liechtenstein, Norway, Poland, the German Democratic Republic; the Republic of China (Taiwan), Romania, Sweden, Switzerland, Czechoslovakia, the USSR, Venezuela and Yugoslavia.

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