

Chris Mazdzer Is on the Fast Track to Beijing 2022

December 17, 2021

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Luge is often considered an individual sport, but Olympian [Chris Mazdzer](#) credits his success to his support team.

“It’s a whole team effort,” says the 33-year-old silver medalist. “Winning a medal, there were two coaches that were so instrumental. Sharing it with them, it was like, ‘This is actually yours, too, guys. I know they only gave one medal, and they should have given out a couple more, but you’ve put in an Olympic medal’s worth of work, trust. You’ve been to the dark places with me.’ When you overcome all that, it’s pretty sweet.”

Before the northern New York native earned the silver medal at the Olympic Winter Games PyeongChang 2018 — making history as the first Non-European man to medal in singles luge — he was just a young boy who enjoyed playing outdoors and staying active. His hometown of Peru, New York, is notoriously cold for nearly half the year, so frozen forms of fun were the norm.

In the Fast Lane

“When I was eight years old, there was a program for kids ages 8 to 13 to try bobsled or luge,” he recalls. “Also, around that time, I saw the movie ‘Cool Runnings,’ which is an absolute classic. It was like, ‘Oh man, it makes bobsled look so cool, so it’s like yeah, let’s go do bobsled.’”

Evidently, he wasn’t the only one who favored it over luge.

“The problem with bobsled is that it was definitely the popular sport, so the line was really long; the turnover was pretty slow,” Mazdzer explains. “You’d only get one or two runs a night that you were actually driving. But after a couple weeks, I realized there was this other sport that was a little bit higher up on the mountain, called ‘luge,’ and there were no lines.”

A spark was ignited, and the rest is history.

“I fell in love with the sport,” he says. “I had no idea it was even an Olympic sport. To me, it was just ultimate sledding.”

Mazdzer has been hooked on the high-speed sport ever since.

Embracing New Challenges

Now, Mazdzer is actively preparing for the Olympic Winter Games Beijing 2022. While this obviously won’t be his first race on the world stage, things are different this time. For starters, he’s taken on a new role: fatherhood.

“Nothing is as planned anymore,” he admits. “That’s important to recognize. You really need such a strong partner for new moms and dads because it’s a team effort. It’s a team effort to raise a kid. It’s a lot of work.”

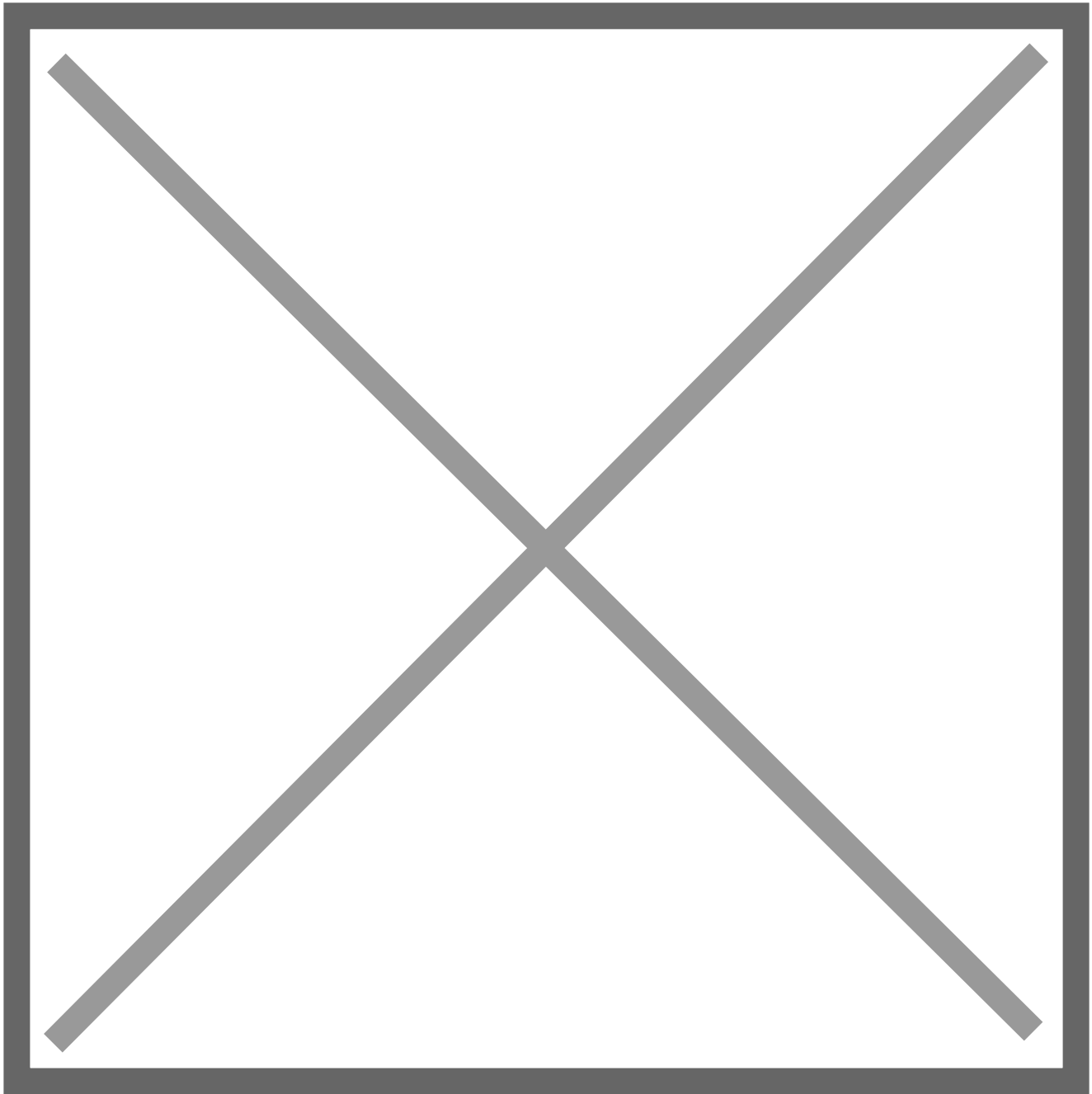
He adds, “Before it was like, it’s fully me. I’ve got my training schedule; this is what I do. And then all of a sudden, one night you’re lying on the floor at three o’clock in the morning trying to rock your kid to sleep and you don’t sleep that night.”

Although parenting requires a lot of flexibility and support, it’s a responsibility that Mazdzer is grateful for and welcomes. “There are definitely challenges involved,” he admits. “It’s beautiful. It’s messy. It’s different from anything I’ve ever experienced before, but I love it.”

Enduring Through Adversity

Staying nimble through unpredictable changes isn’t new for Mazdzer, who recently sustained a foot injury during training. He shattered his fourth and fifth metatarsal bones and cracked his heel after hitting a wall where ice had built up.

“It was a freak accident,” he says. “A total freak accident. It should not have been there, because I didn’t crash, I just hit a wall. I’ve hit thousands of walls in my career, but that one was different.”



He’s since had surgery on his foot and is still training to compete with hopes to qualify for Team USA and make it to Beijing 2022.

While an injury would set anyone off course, Mazdzer knows that the only person he’s truly competing against is himself.

“I like to challenge myself and hold myself to a high standard at everything that I do,” he admits. “So, I think that’s where the competitiveness comes in, where it’s like yeah, I see that I can always be better at what I’m

doing and so I'm going to challenge myself to be better."

Training Like a Champion

Mazdzer approaches training in a similar way. As with many professional sports, luge requires an immense amount of physical and mental strength. Often, there's no room for error. So, he doesn't view training as just preparation, he views it as the real thing.

"When you're training, you train like you compete," he says. "I always train like I'm a challenger, like I'm not the best. I always need to be better and I'm always trying to learn. Every run that I do in training, I treat it like a competition. So, when I get to the competition, it's not like I need to do something that's 110% of myself, I just need to do what I've been doing."

This method eases the pressure during the actual competition and creates the sense of peace and calm that led to one of his most memorable Olympic moments. Prior to winning his silver medal at the PyeongChang 2018 Olympic Winter Games, Mazdzer was almost forced into retirement due to lack of funding. But, he had an all-or-nothing stance while warming up for his fourth luge run during the Games, which was crucial to winning. He sacrificed so much to get to that point in his career, doing what he loved, and was determined to win – and he did all while making history.

"At the handles, I smiled before my last run, which is like the most non-game face you'd ever expect," he recalls. "But that moment, that was my favorite Olympic moment in my life — being around the people who had supported me. My family, my wife, basically being, 'You know what? Just go for it. Be in the moment, we will be there for you no matter what happens.'"

Family Ties and Team Toyota

Fast forward to 2019 and Mazdzer's support system expanded when he became a member of Team Toyota. Partnering with Toyota was a dream come true for the athlete, but the company held a special place in his heart long before his sports career: About 15 years ago, his aunt was seriously injured in an accident that left her essentially paralyzed. Doctors didn't expect her to walk again. After being in rehab for months and eventually gaining her mobility back in her legs, she purchased a Toyota FJ Cruiser.

"She was a very active person," he says. "She found that her FJ kind of became her legs again. She would be like, 'Oh, well, if I modify this a little bit, I can go a little bit further.' I saw my aunt as a different person after she purchased her FJ."

Mazdzer adds, "That's how I got into Toyota. Just seeing my aunt and how it dramatically changed her life profoundly for the better. With mobility, she could go anywhere that she wanted. Nothing was impossible."

For him, that passion for Toyota remains. Today, Mazdzer drives a 4Runner he playfully calls "Dusty" due to its white exterior and the dusty southern Utah environment where he and his family currently reside.

Representing off the Track

When he's not on dad duty, training, enjoying the outdoors or fixing and maintaining his sled equipment — the latter of which is a huge component of luge racing — Mazdzer's working with the International Luge Federation as an athlete representative to the executive board.

"It's a huge honor to be elected by my peers," he says of his role. "It's not an appointed position, so the fact that athletes from around the world entrust me with getting their views to the executive board level, it's a huge honor

and it's something I don't take lightly or for granted."

Luge was not represented at this level when he started in the sport, so his appointment holds great significance.

"I see the federation having just more trust with the athletes; it's more collaborative than in the past," he says.

"It's something that makes me feel really good on the inside — knowing that I am trying to make this sport a better place than I left it."

Mazdzer is making his mark on luge and will always remember why he does it.

"At the end of the day, luge is a ton of fun; I really love the sport," he admits. "I love going down the track. Even if you don't get results, this sport teaches you a lot about who you are and being comfortable with who I am as a person."