

BOBSLEDDER PUSHING FOR OLYMPIC GLORY

HERB GARBUTT

hgarbutt@metroland.com

Sara Villani was curious about other options for her athletic career when she attended RBC Training Ground in 2018.

And after posting the top results and setting a strength record at the annual talent-identification combine, there were no shortage of possibilities for the local javelin thrower/heptathlete.

Several sports organization reached out to her, including Bobsleigh Canada. Her initial reaction was that "bobsleigh is for crazy people."

So instead, she took some time to look into rowing. Though the rowing itself was intense, she found it very serene and calming to be on the water. Maybe, this was it.

"And then we switched to

indoor training, got on the (ergometers) and the puke buckets came out," she recalls. "I said, 'OK, this is not the sport for me.'"

So she circled back to bobsleigh. There, she found an eclectic mix of strong athletes (physically and mentally) with backgrounds in football, rugby, hockey, basketball and, like herself, track and field. It also suited her athletic strengths.

That, of course, led to much different view of the sport.

"Oh no, it's still for crazy people," she says with a laugh. "I'm just one of them now."

Villani is also part of another select group — Olympians — after being named to the Canadian bobsleigh team. The 25-year-old will team up with pilot Melissa Lotholz to compete in the two-woman bobsled.



Viesturs Lacis photo

Sara Villani (centre) along with pilot Melissa Lotholz (right) will compete in the two-woman bobsled in Beijing.

The duo finished in the top 12 in five of the six World Cup races this season. In her role as brakeman, Villani helped turn in top five

push (start) times in half their runs this season.

"As a brakeman, you want to have those push times and show consistency," she said. "I'm happy to have achieved that."

Lotholz was her first pilot and the two reunited this year and Villani quickly no-

ted a difference. "I saw, or I guess in my case feel, how much she's improved in a short amount of time," Villani said.

Villani had known all season that if the three Canadian sleds outperformed Russia's trio, it would secure a spot for all the Canadian women competing on the World Cup circuit. Still, she said it still hasn't hit her that she is going to the Olympics. And she's fine with that if it helps keep the nerves in check.

The Norval native said she didn't grow up dreaming of being an Olympian. She didn't even realize she was a good athlete until she made the switch from gymnastics to track and field as a teenager. Now, after another athletic detour, she is on the verge on competing on sports' biggest stage.

"There are so many athletes and such a small percentage make it to the Olympics," she said. "You think 'Woah, that's crazy' for someone who never thought they were good enough."



Help us, help you.

Your support ensures our staff and physicians are prepared to provide you with the best care possible.

Georgetown
Hospital
Foundation

Living. Giving. Caring.



DONATE TODAY

GeorgetownHospitalFoundation.ca

905 - 873 - 4599

