

OLYMPICS TURIN WINTER GAMES**Canadian sliders carving winning path****Jamaican-born Brown granted citizenship; skeleton crew collects World Cup medals**

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Canada's ice sliders are riding an avalanche of good news and World Cup medals all the way to the Turin Winter Olympics.

In bobsleigh, Jamaican-born Lascelles Brown could scarcely contain his joy yesterday after he was granted Canadian citizenship by a cabinet order-in-council. The 31-year-old can officially don Canada's uniform as the powerful pusher and brakeman of the Olympic two-man and four-man sleds driven by Pierre Lueders.

Meanwhile, Helen Upperton of Calgary drove the Canadian women's sled to its first-ever World Cup gold-medal finish and fourth podium finish of the season at St. Moritz, Switzerland.

In the daring sport of skeleton, Mellisa Hollingsworth-Richards of Eckville, Alta., remained on top of the World Cup skeleton rankings and maintained a 6-for-6 record of podium finishes after yesterday's silver-medal placing on the classic natural ice chute of St. Moritz. Lindsay Alcock of Calgary took the third spot.

The pair completed a full set of hardware in the sport of head-first human torpedoes, as Calgary veteran Jeff Pain grabbed gold in the men's event the day before.

The long-awaited news about Brown had to be accomplished by a cabinet order and came on deadline, as an election looms on Monday.

Brown took a call in St. Moritz yesterday from the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Joe Volpe.

"I asked, 'Who's this?' " Brown said.

When Volpe identified himself, Brown's heart leapt.

"Yes. Yes. The Minister's called. This is important," Brown said. "It made my day, my week, my month, my year. . . . The first thing I did, I smiled.

"I keep laughing. I had to go to Pierre's room because my room is too small for me. I had to share it. I wish I was with my family to share it, too."

Brown's wife, Kara, and two-year-old daughter, Zody, are Canadians. Brown has two more children, living in Jamaica.

A former slider with that national team, he said he maintains a good relationship with Jamaican athletes.

"I always consider myself a Canadian, competing for Canada," Brown said. "It feels great. Thanks to all the Canadians who made this happen."

Together, Brown and Lueders were the world champions in two-man last year and combined for a world championship bronze in four-man.

Last week at Koenigssee, Germany, Brown pushed Lueders to victory in both events for the first time at a European track. Ken Kotyk of Regina and Morgan Alexander of Calgary were also on the four-man crew.

Lueders said the citizenship resolution removed "a huge obstacle" between Canadians and the podiums.

"The facts are the facts: Without Lascelles on the team, the chances of anything result-wise was very slim," Lueders said. "Nothing against the others, but Lascelles is the best athlete on the team. He makes everyone around him better. It's not about the medals, but about sending athletes and giving them the best chance they can have."

"Anything is possible," Brown said. "We're going in with our heads up." He was relieved the long, fretful wait was over. "I keep saying I didn't want to think about it, but deep down, it did [affect me]."

Shane Pearsall, the executive director of Bobsleigh Canada Skeleton, called Brown "one of the top brakemen in the world."

Lueders said the team shook off the weight of uncertainty to focus at Koenigssee last week.

"And we made a big statement last week by winning both races. It was lingering in our minds, but we said we can't go on like this. We have to focus on the World Cups, and we made that commitment to one another," he said.

"It's going to be difficult in Turin for anyone to beat the Germans in either two or four-man. They're definitely the team to beat, but that's why we have the races."

Lueders was in the news this week as one of the Canadian athletes who had opted out of being a candidate for Canadian flag-bearer. Part of it was because he might not be able to march with Brown.

"I think I'd be interested [in carrying the flag, now,] but there's a better candidate here in the room with me. He's a Canadian and world champion and potential medalist and I don't think there's anyone more proud to be a Canadian right now," Lueders said.

"I just didn't think it was appropriate if he had to be home watching the Olympics on TV while I walk in with the flag."

In the women's event, Upperton and brakeman Heather Moyse of Summerside powered their sled in a two-run time of 2 minutes 17.40 seconds.

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