

# The Golden Sledge – The man behind Monti's quest for Olympic Glory

By Axel Forti

Fifty years ago, the British bobsledders Tony Nash and Robin Dixon took Olympic gold in Innsbruck after the Italian star Eugenio Monti helped them fix a problem with their machine in an act of sportsmanship that has entered into Olympic lore. Monti finally achieved his Olympic dream in 1968.

This is the story of the man who helped him achieve that goal. Engineer Antonio "Tony" Bosio, the man Monti called "The magician".

Thanks largely to the technical modifications made to the sled by bobsleigh by Antonio, Eugenio won gold in both the two-man and four-man at the 1968 Games in Grenoble. In 1966 Bosio had started to design and build the sledges which were to be used by Monti.

Bosio's adventure started when Dr. Eng. Dusi contacted him on behalf of "Bob Club Cortina". The purpose was to increase the speed of the bobsleigh during the run.

Bosio willingly accepted. In winter his work schedule was not so full (Tony was a Kart manufacturer) so building a bobsleigh was a good opportunity to increase profits. Bosio went to the 1956 Olympic track in Cortina for research purposes. He observed the bobsleigh runs and tried to work out where modifications might be possible. "I placed myself on the first part of the bends. I immediately found the problem."

The bobsleigh lifted from the ice and only three runners remained in contact with the ground. This was a very bad situation, not only from the technical point of view but also from a safety perspective: low grip, strong impacts and the inability to follow the track bends. The low grip decreased the driving capability and the high coefficient of centrifuge force created an extremely unsafe situation.

At the "Cristallo bend" in Cortina the pressure exerted was in excess of 3.3 Tons. The drivers were at the physical limit and were prone to lose vision, albeit momentarily. This however was enough to have lethal consequences. "I remember Pensberger, a young German pilot. He had a wrong approach to the bend, he went out and died. He was a nice boy".

Tony immediately started to work. It was impossible to introduce a rocker element on the front axle, there was not enough space. The solution he adopted was to cut the sledge transversely and connect the two parts by a central pivot. This element is nowadays compulsory.



"There were only few bobsleigh competitions and it was fundamental to observe every sledge on its run. You had to observe staying out of the track. I didn't sit on a bobsleigh or on a Kart but I think that I have collected some interesting results. We adopted this solution for Gaspari bobsleigh (Gaspari competed for Italy in the 1968 and 1972 Olympics) during the 1966 European Championships. The Gaspari bobsleigh was four seconds faster than the others over the single run. It was a very easy victory."

Looking at this result, Eugenio Monti didn't want to take part in the World Championships.

Two friends and a success: Tony Bosio and Eugenio Monti in Cortina d'Ampezzo.

Anton Pensberger, a 26 year old German pilot, was killed in 1966 at the World Championship in the four-man in Cortina d'Ampezzo. The races were subsequently stopped. The two-man world title had been won a week before by Eugenio Monti with his brake-man Sergio Siorpaes. Below: Antonio Bosio in his workshop today.

Photos: Alex Forti Archive, Volker Kluge Archive

Monti was a stubborn and combative competitive man and got in touch with Bosio to ask if he would adjust his sledge. Bosio refused as he had promised Gaspari that he would not modify any other bobsleigh.

Monti and Gaspari talked long and hard about the problem and eventually at 3 o'clock in the morning Gaspari finally agreed to allow the modification on the Monti bobsleigh to go ahead. "We picked up the bobsleigh on the car and brought it here to my workshop. Eugenio won the World Championships and didn't lose any further competitions. I didn't go to Grenoble. I had a lot of work, the karting season was ready to start".

Bosio's "Tony Kart" company is known throughout the world as one of the oldest and most successful karting factories. A number of future Formula One champions (and others) drove his karts. The world speed record on a kart: 214 Kph was achieved in one of his karts.

On the icy track the American teams was shocked by Monti's sled. "Monti's victory gave me a lot of recognition and in my workshop I began to receive sleds from all over the world."



A second important modification was made to Monti's sled an adjustment of the runners. "Runners had a straight shape which was not suitable for the work considering how they were mounted on the sledge. I made runners using strong steel 70 mm by 14 mm. The shape was rounded and the weight of the bobsleigh straightened them obtaining the best drive ability on bends".



As Bosio explained to me how his runners were made I remembered that I had the FIBT drawings with me. I showed him the plans for runner. This was the most emotional moment. "I also modified the shape of the cowling but it was adopted particularly on the American bobsleighs".

Bosio and Monti were two very similar men, and it was not long before they became friends. "Monti was a very kind man. It was impossible not to become his friend. He didn't like journalists, he hated them. When we won the World Championships we escaped, followed by photographers. They woke us up at 5 o'clock in the morning! If there are a lot of journalists, they are boring. They listen to what you say but they don't understand and they write untrue things".

The relationship started as simply a working arrangement. "Monti was a not easy person, very fussy. One day, during a race, he asked me to change the driving position three times. He thought about that and then came to me asking for a new position in order to extend legs".

Over the years this relationship blossomed into a deep friendship. "Monti loves me. I stayed at his home. During the summer season I went to repair his snowcats and in winter I helped him to start his skillifts in the Cristallo mountain, the most beautiful mountain in Cortina."

Eugenio Monti died in 2003 in tragic circumstances but the memory of the friendship endures. "'What should I do?' – He asked me one day when he visited. 'Stay here with me for few days.' I repeated to him a few times. I was a little bit concerned when he told me that he had to return home. A few days later he committed suicide with a shotgun. He was ill and had lost his mental capacity. He was found in his bed."

Tony had great respect for his friend and only modified his sleds. "I proposed a revolutionary solution for his runners. Monti obtained the parts that I needed from America in one night. Monti tested it but he was not convinced. Nowadays no bobsleigh uses that solution."



Before leaving Bosio's, a small farm with the legendary workshop in an annex, I showed Tony every drawing I had. "Look at this. This is my pivot. I like this scheme but there are no indications about the maximum load for every runner".

This is Antonio Bosio, born in 1923, a reserved man, but as generous and active as his friend Eugenio Monti. They were two men from different worlds and unified by bobsleigh in a friendship forged on the ice. Their actions defined them and were more eloquent than any words. ■

In 1964, Tony Nash and Robin Dixon of Great Britain were surprise victors in Innsbruck. Later it was revealed that a bolt had sheared on the British sledge during the third round. As the Britons could not have taken part in the last round without that bolt, Monti helped them with his own equipment. Then Nash/Dixon set the fastest time, while the Italian world champion, who had narrowly failed to win two Olympic victories in 1956, came away with only bronze. For his unselfish act Monti was the first athlete to receive the Fair Play Trophy in 1964. Above: Monti did crown his career with double gold at the 1968 Games. The photo was characteristic. While brakeman Luciano de Paolis celebrated, Monti was withdrawn.

## Owens' Gold comes under the hammer?

On 7 December 2013 the Californian Sports Memorabilia Company SCP Auctions intends to auction an Olympic gold medal which allegedly is one of the four won by Jesse Owens in Berlin. As President David Kohler announced on the sports channel ESPN, he expects a price of more than a million US dollars. The record for a US Olympic item was set in February 2013. The jersey worn by 1980 Ice Hockey captain Mike Eruzione fetched \$657,250.

According to SCP Auctions, ISOH member Jim Greensfelder has confirmed the authenticity of the medal. That is certainly correct –

for he is an expert. But how was it established that the medal once belonged to Owens? Was his name on it, or could his DNA be found on it?

At the 1936 Olympic Games more than 300 gold medals were awarded. Each medal resembles the next as if they were eggs. None of the owners was marked by name, and even the description of the type of sport in which the prize was achieved was at that time not customary.

According to an SCP item of news the gold piece was among the possessions of the dancer Elaine Plaines, who had married Bill "Bojangles" Robinson in 1944. The black tap-dancer is supposed to have been a close friend of Owens, so that the latter – so says the legend – honoured him with one of his four Olympic trophies. In spite of his great

success Robinson died in poverty in 1949.

However I ask myself how it was possible that in 1960 the four Owens medals could be stolen from an exhibition? For it is proven that after the theft the American Olympic Committee asked the German NOC President Karl Ritter von Halt if he could procure replacements. Halt then turned to the Pforzheim artistic mint which had produced the medals in 1936. It made four copies which today are in the Jesse Owens Collection of the Ohio State.

Kohler said it is not clear which medal he is auctioning off. And I wonder that too! Could it be a bluff to drive up the price by using a famous name? Was the medal raid of 1960 just a deal? Or are stolen goods being offered for sale here?

Volker Kluge