

St. Albert businessman offers \$1 million prize for Canadian luge success at Vancouver Olympics

Luge prize not a stunt

BY CORY HARE
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Promising a \$1 million payday for any Canadian luger who snags a gold medal may be garnering international publicity but it's not a silly publicity stunt, said Darren Weeks, the owner of St. Albert-based Fast Track Group.

The organization has pledged a million-dollar prize if a Canadian luger wins an Olympic gold medal. Canada has never medalled in luge at the Olympics but this year's team has had a number of top-10 finishes and is a threat to medal, Weeks said.

The \$1 million would be split between the athlete and the Canadian Luge Association. If Canada produces more than one gold, the athletes would share the prize money.

His company is also offering \$50,000 for each silver and bronze medal. There will be a \$5,000 reward for the top Canadian in men's and women's singles and doubles. The athletes can pocket all the cash.

The offer applies to the Vancouver 2010 games or the 2014 games in Sochi, Russia.

Weeks said he came up with the idea about 10 days ago.

"Just trying to do something different," he said.

"More than just financially, I wanted to make sure they got a lot of exposure."

"I thought, if we put a million dollars on the



DARREN
WEEKS
Prize donor

line, I think that might get some publicity and then more people will know what the luge sport is all about, because very few people even know what it is."

The story has been picked up by media all over the world.

Weeks insists it's not a publicity stunt aimed at generating interest in his financial education company. He noted that his Fast Track Group began sponsoring the luge team last year after noticing the team was putting "For Sale" signs on their helmets in an attempt to attract sponsors.

"When I found out that they were for sale, I was kind of embarrassed as a Canadian that we had the Olympics coming up in 2010 and they didn't have a corporate sponsor," Weeks said. "I thought what the heck, let's support a little guy, an underdog."

There were several things he had in common with the team: both are Alberta-based and both use a fast track. His sponsorship is worth more than \$1 million over five years.

Weeks has heard the snickers that this million dollar prize is just a publicity stunt with zero chance of the prize being claimed.

"I made sure we did a five-year sponsorship and also for those skeptics out there if they think this is just publicity because, they're not going to win, one of the ladies came in fourth, one of the guys came in fifth," Weeks said.

"If it happens to be a gold medal in Russia, I'll still pay."

Canadian Olympians who medal will receive bonuses of \$20,000 for gold, \$15,000 for silver and \$10,000 for bronze from the Canadian Olympic Committee.

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