

= Nodar Kumaritashvili =

Nodar Kumaritashvili ( Georgian : ნოდარ კუმარიტაშვილი ; pronounced [ nɔˈdɑr kʰumɑritʰɑˈvili ] ; 25 November 1988 ? 12 February 2010 ) was a Georgian luger who suffered a fatal crash during a training run for the 2010 Winter Olympics competition in Whistler , Canada , on the day of the opening ceremony . He became the fourth athlete to have died during Winter Olympics preparations , after British luger Kazimierz Kay @-@ Skrzypeski , Australian skier Ross Milne ( both Innsbruck 1964 ) , and Swiss speed skier Nicolas Bochatay ( Albertville 1992 ) , and the seventh athlete to die in either a Summer or Winter Olympic Games .

Kumaritashvili , who first began to luge when he was 13 , came from a family of seasoned lugers ; a relative of his was the founder of organised sledding in Georgia , and his father competed when he was younger . A cousin of Kumaritashvili on his father 's side was the head of the Georgian Luge Federation ; Kumaritashvili himself began competing in the 2008 ? 09 Luge World Cup , where he finished 55th out of 62 racers . Outside of luge , Kumaritashvili had been a student at the Georgian Technical University , where he earned an economics degree in 2009 .

= = Life and career = =

Nodar Kumaritashvili was born on November 25 , 1988 , in Borjomi , Georgian SSR , present day Georgia , to David and Dodo Kumaritashvili . He had one sister , Mariam , who is four years younger . The region Kumaritashvili grew up has many ski hills , and he enjoyed several different winter sports . Kumaritashvili started luge when he was 13 years old . While he maintained a rigorous training and competition schedule , Kumaritashvili graduated from the Georgian Technical University , where he received a bachelor 's degree in economics in 2009 . A devout member of the Georgian Orthodox Church , he prayed at a local church before leaving for the Olympics . Though his family endured economic hardship , Kumaritashvili attended as many luge events as he could , often driving for days to reach World Cup events .

Kumaritashvili 's family has had a long association with luge . His father , David , won a USSR Youth Championship when Georgia was part of the Soviet Union . His aforementioned paternal cousin , Felix Kumaritashvili , is the head of the Georgian Luge Federation . Nodar was also related to Aleko Kumaritashvili , the founder of organized sledding sports in Georgia .

During his first season of competition , Kumaritashvili finished 55th out of 62 competitors in the 2008 ? 09 Luge World Cup as he entered four races . Kumaritashvili finished 28th out of 32 competitors in the 2009 ? 10 Luge World Cup event at Cesana Pariol in January , which was his fifth and last World Cup event . At the time of his death , he was ranked 44th out of 65 competitors in the 2009 ? 10 World Cup season and was regarded as one of the best lugers to come from Georgia .

= = Accident and death = =

By December 31 , 2009 , the cut @-@ off date for luge qualifications for the Olympics , Kumaritashvili was ranked 38th overall . As he had also raced in the minimum of five World Cup races over the previous two years , he qualified for the luge men 's singles event at the 2010 Winter Olympics , which would be his Olympic debut . On February 12 , 2010 , Kumaritashvili was fatally injured in a crash during his final training run at the Whistler Sliding Centre when he lost control in the penultimate turn of the course and was thrown off his luge and over the sidewall of the track , striking an unprotected steel support pole at the end of the run . He was travelling at 143 @.@ 6 km / h ( 89 @.@ 2 mph ) at the moment of impact . At a test event in 2009 , a luger had clocked a record 153 @.@ 937 km / h ( 95 @.@ 652 mph ) on the same track , prompting Josef Fendt , president of the International Luge Federation ( FIL ) , to comment : " It makes me worry . "

Medics were at his side within seconds of the crash . Cardio @-@ pulmonary resuscitation began within one minute , and a plastic breathing tube was inserted into his mouth . He was airlifted to a Whistler hospital , where he died of his injuries . It was luge 's first fatality since December 10 , 1975 when an Italian luger was killed . Kumaritashvili 's final run had been his 25th on the Whistler track ,

and his 13th from the men 's start .

= = = Georgian response = = =

There was shock and mourning in Georgia after footage of his death was televised . In response to the accident , the Georgian team announced that it would consider skipping the opening ceremonies or withdraw from the games entirely . However , Nika Rurua , the Georgian minister for sports and culture , later announced the team would stay in Vancouver and " dedicate their efforts to their fallen comrade . " The other seven members of the Georgian Olympic team wore black armbands during the opening ceremony , tied a black ribbon to the Georgian flag , and left a space vacant in the procession as a mark of respect . They were greeted with a standing ovation from the assembled crowd , and immediately left BC Place Stadium after the procession .

A moment of silence was held during the opening ceremonies to honour his memory , when both the Canadian and Olympic flags were lowered to half @-@ staff . Upon learning of Kumaritashvili 's death , the Governor General of Canada ordered flags on federal government buildings throughout the province of British Columbia , including at all Olympic venues , flown at half @-@ staff until midnight , February 13 , 2010 . Fellow teammate and luger Levan Gureshidze who was to compete with Nodar withdrew after the crash telling teammates that he " couldn 't go on " and went home to attend the funeral .

In the early morning on February 17 , 2010 , Kumaritashvili 's body arrived in Tbilisi , Georgia , via Munich , Germany . It reached his hometown of Bakuriani later that day and he was buried on Saturday , February 20 , at the church he attended . Thousands of Georgians attended a funeral feast for him the day before and Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili attended his funeral service dressed in a Georgian Olympic uniform . The street where his childhood home is located was renamed in his honour .

= = = Other responses = = =

The FIL stated that Kumaritashvili 's death " was not caused by an unsafe track " . As a preventive measure , the walls at the exit of curve 16 were raised and the ice profile was adjusted . Padding was also added to exposed metal beams near the finish line . Olympic officials claimed the changes were " not for safety reasons but to accommodate the emotional state of the lugers " . In addition , the start of the men 's luge was moved to the women 's starting point to reduce speed , while the start of the women 's luge was also moved farther down the track .

Training runs on the track resumed on February 13 , after the changes to the track had been finished . Three lugers , including Kumaritashvili 's teammate Levan Gureshidze , did not participate in any training runs on February 13 . Gureshidze decided to fly back to Georgia to mourn the loss of his teammate , and the athletes who decided to participate all wore a black stripe on their helmets in honour of Kumaritashvili .

On March 10 , 2010 , the FIL announced that it had made a ? 10 @,@ 000 donation to the Kumaritashvili family in Georgia at the request of the Georgian Luge Federation in an effort to rebuild the Kumaritashvili family house .

= = = International Luge Federation report = = =

On April 19 , 2010 , the FIL published its final report to the International Olympic Committee into Kumaritashvili 's death . The report found that the sled used by Kumaritashvili had met all FIL criteria and standards . It attributed the accident to " driving errors starting in curve 15 / 16 which as an accumulation ended in the impact that resulted in him leaving the track and subsequently hitting a post ... This is a tragic result that should not have occurred as a result of an initial driving error " . As the sled hit the wall at the curve 16 exit , it catapulted off the track , causing Kumaritashvili to lose control of it entirely . This was a type of accident not seen before , and therefore " [ w ] ith the unknown and unpredictable dynamics of this crash , the calculation and construction of the walls in

that section of the track did not serve to prevent the tragedy that happened ". However , the report also determined that during the homologation process and later sessions of the Whistler Sliding Centre , the track was faster than originally calculated . While calculations called for a top speed around 136 km / h ( 85 mph ) , the highest speed recorded was 153 @. @ 98 km / h ( 95 @. @ 68 mph ) . The FIL felt that luge athletes were able to cope with this speed , but " this was not a direction the FIL would like to see the sport head " , and that President Fendt had written to the Sochi 2014 Organizing Committee that the FIL would homologize the proposed Sochi track only if speeds did not exceed 130 to 135 km / h ( 81 to 84 mph ) . The FIL also said it was " determined " to do what it could to prevent such accidents occurring . It would re @-@ examine changes to the sport , sled design and track technology . FIL Secretary General Svein Romstad summarized : " What happened to Nodar has been an unforeseeable fatal accident " .

= = = Coroner 's report = = =

The British Columbia coroner 's office investigated the incident . It was reported to be considering , among other pieces of evidence , written complaints about the safety of the Whistler track by Venezuelan luger Werner Hoeger who crashed on the track on November 13 , 2009 , and suffered severe concussion , and information suggesting that the track was constructed in its present location near the Whistler and Blackcomb mountains for commercial reasons despite the site being too narrow and steep . The track designer , Udo Gurgel , said : " The track had to be near Whistler , for use after the Olympics . You don 't want to ruin an investment so the track is on terrain that 's a little steep . " According to John Furlong , the chief executive of the 2010 Winter Olympics organizing committee , proposals to build the sliding centre on Grouse Mountain near Vancouver were rejected early in the bid phase due to reservations expressed by international bobsleigh , luge and skeleton federations .

In a report dated September 16 , 2010 , the coroner ruled Kumaritashvili 's death an accident brought on by a " convergence of several factors " , including the high speed of the track , its technical difficulty and the athlete 's relative unfamiliarity with the track . He wrote that during Kumaritashvili 's training runs , it was reasonable to assume that " Mr. Kumaritashvili was sliding faster than ever before in his life , and was attempting to go even faster , while simultaneously struggling to learn the intricacies of the track and the dynamics it created " . The coroner accepted that luging would always carry an element of risk and that best practices known at the time had been followed in the construction of the Whistler track . However , he called upon the International Luge Federation to require athletes to engage in more mandatory training sessions prior to the Olympic Games and other major competitions . Responding to the report , Kumaritashvili 's father said : " I don 't accept the statement about Nodar 's lack of experience . He wouldn 't have won the right to take part in the Olympics if he lacked experience . "

In 2013 , Mont Hubbard , a University of California , Davis mechanical and aerospace professor , issued a report claiming that Kumaritashvili 's crash was probably caused by a " fillet " , a joint between the lower edge of the curve and a vertical wall . Hubbard suggested that the right runner of Kumaritashvili 's sled rose up the fillet , launching him into the air . Terry Gudzowsky , the president of ISC / IBG Group , a consortium involved in the construction of the Whistler track , dismissed Hubbard 's theory as " flawed " , stating that the data to replicate the ice surface at the site of the accident in three dimensions do not exist . The luge track built for use at the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi , Russia , was designed with two uphill sections to reduce speeds , and runs about 10 miles per hour ( 16 km / h ) slower than the Whistler track .