

Jamaican Bobsledders Hit Sundance Before Olympics

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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This year's Sundance Film Festival has featured two former presidential candidates, rap stars, male strippers and rescue dogs. So why not the Jamaican Olympic bobsled team?

The group appeared at the festival on Monday to promote their trip to Sochi for the Winter Olympics and seek some much-needed cash. When the team was approved entry this month, Jamaican officials said they did not have the money to travel to Russia to compete. Coach Wayne Thomas said some funding has flowed in, but the team is still in need.

"What we really need now is money to buy the equipment, specifically the runners," Thomas said of the skates attached to the bobsled. "The runners that we are using are very close to illegal right now."

When asked what the deadline was for the cash, he joked, "Yesterday."

So the team decided to head to Sundance to raise awareness, hoping that some celebrities with deep pockets might want to contribute.

"We are here to let people know that we are here and still in need of funding," Thomas said, adding jokingly, "And also to see some stars."

"Only lady stars," said pilot Winston Watt, as the team broke into laughter.

For some at Sundance, seeing the Jamaican bobsled team was like catching a glimpse of the movie stars who have packed Park City for the festival. The team attracted attention and happily posed for eager picture-seekers in between bites at the pop-up MorningStar Veggie Burger Bar, which has been providing free veggie burgers and other food for moviegoers. It was just one of their pit stops on Main Street as they tried to draw attention to their need for funding.

They will get an even bigger spotlight when they travel to Sochi next month. The Caribbean island nation's entry to the Winter Olympics in 1988 caused a huge media stir and inspired the movie "Cool Runnings." This year's team says that members of the 1988 team have offered advice.

The athletes have been training since last summer and have been in Wyoming for practice in icy conditions.

"Despite being from a tropical country, we do not think of lots of obstacles," said Wayne Blackwood, a brakeman. "We stay focused."

"We just want to go up there and do our best," said the team's other brakeman, Marvin Dixon, who will hold the flag for Jamaica during the opening and closing ceremonies.

They do not see themselves as a novelty act in the Olympics, but real competitors.

"I am one of the best brakemen in the world right now," Dixon said matter-of-factly.

Blackwood said they would be comparable to other nations excelling in the bobsled competition if they had better equipment. "That is what we want, equipment — and we are up there with them," he said,

The Jamaican delegation has to be in Sochi on Feb. 4. They say they are not concerned with security despite bombings in Russia last month that left several dead.

They also expressed tolerance for gay athletes, who will compete in Sochi despite last year's implementation of a law banning homosexual "propaganda" among minors. Russia's crackdown on gays had led some to call for a boycott of the Games there.

"For me, you is you, I am me. You be yourself, I'll be myself," Dixon said.

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