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I do not fear Olympic bobsled track, says Shelley Rudman



(REUTERS/Tony Gentile)

Ben Smith

Shelley Rudman says her lingering fears over the safety of the Olympic bobsled track have been put to rest.

The 29-year-old athlete, who won a silver medal in the skeleton bob in Turin four years ago, expressed her concerns over the safety of the track after the death of Nodar Kumaritashvili, who was killed during practice for the men's luge in Vancouver last Friday. The Georgian racer died after losing control of his sled and slamming into a trackside steel pole at nearly 90 mph.

In the wake of the fatal accident, Olympic and International Luge Federation (FIL) officials stated that the ice track was not at fault and blamed "pilot error". However, alterations have been made to the track, with the length of the run shortened and the ice wall at the fatal corner 16 raised.

Rudman, who is considered one of Britain's best medal hopes, says she is convinced that changes to the course have made it safe.

"I would always think of my own safety and what happened was very difficult for everybody," Rudman said. "I did feel more at ease when I saw the changes made by the officials and now I don't feel it is a dangerous track.

"Ella is my number one priority and I wouldn't do something that was absolutely high risk. If there's been an accident on the road am I not going to drive my car any more? I'm here, I'm safe and I've just got to perform."

Rudman's two-year-old daughter Ella will be track-side for her attempt to become a two-time Winter Olympic medallist on Friday night and Rudman says her presence will help to keep things in perspective.

"[Ella] cheers me on at the start-line," she added. "She asks me every day, 'did you have a good day of sliding today, Mummy? Did you slide fast?'"

"Obviously I know everyone wants me to get gold and I want to get gold but these are totally different circumstances in this sport. I've got better as a slider but everybody else is really aggressive in our sport. I can honestly say I couldn't have done anything better in the last four years in preparation for this week. I just hope I have two good days of sliding and not a situation where I think, 'why did this have to happen?'"

"I just want it to be as neat and tidy as possible with nothing freakish happening around it. You don't want to hit a groove or anything like that when you've had four years preparing for it."

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