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## After Eye Surgery, U.S. Bobsled Driver Has Visions of Gold

VANCOUVER, [British Columbia](#) - Two years ago, Olympic bobsled driver [Steve Holcomb's](#) vision had degenerated so drastically, retirement seemed the only option. He made his living steering a bullet of a sled down an icy, turn-filled track with other lives dependent on him. What choice was there?

"It was kind of emotional, but I was like, 'well, sorry,' " said Holcomb, 29, at the U.S. Olympic Media Summit last fall. "It had been going on a long time, so I sort of knew it was coming."

Holcomb's resignation - an attempt at covering his devastation, he admitted Thursday - didn't last. Finally, thanks to U.S. bobsled coach Brian Shimer, he found a doctor conducting an experimental procedure that could help. With his sight restored to a pristine 20-20 - from 20-500 - Holcomb returned and led his four-man team to the 2009 world championship, the first by an American team in 50 years.

Now, coming off the 2010 World Cup title, Holcomb's "Night Train" team could become the first U.S. men's bobsledders to win Olympic gold since 1948.

Holcomb's crew - which includes San Antonio-bred pushman Justin Olsen - highlights a cluster of U.S. Olympians who appear poised this month to break through in sports in which Americans have long floundered.

Luger Erin Hamlin broke a ridiculous German winning streak at last year's world championship. Americans are also medal contenders in the Nordic combined, cross-country skiing and biathlon, not exactly classic U.S. traditions.

Holcomb's vision had been slipping for seven years. Every three months or so, he'd go in for new contacts, his prescription worsening each time because of the disease called keratoconus.

He learned to adjust on the track, fooling many from absorbing just how bad his vision had become.

"I realized I had learned to drive more by feel and not by vision," Holcomb said.

But finally, he reached the end of the line on contact prescriptions. Almost a dozen specialists he visited couldn't help. The only option seemed to be receiving cornea transplants, a procedure that requires an extensive rehabilitation.

Word of the California doctor who could help - even though the surgery wasn't yet approved by the Food and Drug Administration - seemed almost too good to be true.

But Holcomb was game, undergoing the procedure that inserted contacts behind his irises in 2008.

After a 10-minute surgery and an hour of recovery, Holcomb was strutting along the streets of Beverly Hills, marveling at his gift.

"It's strange, but it's hard to accept that it was so simple," he said. "So many people have this issue."

The Whistler track will require Holcomb at his best, challenging with the unusual layout of tighter turns toward the bottom of track, when the sled is rocketing its fastest. Holcomb named one particularly difficult turn "50-50," for a driver's chances of making it through. It's stuck.

"When you're riding behind him," Olsen said of Holcomb, "you're in good shape."

But Holcomb's clear sight has required its own adjustments. After driving with poor vision for so long, Holcomb makes sure to drive behind a racing visor that is scratched and sullied.

"I have to take away my eyes a little bit," Holcomb said. "It's too much for me." "Don't count them out

Along with Steve Holcomb in bobsled, several Americans could do well in disciplines that are not known as U.S. strengths in the Olympics.