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## Bobsledding Holcomb a sight to behold

Feb. 12--VANCOUVER -- Joel Maus, professional photographer, couldn't talk yesterday afternoon. He was too busy, in the middle of a shoot at his small studio in Fullerton, Calif.

He has bobsledder Steve Holcomb to thank for that; well, Holcomb and the doctor who saved Holcomb's bobsledding career, putting Holcomb on track for the first U.S. bobsled Olympic gold since 1948.

Holcomb's story helped Maus keep his sight.

Holcomb drives the top four-man sled for Team USA, the favorite in the four-man event at the Winter Olympics. He is as famous for contending as he is for almost going blind.

Two years ago, Holcomb thought he'd have to retire due to keratoconus, a degenerative eye disease that causes the cornea to bulge.

After seeing a dozen doctors, Holcomb's sight, and career, were saved by Dr. Brian Boxer Wachler, a Beverly Hills ophthalmologist who performed a noninvasive, painless procedure. Within a year, Holcomb won his first four-man world championship.

That got Holcomb's vision issue noticed.

Since high school, Maus, 37, dealt with a steadily deteriorating left eye. By last fall, his keratoconus made his vision 20-400 in his left eye, legally blind. No big deal. Maus shoots with his right eye.

When vision in his right eye blurred to 20-30, Maus was faced with the same option Holcomb initially faced:

Cornea transplant. Two years of pain. Possible rejection; astigmatism; cataracts; glaucoma.

Without at least one sharp eye, Maus said, "I'd be on the streets with my wife and two kids."

And then Maus read of the procedure that saved Holcomb's career.

"I broke right down," Maus said. "It was a light at the end of the tunnel."

He saw the light in October, when Boxer Wachler performed the procedure.

Maus is one of several people who, after learning about Holcomb's success, have contacted Wachler about the procedure. They contact Holcomb, too.

"It's nice to show people there's something else out there," Holcomb said. "There really is something you can do."

It's the only thing Holcomb could do to continue his Olympic quest.

Yes, he was on the list for a cornea transplant. But that would have meant a recovery time of at least a year, not to mention the possibility of complications.

At risk of losing its top driver, the U.S. Bobsled team discovered Boxer Wachler's version of the treatment, called C3-R. They sent Holcomb to California and, with the help of the USOC, paid the \$15,000 medical bill.

Boxer Wachler applied riboflavin eye drops to Holcomb's corneas and, with an ultraviolet light, activated the vitamin, which strengthens the collagen in the cornea and stops the degeneration; that's the C3-R part. The doctor then implanted a sort of contact lens behind the iris of each eye to correct eyesight, a procedure called Visian ICL.

It takes a little over a half-hour.

That's it.

Boxer Wachler said the treatment is 99 percent effective with just one procedure. One out of 100 patients require a second treatment. Boxer Wachler claims that there have been no infections, no corneal damages -- nothing but success, and the spread of the good word.

"It's really brought a great deal of awareness with keratoconus [patients] worldwide, who would otherwise have to go under an invasive corneal transplant," Boxer Wachler said.

Holcomb's vision was 20-1000. Now, it's 20-20. It took about 40 minutes.

It changed his life.

Eventually, it changed Maus' life, too.