

MSU GRAD PURSUES OLYMPIC DREAM

DONOVAN JACKSON
REPORTER

Recent graduate and former Mustangs basketball player Jace Johnson described bobsledding colorfully.

"Imagine you're in a bathtub and you're going down a mountain," Johnson said.

Johnson has aspirations that are not typical for athletes living in the south - or athletes in general. Johnson has switched from the hardwood to the frozen track, with a goal to earn a spot with the United States Olympic Bobsled Team.

Johnson's introduction to the sport of bobsled happened in the fifth grade with the 1993 Disney film "Cool Runnings," a true story about the 1988 Jamaican bobsled team. Johnson would eventually revisit the film during the 2022 Winter Olympics before going into a deeper dive about bobsled and seeing what was required to join a team.

"I knew I had one more year at MSU. So I couldn't really do too much at that point." Johnson would later go to a universal combine to get his start in Bobsledding. After the combine, Johnson considered himself to be "knee deep" in the whole thing.

Johnson mentioned that the film

"Cool Runnings" is his biggest influence, but the person that he looks up to most is Vonetta Flowers.

Flowers is from Johnson's hometown of Bessemer, Alabama and competed in the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City for the United States. Beyond simply competing, Flowers would go on to make history as she and Jill Bakken would win the gold medal in the Olympics first women's bobsled event in the 2002 Winter Olympics. Flowers made history, as she became the first Black athlete to win a gold medal in the Winter Olympics.

As a basketball player going into bobsled, Johnson has learned to adapt some of the skills from his time playing basketball for the Mustangs to bobsledding.

Johnson said the biggest skill he takes from basketball to bobsled is power and explosion.

"When I'm probably trying to finish at the rim in basketball, it requires a lot of power and explosion. So that's the biggest one," Johnson said.

Now, Johnson is training to be part of the U.S. Olympic Bobsled Team, and said he's picked up a lot in his time training.

"It's going pretty good. Long way to go, long way to go. But I have learned a lot in the short time I've been involved in the sport. I've learned a lot that's just required," Johnson said.

Johnson said being a part of the U.S. Olympic Bobsled Team is a "childhood dream come true" and "a surreal feeling." He added he's beginning to take in what the opportunity means.

"I've been involved with the sport in a short amount of time, but I kinda understand you know. What it means to represent your country and kinda do something that's bigger than you, and be a part of something that's bigger than you," Johnson said.

Even though bobsledding is a sport that only has two tracks in the United States, Johnson said there's no good reason for people not to pursue their passions.

"Don't be afraid to try new things and see if you would enjoy something. Because I found a new love in a sport that I didn't know too much about beforehand and it allowed me to continue my athletic career in a completely different arena," Johnson said.



PHOTO COURTESY OF JACE JOHNSON

Jace Johnson sits in a Team USA bobsled, 2023. Johnson's Olympic dream began as a child, and he is pursuing his passion after graduating from MSU.



PHOTO COURTESY OF JACE JOHNSON

Former MSU basketball player Jace Johnson sits outside the Mt Van Hoesenberg Olympic facility, 2023. Johnson's hometown of Bessemer, Alabama produced bobsledding gold medalist Vonetta Flowers.



PHOTO COURTESY OF JACE JOHNSON

Kinesiology graduate Jace Johnson sits in front of a Team USA logo, 2023. Johnson is one of 38 on the team, and is waiting to find out which crew he will run with.