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Jennifer Ortiz

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GWU alumna's Olympic dream is within reach



Courtesy of Kristen Hurley.

By: Jennifer Ortiz

A year ago, Kristen Hurley, a 2014 Gardner-Webb alumna, told GWU-Today about her **Olympic dream** of making the USA Bobsled team. She is currently competing in the last stage of tryouts, the National Team Trials. Oct. 17 marks the first day of a seven day-long competition for a spot on the 2018 Olympic team.

"My goals are still the same," said Hurley, reflecting on the past year. "I want to bring glory to God by the way I compete and interact with people."

Hurley must place among the top four brakemen at the National Team Trials to have the opportunity to be selected by the USA Bobsled Committee to the National Team. "If that is the case, then I would soon after begin travelling with the National Team competing on the World Cup Circuit at bobsled tracks around the world," said Hurley in a Facebook post.

Bobsled is a winter sport where a pilot and a brakeman race down an ice track in a sled. The track is about a

mile long, and the sled can reach a speed of roughly 95 miles per hour, according to Hurley. As a brakeman, Hurley's job in the two-person sled is to push the sled, hold on and brake.

"I knew that a lot of people who compete in bobsledding come from a track background," said Hurley. "Brakemen train similarly to sprinters in track. The most important thing for a brakeman is to be strong and fast."



Photo by Jonelle Bobak.



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Video courtesy of Kristen Hurley.

Hurley, a Columbia, Conn. native, was a student-athlete during her time at Gardner-Webb. She majored in physical education and ran track where she competed in heptathlons—a track and field event that involves seven events including a 100-meter hurdle, high jumps, shot put, a 200-meter dash, long jump, javelin and an 800-meter run. Hurley also began pursuing her Master's degree in Sports Science and Pedagogy, but has since put that on hold for bobsledding.

Knowing she would finish her track career upon graduation, Hurley wanted to continue to challenge herself athletically. She watched the 2014 Winter Olympics and noticed some people that she recognized for their reputations in track—including the famous athlete, Lolo Jones—also competed in bobsledding. She began researching the USA Bobsled team, and decided to make learning bobsled and competing in this new sport her next athletic goal.

Hurley has been staying at the Olympic Training Center in Lake Placid, N.Y., where she competed in the National Bobsled Push Championships in September. She said she was both excited and nervous to be competing against top athletes—including Jones herself.

"She was an idol of mine growing up and watching track. Now all of a sudden, I'm competing with her," said Hurley in amazement.

Hurley placed seventh and "cut it close." According to Hurley, Jones ranked higher than Hurley but has discontinued competing and has chosen to focus on summer Olympic games, putting Hurley into sixth place. Hurley said that she would need to move up four spots to make the National Team.

If she doesn't reach her Olympic goal, Hurley plans on pursuing the sport of Skeleton. Skeleton is similar to bobsled, but only one athlete controls the sled. Hurley has already shown success in this sport, winning first place in the women's 2015 USA National Skeleton Push Championship on Sept. 26. She attributes all her success to God.



Courtesy of Kristen Hurley.

"I've hit a few bumps in the road. I've doubted that this is what God wanted me to do," said Hurley. "But it seems like it's God's plan for me to be here. Really there is no way I can fail if it's God's plan."