

Family takes priority

Sven Fischer's waiting for "his day"



For nobody knowing the Fischer family it came in surprisingly, that sports would be of importance in Sven Fischer's life. Both his parents had been competitive sportsmen at "Turbine Erfurt", his mother was a track and fields athlete, his father a cyclist. So both Sven and his sister Andrea started to do sports rather early in their lives. But no one thought about a career in sports, especially not in wintersports.

From the cinder track on snow

Sven started in track and field athletics as a middle-distance runner and cross-country runner. In fifth grade he became district champion of his age in the 800

meters and as district champion in cross-country running 1982 he was allowed to participate in the GDR cross-country running championships.

At the change of the years 1982/1983 he changed from the Schmalkalden sportsclub and athletics to the Seligental sports club and wintersports, precisely: cross-country skiing. His teacher: Stefan Luck, an uncle of Frank Luck. Sven did so well, that he was sent to the children- and youth sports school (KJS) in Oberhof the same year, not to the cross-country class though, but the biathlon class. That happened in September 1983 – and since then Sven Fischer has been a biathlete.

In 1989 Sven made his "Abitur" and he had his first success as a biathlete: he became junior champion of the GDR in the sprint distance. The year had started so well, but then Sven suffered a bad backset: he suffered from severe pain in both knees and had to undergo arthroscopic examinations and an operation of his right knee. The reason: too much strain on the knees during growth, that lead to a serious cartilage damage in both knees. After the operation he had to pause in sports for a whole year. The only sport allowed during that time was swimming. His career seemed to be over before it had really begun.

The way back to a normal life as considered by Sven developed slowly, literally step by step. The first aim: being able to walk normally and without pain. After he had managed that, he wanted to do sports again. And only after achieving his third goal, which was skiing, it was time to think about competing again.

The hardest comeback

Returning to competitive sports in 1990/1991 was particularly difficult. The German reunion lead to a unity of the two German teams. There was an extremely close competition to be part of the national German team and Sven of course had no results to show. Thanks to Frank Ullrich (today's national team trainer), Sven got the chance to prove his skills. Ullrich managed to make Sven a reserve in DSV's (German Ski Federation) top C-group, and already in December 1991 Sven celebrated his first European cup victory in the sprint of Hochfilzen. One week after that he participated in his first world cup relay ever. He was rewarded B-status and because of success in the German championships in 1992 he qualified for the world cup in Pokljuka in December 1992. He ended up as number 38 in the individual whereas he took fifth place in his first ever world cup sprint. Aged 21 the step to the top – the A-team – was definitely taken and since then, Sven has been on the world cup team without interruption.



He was rather successfully in his first world cup season: from his first world championships he took home two medals. He won gold in the team competition and bronze with the relay in Borovetz (Bulgaria). – Part of the team



at that time was another Fischer: Fritz Fischer, today's national co-trainer to Frank Ullrich. Aged 37 he was in his last season as an active athlete. – Apart from that Sven took his first world cup victory in the sprint of Kontiolahti in March 1993. He did so well in sprints all over the season, that he won the sprint world cup and became sixth in the overall world cup.

In the "Fischer-tradition"

The next season was even better. Sven not only qualified for the Olympic Games in 1994 in Lillehammer, he even started in all three olympic races. Olympic disciplines at that time were sprint, individual and relay. Pursuit and mass start competitions didn't exist yet and the team competition was not an olympic discipline. Right in his first olympic race Sven won a medal. He got bronze in the 20 km race, Frank Luck snatched silver from under his nose. When asked if he was annoyed about his two misses that prevented an even better result, he answered: "A medal in the first olympic race of my life – my God, what more can you demand?" He ended seventh in the sprint, still feeling the 20 km race in his bones, it was his worst placing in these Olympic Games! In the relay the Germans, with Sven as youngest of the team on last position, took gold, despite of the fact, that the Russians were the clear favourites. Many people still remember how Sven was looking for a German flag to take it over the finishing line – just like Fritz Fischer did four years before.

Sven stayed in shape after the Olympics and nearly won the overall world cup, because he gathered the most points during the season. But the complicated way of summing up and subtraction of points, after discussions about the ambiguous rules for awarding points and due to the fact that Olympic competitions did not count for the world cup, Sven became "only" second. Since then he says, he doesn't care about summing up points anymore.

Strong away from the track as well

But of course in the more than ten years of his career, Sven had to come through and get over lean periods, setbacks and other adversities. A disease in 1994 e. g. prevented him from a normal season preparation. As a consequence he ended 18th in the overall world cup. This is his worst placing until today.

And envious people showed up with Sven's become successful. Suspections about doping and cooperation with the Stasi were spread. All these accusations turned out untenable, but they put an enormous strain on Sven, what was the obvious purpose of these attacks. But Sven was shown so much solidarity and support from an intact milieu of family, team-mates and trainers, that he was able to cope with the difficult situations and didn't lose his motivation.

It paid off that he didn't allow these people to discourage him: in 1997 Sven became the first German since Fritz Fischer to win the overall world cup. Not before 1999 though, he managed to win a title as world champion in an individual competition, but then, at Holmenkollen he won even two in a row: world champion in individual and mass start. Sven was happy: "That's a huge weight off my mind... All these years I've always tried to compete on a high level. I had always been out of luck in crucial situations, but I knew one day, my day would come." In addition to that, he won the overall world cup for the second time.

Who's the best?

Every now and then the "most successful biathlete of all times" is being searched for, and you can apply different standards for that. You can take world champion titles, olympic victories, first places in world cups or overall world cup titles as a basic. You will always get a different "best one" depending on which you chose. If you sum up how

often a biathlete was on the rostrum, Sven would be the most successful one (as of Dec. 2003). He never won races in a row as Ole Einar Bjørndalen or Magdalena Forsberg who have won more than 10 competitions per season, but Sven has been so constant over all these years, that he takes that top position – even though the official IBU Calendar unfortunately tells something else.

Sven keeps it open for long he will do competitive sports. "Body and should have to be a unity. If one of these two says: 'I don't want no more' or 'I can't no more', I will quit". He loves his sport, but he knows there are more important things in life: e. g. health and family. Just during the world championships he and his girlfriend are expecting the birth of their first child. He didn't have to think about the answer to the question whether the birth of his child or the world championships make his heart pound more: sport is his job, he loves it and takes it seriously, but family takes priority over everything else.

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