

HOLDENER AND GISIN ARE DISGUISED SOLOISTS

In the past, many athletes worked independently and with their own teams. The Olympic winners of Pyeongchang are committed to Swiss-Ski, but have been moving for some time in tailor-made teams.

Benjamin Steffen, Crans-Montana



Michelle Gisin and Wendy Holdener during the Olympic Games in Pyeongchang. (Image: Jean-Christophe Bott / Keystone)

The dream is sitting in the back of the head. But the more successful Wendy Holdener and Michelle Gisin are, the more obvious is the lure of giving him more room: the dream of the overall World Cup. For Holdener alone, her current placement arouses the appetite for more, she is clearly behind Mikaela Shiffrin, but on rank 2. And Gisin said in December: that this winter is a test run, because she had to learn "to deal with everything around it" .

The trappings have become even bigger. Gisin has traveled to Crans-Montana as a combined Olympic gold medalist at the World Cup races, and the season lasts another two weeks, saying she's "not so bad a way," says Gisin. In the overall ranking she occupies 11th place, but for the time being she is less concerned with the ranking than with the experience. And it's about a higher-level question: what does it take to become the world's best ski racer? The most obvious answer seems: a slim team.

Gisin and Holdener want to stay in the team

Most overall World Cup winners came from small, sometimes even familiar cells. Mikaela Shiffrin, who secured the big crystal ball in 2017, always had the mother at her side on her ascent. Lara Gut went the long way to the overall World Cup triumph 2016 with her father as coach, Tina Maze (2013) with her partner. Anna Veith (2014 and 2015) was most successful in getting the club out of federation structures, but she did have a coach who was so close to the tie that sometimes he had to make it clear he was a regular group coach. Today, Veith is also on her way with her own physiotherapist and press officer.

Would that be the logical next step for Holdener and Gisin to break away from Swiss Ski groups and try their luck with their own teams? The one answer is no. Gisin says she thinks it would be "cool" to continue on the path that has gone so far, "I want to stay in the team where I am". And Holdener, the three-time Olympic medalist: "At the moment, it's not an issue to do everything alone."

The other answer is: you're almost in your own constructs, as camouflaged soloists, so to speak. Their degree of individualization seems relatively large, even in the technical group they do not have the same first contact person: Gisin works more with Denis Wicki together, Holdener with Werner Zurbuchen. Especially the relationship of trust between Holdener and Zurbuchen is considered very close.

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In many cases, a tailor-made team emerges over the years. At Gisin, the special staff includes much more than the much-cited presence and advice of her sister, Dominique, who won the 2014 Olympic run. Michelle Gisin has her own physiotherapist and conditioning coach, and with Lukas Weisskopf a doctor who has long been known by outsiders to simply mend hard-dashed Swiss ski racers. But Weisskopf's meaning for Gisin goes beyond that. "If there's something, there's a direct phone to him," she says. And if she plans the next few weeks in the fall, there will be an MRI and a consultation at Weisskopf.

Christian Marcolli is also a man for all occasions, far away from Swiss Ski. Marcolli is a sports psychologist and has been in charge of Dominique Gisin, as well as footballer of FC Basel. It has even happened that he accompanied Gisin until just before the start of a race.

Many private engagements

Wendy Holdener also works with a mental coach, as well as with a nutritionist. Kevin Holdener, her brother and manager, speaks of "Team Wendy", in which several people in the background key functions. This includes a conditioning coach, who was with Swiss Ski until last summer. Holdener attaches so much importance to cooperating with him that she still works with him on a private basis. The financial burden of such engagements should not be underestimated, but Kevin Holdener says, "You have to find solutions to make it the right one for Wendy."

Above all these thoughts is the hope that such investments will matter whether a pedestal more or less results – and if something flows back. Holdener alone has earned 212,794 francs this season, Gisin 73 101. The Swiss Ski Director Markus Wolf says: "When top athletes feel a particularly trusting relationship somewhere, money often plays a subordinate role."

Wolf finds Holdener and Gisin are "very individual on the way", he sees no urgency to make any significant changes. In recent years, Swiss Ski has repeatedly offered its services, for example in the mandated employment of Lara Guts father Pauli. There is a willingness to debate in the association, "we accept that athletes have their own needs". But what Wolf does not want is that discussions emerge from "a comparison" – that it means that they have it and that way. Wolf says, "You never know what's good in

other teams and what's less good." But you know about the dream in the back of your mind. And as Holdener said, "At the moment it's not an issue to do it all by yourself." She said: at the moment.