

“SUCCESS IS NOT TO WIN EVERYTHING BUT TO MAKE THE BEST OUT OF EACH SITUATION.”

TRIATHLETE AND IRONMAN WORLD CHAMPION DANIELA RYF REFLECTS ON SUCCESS AND WORKING TO ACHIEVE YOUR ABSOLUTE BEST.

BY LINDSAY JUDGE

Swiss triathlete Daniela Ryf has taken on some of the hardest physical challenges in the world. A ten-time Ironman World Champion, she pushes her body to the limits to endure some of the hardest races known to man. Ironman challenges typically consist of a 5.86 km swim, a 180.25 km bicycle ride and a marathon, raced in that order. The races are undertaken all around the world, often in extreme conditions and require a lifetime of training.

Daniela began her triathlete career at a young age. She joined her first team when she was just 15 and began training in her home country of Switzerland. Triathlons have taken her all around the world, with some of her most notable successes including winning the Ironman World Championship in 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018. She has a total of an impressive ten World Championship wins.

This year has been very different for the athlete, who is used to flying across the world for her next race. Because of the global pandemic, Daniela has spent much of this year in Switzerland, continuing to train and improving her skills as well as recently returning to studies in Food Science.

Daniela is a member of Breitling's Triathlon Squad, which was formed in 2018 as part of the brand's "Squad on a Mission" campaign. Daniela was recently in Geneva for the launch of the Breitling Endurance Pro during the Geneva Watch Days event. The Breitling Endurance Pro is the latest sports watch from the brand, joining Breitling's professional line of timepieces. This ultra-light, highly precise and sporty watch is perfect for those undertaking high impact sports and its interchangeable colour straps make it stylish and unique. To find out more about why this watch suits her lifestyle and how this year has allowed her to develop and evaluate her success so far, we talk to Daniela Ryf.

Why did you decide to partner with Breitling and what are the values you share with the brand?

The way the brand is established, especially with Georges Kern (CEO) having such enthusiasm, is really dynamic. It's a very sporty brand but technically very elaborate. The fact that it is Swiss is also very cool as I am Swiss too, in fact, Breitling's headquarters are actually close to where I live and grew up. In terms of values, I think

putting effort into sports and always striving for perfection are very similar to mine. Even during the lockdown, I was seeing similarities with how Breitling was still very active, they didn't want to stop, and as an athlete, I am very similar. I kept training! And now I'm waiting to get back to the competitions. The Squads are something very new and it's a very unique concept. Having great athletes come together and with Georges Kern joining us for initiatives like for example the Coronation Double Century race in South Africa, it starts to feel like a family.

What do you look for in a watch you wear when you are training or competing and for your free time?

For training, I always look for something very light. That's why the Endurance Pro is so great. I want a watch that I don't feel on my wrist when I'm training and also something comfortable. I'm not the kind of person that wants to track everything all the time on a watch so I like the approach of this watch being sporty and functional, but not over analysing everything or going too much into the data. It's still a very stylish watch, but robust and sporty. That's why I love it. In my free time, I do love the Superocean. I like to be a little bit classier when I'm not training, as I don't always walk around in my running shoes!

Do you find you can wear the Endurance Pro when you're not training too?

Yes, especially the one on the white strap. I think for a woman, that's the one I love the most. You can pair it with jeans and a white shirt and it looks so cool, classy and modern. When you add colours it makes it sportier but I also wear the orange strap quite a lot, it's cool because it's different and it stands out. But for everyday life, I would say the white is my favourite.

What are your thoughts on the women's offering at Breitling?

I think it has changed quite a bit and now there is a huge focus on women's watches and there is more to come. I love their approach because I'm quite a strong woman; I'm sporty and I don't wear tiny watches, I like to have a good piece on my wrist but still keep it classy. I love the Navitimer for example. I like how it approaches the elegance of women but still represents a strong side of woman.



Breitling's squad concept is very unique to the brand – what is it like to be lined up alongside the other successful squad members?

It's been quite a lot of fun and we've had a few projects together already. I think the highlight has been the cycling race in South Africa, we went as a Squad and took part in a big team race together, that was great fun. Plus, it was for a good cause, which is cool, and it's great to make memories together.

Of course this year you haven't been able to compete – as an athlete how have you managed during this time?

I've gone through quite a lot of phases. In the beginning, I thought it was awesome, the pressure was off and I could train and just be at home doing my own thing. But then after a while, I started to miss the races. It became hard when I was training but I wasn't getting to compete, as this is the way I often measure my fitness. So this year I never really had that. In one way it felt like freedom, then in the other way, it was hard to know if I was going in the right direction. I was hoping that I would have been able to compete in September but the race was postponed again. So every time this happens you have to adjust again and there is always uncertainty, which is hard. To be honest, I do enjoy training quite a lot, so I have been able to keep myself motivated but I think there is a positive and negative side. I could say, "Why should I train if there are no races?" Then, on the other hand, I could say, "I have one year now to get even better than where I was last year." So it's really how you look at the situation.



What is the goal currently, are there any races you are working towards?

It changed in September as they cancelled more races, so at the moment I have told myself that it is going to be next year before I can race again. So having accepted that makes things easier as I have a long-term motivation and more time to focus on a few things that I normally wouldn't. But who knows what is going to happen.

What is a lesson you have learnt from this year?

I have learnt that I don't do what I do just because of the racing; it's the whole process. I've realised that sometimes the process of continually working to improve my fitness to see how fit I can become. I still get satisfaction when I have a good ride or a good session that makes me feel really tired. So the fact that I still have that satisfaction is good proof for me that I am doing the right thing. I have also learnt to be patient and flexible which has been very important this year for everyone. I also did some new things – I started to play the piano and use my time differently.

Triathlons are not something easy – what made you decide to go into this line of work and what keeps you motivated?

I started very early and I just grew into it. I was swimming when I was 9 and doing athletics when I was 10 and then I went to a youth camp, which is where I met my former coach. He invited me to join his team in Basel when I was 15 and from then on I was already doing triathlons. So I never really decided to do it, it's something that just happened and I really started to enjoy it. We had a great team it was lots of fun – we trained hard but we went out on the weekends, so it was a really good combination. I made so many friends who are still my best friends today. I think the surrounding just worked well and I enjoyed getting better. A lot of the people I trained with were quite a bit older than me and I always wanted to beat them or be as

fast as them and I think that's how I started to enjoy what I did. It was never in my plan to do it as my job but it just happened and I think this is often the way.

What's the biggest challenge you face as an athlete?

What most people underestimate is that being an athlete is a 24/7 job. Even when you're not training you're always an athlete and you have to live it all the time. You're always thinking about nutrition, recovery, training. It's 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. So I think the biggest challenge is to keep that balance of enjoying life and training. Sometimes I need to do things that might not always be the best as an athlete but you have to allow yourself to relax and this, in the long run, will help your performance, as it's hard to perform if you are too tense.

What is the biggest achievement in your life so far?

It would be the 2018 race in Kona during which I got stung by a jellyfish. I almost drowned during the swim when it happened just moments before the race started and I wanted to give up, but I decided I would fight through somehow. I was about 10 minutes behind at this point but I kept going until eventually the stinging stopped and I not only won the race but also got a World Championship record.

What went through your mind during that race?

I told myself that the jellyfish sting didn't happen and tried to ignore it, but it was very hard as it really hurt! The harder I swam the more blood there was and the more it burned. That was most definitely the craziest race I've ever had. For me, quitting is never really an option and I had to find a way to carry on and finish the race. I didn't even think about winning, I thought maybe I'll do it in 15 hours instead of 8 and a half, but I just didn't want to give up. This taught me how a bad situation can be turned into a good situation.



What is something you would still like to achieve that you haven't had the chance to do yet?

For a race itself, it's hard because the World Championship is definitely the biggest and I have achieved that, but I think it's always hard to do it again and again. The higher the expectations, the harder it is to do it again. I still think I haven't had my absolute perfect race but I also think the goal is to have performances that people can remember. I hope a jellyfish never stings me again but that's why racing is interesting because no matter how prepared you are, something can always happen.

In every great career we see people experience failures – how do you deal with that and is there any particular failure you can share with us that was a big learning experience for you?

I try to use it as motivation. I had one race in Frankfurt where I was just really cold, I thought I was going to freeze to death and I had to stop and pull out of the race during the cycle. This was hard for me because I had to give up, but I was almost falling off the bike, I didn't have a choice. But I think you can always take something good out of a bad situation like that and try to improve for next time.



Breitling Triathlon Squad



You are working on a programme that helps to develop young talent – what can you tell us about this and why is it important to you?

Yes, it's a programme I run in my hometown in Switzerland. I believe that if you give young people an opportunity, that's the only way they can become good at something. Of course, they have to take that opportunity but it needs to be there in the first place. I was lucky that I found my team when I was young and that was my opportunity. So to be able to go to training and have the opportunity to train alongside the education is great for some of these kids. It was important to me to give back and we have around 12 athletes in the programme now. They come to see our training and I think it's great for them to see where they can get to.

Where is a place you like to travel to?

I'm quite lucky that I can train close to home. I do like to switch places but I don't like to actually travel. Especially having so much luggage for races! But within Switzerland, there are so many different places you can travel to and different landscapes and temperatures. I'm a mountain person; I feel such locations give you peace.

What do you do during downtime or on days off?

Sometimes I just like to sleep! I'm quite a relaxed person and I think because I train so much it is nice to go out for dinner or go to a lake and have some quiet time.

What is the motto that you live by?

Success is not to win everything but to make the best out of each situation. So whatever gets thrown at you it doesn't matter if you're the best as long as you give your best, that's all you can do. 🍷