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## **I'VE BEEN IN LOVE WITH A WOMAN**

Finally, she's back! After an 18-month break from racing, Daniela Ryf returns to competition at the Ironman 70.3 in Dubai in mid-March. And she wins – in record time. So more of the same old for the triathlete, who dominated her sport for years? It appears that way but appearances can be deceptive. In the life of the 33-year-old from Solothurn, pretty much everything is different than prior to the pandemic: "I used this break to question many things. And I guess I needed this so that I wouldn't be afraid of change anymore."



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### **DANIELA RYF, ARE YOU HAPPY?**

I've thought about this a lot. I even wrote a list of things that make me happy. For example, when my godson is happy about a gift from me (laughs), I share his happiness. I guess I'm happy when I'm not trying to be happy. At the moment, I'm totally happy.

### **DOESN'T SUCCESS MAKE YOU HAPPY?**

My success has brought me fulfillment, it has made my dreams and goals come true. It has shown me what I can do. It's a wonderful feeling. But success alone no longer makes me happy.

### **WHEN DID YOU REALIZE THAT?**

It was a gradual process. Little by little, I started to notice that the pressure I felt during the last few years had taken some of the joy out of it.

### **WHAT ROLE DID THE PANDEMIC PLAY?**

At the beginning, the lockdown and the cancellation of the first races almost came in handy. I had injured my foot at that time and couldn't do any running anyway. At first, I didn't miss the competitions either.

### **WERE YOU HAPPY TO BE INJURED?**

No. I continued to train, but I couldn't break out of this hamster wheel. When the World Championships in Kona were first postponed and then canceled, it really pulled the rug out from under me. The pandemic made it painfully obvious that I don't have much in my life, when sports breaks away. At times, I lived a rather monotonous life. Training three times a day, sleeping, eating. Fortunately, I have close friends and a fantastic family. But nothing that is just mine. My thing. In return, the fear of daring to make changes was also gone. Because the process started earlier.

### **WHEN YOU DIDN'T WIN IN HAWAII 2019 FOR THE FIRST TIME IN FIVE YEARS?**

No. That defeat didn't trigger much, because I was almost out of action due to stomach problems. The pressure also remained. I still felt like the hunted. Looking back, the win in 2018 was the beginning of my questioning.

It is "the craziest race" of her career: shortly before the start in Hawaii, Ryf is stung by a jellyfish. She suffers extreme pain. Giving up is not an option. In the end, the result is the same as in the three previous years: Ryf outpaces everyone and becomes world champion. "Maybe the jellyfish gave me superpower," she quips at the finish line. The sheer incredible achievement also becomes a curse for Ryf. Her role in the public eye contributes to this. "I was often asked: What more do you want? How can you top that?" Through such questions, these themes planted themselves like seeds in her mind: "Was this the best performance I'll ever be capable of, the best story I'll ever write?"



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### **HAVE YOU FOUND ANSWERS?**

Yes. I asked myself: Where do I want to be five years from now? It no longer satisfies me to simply win races. After years of competing in triathlon, during which I practically dedicated my entire life to the sport, I see what lies ahead as a new, a third career.

The changes for the next stage of life are drastic. Ryf decides in the fall of 2020 to resume her studies for a bachelor's degree in food technology. At the time, two classes and her bachelor thesis are still missing. But in typical Ryf fashion, Daniela puts her heart, mind and soul behind the course work and hands in her thesis in mid-December, passes final exams in January. Even today, she no longer dedicates 100% of her time and energy to her athletic career. Instead, she is completing further training in neuropsychology. Her goal: an EMBA in business psychology.

### **WHY THIS CHANGE IN DIRECTION?**

Our brain has always fascinated me. What happens when we are motivated? What substance is released when we are happy or sad? My interest also has a bit of a tragic background: My father narrowly escaped death three times last year. He will have to be nursed for the rest of his life and now has to learn everything anew: eating, speaking. That showed me what people are capable of when it comes to learning. Acquiring this knowledge fascinates me and provides me with a more diverse life and additional motivation.

### **YOU HAVE OFTEN STRESSED THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY TO YOU. WOULD YOU LIKE TO START YOUR OWN SOON?**

I have thought about that, too. Many of my friends now have children. And I'm at an age where, as a woman, you're often asked about it ...

### **DOES THAT BOTHER YOU?**

It bothers me that our society always wants to pigeonhole everyone and put a label on everything.





**“IRONLADY”, “MACHINE”, “THE UNTOUCHABLE” – WHICH ONE OF THESE LABELS DO YOU FIND ANOYING?**

I am well aware that I'm partially to blame when it comes to these nicknames (laughs). I certainly have this ambitious, very disciplined side, I'm hard on myself in training. But that's only one aspect of my personality. I understand that categorizing things and people help us find orientation. That this “pigeonholing” provides us with a handle on life. But I want to live free of conventions. That's why I also leave the family question open. And I'm currently building a house in my home region of Guensberg - as a single person, against all social norms.

Ryf, who is talkative about her career and social issues, always keeps personal relationships out of the public eye. She will continue to do so in the future. "In order to protect my dearest people." However, she now wants to share a very personal experience: "I have also been in love with a woman."

**HOW DID THAT FEEL?**

First of all, I was surprised. Because I had only loved men before. I rediscovered love and thus also a bit of myself.



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**WHY ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT THIS?**

I was torn. Actually, who you love shouldn't matter. But I am direct and honest, I don't want to hide. I also want to set an example and say: live and let live. Love and let love.

**HOW HAVE THE PEOPLE AROUND YOU REACTED TO YOUR OUTING?**

For me, this is not an outing. Because that would imply that I am somehow different. But to answer your question: Everyone reacted very positively and was supportive.

### **SO ARE YOU BISEXUAL?**

I had to Google myself what it's called when you fall in love with someone regardless of their gender. But that brings us back to topic: why do you have to give it a name at all? I don't want to label it. I can fall in love with men and women, so what?

### **YOUR MAIN SPONSOR IS TEAM BAHRAIN. IN BAHRAIN, PEOPLE WHO FEEL AND LOVE LIKE YOU HAVE FEW RIGHTS. ARE YOU AFRAID OF CONSEQUENCES?**

I would be very disappointed if my openness resulted in pushback from my partners. For me, the most important thing is that I can be who I am. Open, honest, free.

This new-found freedom permeates all areas. With her degree, Ryf will encounter improved professional opportunities after her triathlon career. And she's gained additional freedom in triathlon as well. She now shoulders more responsibility herself and no longer works with her long-time coach Brett Sutton. Her new coach: herself.

### **IS THIS AN ACT OF EMANCIPATION?**

Absolutely. Brett and I have not fallen out. And I am eternally grateful to him. But I wanted to develop further. After eight years with Brett, I want to implement what I've learned myself.



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### **IS YOUR FIRE FOR THE SPORT SLOWLY DYING?**

Quite the opposite. In Dubai, I realized that my fire actually burns as strong as ever. But I almost got too close to the flame. I want to continue to be successful at all levels. But the balance has to be right - like it is now.