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12 Months, 12 Top-Riders, 12 Interviews

by Mad4One

Interview with
Kathi Boll

HER PASSION STARTED IN 1998, AND FROM THAT MOMENT ON SHE HAS NEVER LOST HER LOVE FOR TRAINING, LEARNING, MEASURING HERSELF; ALL THIS WITH GREAT ENTHUSIASM, DETERMINATION AND A STRONG SENSE OF DUTY.
"... IF YOU REALLY WANT SOMETHING, YOU CAN ALSO DO IT."
"... A LIFESTYLE, A TEACHING ALSO FOR ALL OF US, BUT WHAT REALLY STRUCK US IN THIS INTERVIEW IS THE VALUE THAT KATHI GIVES TO "... CONTINUE TO BE HAPPY "..., AND HER AWARENESS THAT THIS CONDITION IS PRECIOUS AND NEEDS TO BE CARED FOR AND SAFEGUARDED.

Foto: Belinda Bebst



Foto: Konstantin Höhne

WITH YOU WE HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO LOOK AT THE FREESTYLE'S WORLD WITH A "DEPTH OF FIELD" OF 20 YEARS. THIS DOES NOT HAPPEN OFTEN. THE FIRST QUESTION IS QUITE OBVIOUS: WHAT ARE THE SUBSTANTIAL CHANGES THAT YOU HAVE SEEN AND EXPERIENCED IN THESE YEARS?

First of all I would say that it doesn't happen very often in our sport that an athlete practice it for so many years attending also competitions. However, many of my friends, who started with me, are still part of this community. Both as coach and as unicyclist, we all feel somehow „linked“ to this sport and this tells us how much this sport creates a high sense of community and passion. This hasn't changed over the years. Of course, 20 years is a very long time period and our sport, especially Freestyle has seen several changes over the years. Above all the level of the tricks has increased considerably. For example stand-up was unthinkable only a short time ago. Today it is a basic trick. Freestyle is such an innovative discipline that allows you to always invent new tricks and never stop learning!

But also the work of the jury has become more and more professional over time. Especially here in Germany every year we work to improve the jury's evaluation sheets. It is a constant process, far from being over. Another great goal achieved is certainly the EVD-BDR joint German Freestyle Championship. It's a great joy for me! For sure, it will make us even more professional.

AS A CHILD WHO WAS YOUR SPORTS ICON?

My idol in sport has always been my father, this regardless of unicycling. He is not a professional athlete or something similar, but he loves playing sports and has practiced many sports all over his life. It has been always a pleasure for me to see him so active, and I promised myself that also for me sport would have been part of my life.

If we talk about unicycling, there has been only one idol for me, it's Ryan Woessner. In 2004 I saw for the first time a video of the individual routine that he performed at the World Championship in Japan. It was simply fascinating. I have never seen before then an athlete doing such crazy things riding a unicycle. It was a great honor for me, when, in 2010 during Unicon in New Zealand, at the end of my routine for the individual expert category, he told me that he found it beautiful and that I had shown many difficult tricks.

FREESTYLE IS MY PASSION, BECAUSE.....

...for me, freestyle combines everything that makes out of a sport a good sport. I can train, execute tricks, achieve my limits and go further, I can give space to my creativity and measure my skills with other freestylers.... What I love most is that you never stop learning. There is always something to try. I also find the combination of trick, music and presentation awesome! It's a pleasure to show to the audience what you can do and see the enthusiasm in their eyes.

THIS SPORT HAS GIVEN YOU THE OPPORTUNITY TO TRAVEL AND MEASURE YOURSELF WITH ATHLETES FROM OTHER COUNTRIES. ACCORDING TO YOUR OPINION, HOW MUCH DOES THE ATHLETE'S CULTURE AFFECTS HIS/HER WAY OF PERFORMING IN FREESTYLE?



Very often I can understand which country the freestyler comes from, just looking at his/her routine and presentation. I think that here in Germany we are very focused on reaching a high level in the execution of tricks, and this enable us to succeed in combining different types of tricks. If we look at Japanese athletes we find that they give great attention in creating routines of high esthetic level. The costumes they wear and the music their choose may often speak of their culture. Their performance is always an enchanting show for the audience. But also Swiss and Danish freestylers have their own peculiarities. I'm not sure that you can always perceive the culture of the country of origin of the freestyler, but surely each country brings on the stage its history, its own style.

YOU ARE ALMOST 28 YEARS OLD; HOW ARE YOU FACING NOW THE EUROPEAN AND WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS? HAS YOUR WILL TO WIN KEPT UNCHANGED, OR DO OTHER FEELINGS PREVAIL?

No, it's not the same feeling. When I was 16/17 I was very ambitious. Maybe a little too ambitious. I absolutely wanted to win and I trained a lot. Today I'm still ambitious and motivated, but now I execute my routines with a quite different feeling. For example, when I performed my last individual routine at the selection for the German Championship 2019, the feeling that prevailed was a sense of gratitude. In 2009, exactly ten years earlier, I entered the Expert category for the first time (the 6 best individual routines can be performed in the Expert category and you can compete for the German Champion Title).

The fact that I was there, able to do the same after ten years, made me proud and grateful at the same time. This year too I will have the opportunity to compete in the World Championship for my country, Germany. When I think about this opportunity, I feel really excited and full of joy. Of course it's nice, to end your career on the top step of the podium, but for me this is not a priority. I want to show the best of myself and be able to excite the audience. These words may sound obvious, but for me this is really my today's goal.



SINCE MORE THAN 20 YEARS YOU HAVE BEEN TRAINING AND TAKING PART IN COMPETITIONS. EVERYONE GROWS UP. HOW DOES THE ATHLETE'S PHYSICAL AND MENTAL PREPARATION CHANGE OVER THE YEARS?

My physical training hasn't changed much. In fact, I train exactly as before. Only my mental preparation takes longer. I think more about tricks and this somehow inhibits me a bit. I must always try to counter these emotions. I'm also a little more nervous than in the past. For this reason I prepare my routines in a very safe way to have a good performance even when I'm nervous.

TRAINING, CHAMPIONSHIPS AND AT THE SAME TIME STUDY AND DEGREE. HOW DO YOU MANAGE TO BALANCE ALL THIS?

I have set the right priorities for myself. Unicycling gives me the right balance in the everyday life. It has always been a very important element in my life. I've never put to myself the question, school or sport! For this I'm grateful to my parents, who have always believed in the importance of extra-curricular activities. They always said that you never learn 24 hours a day, so there is time for friends and unicycle. And I take my time to do this. I would say that sometimes I have rather neglected my social life in order to play sports. Although this has been marginal. I also have a great sense of duty. I've always trained in a group and I've never wanted to disappoint my teammates. If you really want something, you can also do it.

IN SPORTS THERE ARE MANY UPS AND DOWNS. WHAT WAS YOUR HIGHLIGHT?

In twenty years there have been many beautiful moments that I always remember with great pleasure. One of the highlights was definitely my first routine, Single Expert, in New Zealand and my first place in the German Championship. If I look back to these moments I'm very proud. But my best experience was during Unicon Canada. It has been the first time we won the title of Vice World Champions with our group routine. To win with your best friends is simply amazing.



AND THE WORST MOMENT?

Anyone who has practiced a sport for such a long time, participating also in competitions, has most likely experienced defeats. It has happened also to me, no doubt. In those moments I always felt very disappointed. But that has often given me new energy in view of the next championship. If I have to mention a defeat, it would surely be the routine we performed at the German Freestyle Championship 2019. Every year, from 2007 to then, we have always climbed the steps of the podium with our routines, but the poor way we performed our group routine there, and the disappointing 4th place we achieved, all this did hurt us very much.



HOW DO YOU RELAX AFTER COMPETITION?

Most of the time I absolutely don't need to relax, because everything I live in a championship, I mean the discovery of many new and exciting tricks, the pleasure in admiring truly spectacular routines, is for me a great boost to find new energies. I usually go back to training with more motivation than before. After a championship I can train a bit more freely, without having to repeat the same routine countless times, and I enjoy these moments, because this is just the right time to try new tricks and give space to my creativity. It is an almost informal workout that relaxes me. And I can calmly set my new goals.

DOES DISCIPLINE ALWAYS COME FIRST FOR YOU?

I'd say I'm a disciplined person when it comes to unicycling. It has always been important for me to master all the tricks (which are also present in our group routine), even without having a partner. This is the reason why I've reached a very good level in basic tricks. In my opinion this makes a freestyler a good team member. I think that discipline is essential in this specialty, otherwise you risk disappointing your group.

3 STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF YOUR CHARACTER AND HOW DO THEY IMPACT ON YOU, AS AN ATHLETE

My strengths are for sure commitment, ambition and sense of duty. In my opinion one of my weak points is that I often lack of self-confidence, I think too much and it's hard for me to say "no". All these peculiarities have also an impact on my life as an athlete, no doubt. They drive me to try a trick countless times, until I can do it well. I've always wanted to show my coaches that I can do it and I'm not lazy. I know, I'm often very critical of myself and this holds me back a bit with some tricks. The result is that I don't learn them as quickly as I would like.



INDIVIDUAL, PAIR, GROUP FREESTYLE. YOU HAVE ALWAYS ENGAGED YOURSELF IN ALL THESE DISCIPLINES. IF YOU WERE TO ADVISE A YOUNG FREESTYLER WHICH ONE OF THESE SPECIALTIES IS THE RIGHT ONE TO START WITH, WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO HIM?

Every person is so unique and has strengths and weaknesses just like me. Therefore it is difficult to give an advice, that may fit to everyone. However I think being part of a group can teach a lot. A good coach pays great attention to precision and safety. This is also important for individual and pair freestyle. On the other hand, I think that when we perform individual routines we have the opportunity to learn tricks more safely. Here we don't have a partner who can support us. You have to practice everything on your own. This has helped me a lot also in group work-out.

WHICH ARE YOUR NEXT PERSONAL GOALS? AND YOUR GOALS IN SPORTS?

Summer 2020 will certainly be exciting. I would like to complete my Master at the University in Cologne and compete at Unicon 2020, Grenoble. Two goals I'm working on. But in the private life I have certainly set other goals. It might sound as a trivial statement, but I want to go on being happy and in my opinion, if you want this, you got to keep working at it.

IF YOU COULD CHANGE ONE THING IN FREESTYLE: WHAT WOULD IT BE?

Today I would not change anything. I just hope this sport go on growing and becoming more and more professional. Freestyle has great potential, it knows how to inspire people. And I would be happy if the athletes take up this challenge and work even more on this aspect in their routines. In many routines we should improve the merge between tricks and presentation. But I also see great steps forward in this direction, so I am excited to see what the future holds!



KATHI'S MOST IMPORTANT NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL RESULTS

Group Routine

- Vice-World Champions: Unicon 2014 and 2016
- German Champion: 2009, 2010, 2011, 2014, 2015 and 2017

Pair Routine

- Unicon 2016 (San Sebastian): 3. Place age cat. with Svenja Schanz
- European Championship 2017 (Sittard): 1. Place age cat. with Lara Kubiczek
- German Championship 2019 (Nümbrecht): 1. Place age cat. with Lara Kubiczek

Individual Routine

- Unicon 2009 (Wellington): 4. Place Expert
- Unicon 2016 (San Sebastian): 3. Place age cat.
- Unicon 2018 (Ansan): 3. Place age cat.
- German Championship 2009: 3. Place age cat. Expert
- German Champion 2010
- German Championship 2010: 1. Place age cat.
- German Championship 2011: 1. Place age cat.

Standardskill

- German Champion 2014
- German Championship 2009: 3. Place Expert



BUT THAT'S NOT ALL. WEALTH OF IDEAS, PROFESSIONALISM, COMMUNICATION SKILLS, LOVE FOR INNOVATION, ALL THIS WE HAVE FOUND IN KATHI AND GO ON APPRECIATING IN HER.

KATHI HAS BEEN THE DECISIVE FIGURE IN THE REALIZATION OF THE MAD4ONE'S FREESTYLE WORKSHOPS, WHICH HAVE BEEN HELD IN THE RECENT YEARS NOT ONLY IN GERMANY, BUT ALSO IN ITALY. SINCE 2018 SHE HAS BEEN THE DRIVING FORCE IN THIS EXCITING PROJECT "12 MONTHS, 12 TOP RIDERS, 12 INTERVIEWS" AND THE LIST OF THINGS THAT WE HAVE DONE TOGETHER AND WILL GO ON INVENTING TOGETHER DOES NOT END HERE.

"... WE ARE EXCITED TO SEE WHAT THE FUTURE WILL BRING US ...", AS KATHI SAYS.

THE IDEAS WE HAVE ARE MANY, OUR WILL TO DO IS GREAT.

THANKS KATHI FOR THIS VERY NICE INTERVIEW.

THE EDITORIAL TEAM