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Sport

Roland Collombin

«The more or less flat parts of the descent track I do not like. One is tempted there to reflect and to ask oneself questions.» More than a year ago, Roland Collombin sketched his own self-portrait in these simple words. That was when he had his first success at Kitzbuehl.

He, the skier by instinct («I don't know how I take these undulations and bumps»), the man who can detach himself more easily from his surroundings than any others, the friend who would never betray an old comrade, and

the great youngster intoxicated by speed, is the best skier of today. Certainly, his fall at the World Championships at St. Moritz has deprived him of a victory he had earned a long time ago. Shortly before and within a month, he had won with considerable superiority the four great «classic» races of the winter season: Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Morzine, Wengen and Kitzbuehl. Four masterpieces, four undisputed proofs of his great skill on four completely different tracks. Whenever it mattered to believe in victory and to defy danger, he was there, wher-

ever it mattered to have sure command over his skis and to calculate the bends accurately, even his opponents admired him. With his healthy, natural common sense, his candour, Roland Collombin discovers his rivals daily anew. Every day they, on their part, got to know him from yet another unaccustomed side. And soon his natural and extremely simple training methods won him the legendary reputation of a Jean-Claude Killy and of Karl Schranz said to be invincible.

Within two years, Roland Collombin won eight world cup victories,

which equals the record the other two top skiers had achieved by the end of their careers. Twice in succession he won the gold medal of the World Cup, meant for the best descent skier! Still somewhat controversial in Sapporo, he won a silver medal thanks to his cheerfulness coupled with an incredible talent to concentrate. He was 23 at the time, the good-looking young Valaisan, and resembled a «race-horse». This expression does not mean that his energy and inspiration disturb the general balance. Collombin was very nearly selected for the Olympic Games in Mexico as a cyclist — he had won a kilometer test sponsored by a popular Swiss paper! His whole bearing is calm, unruffled and amiable. His refusal to submit to an iron discipline — he does not like to give up an evening's outing and a glass of wine with his friends — has often brought him sharp criticism from his coaches and those who would like to see him as a stereotype model of a world champion. Anti-conformist, but incredibly devoted, Roland Collombin influences his colleague Philippe Roux, another Valaisan skier. As motorcycle and car addicts, the two represent the modern, uncomplicated skiing team which, thanks to the congenial «Romande» Lise-Marie Morerod, reached a new climax inspite of a few defeats at St. Moritz.

Roland Collombin was invested with nicknames like «superstar» and «dove» by his fans and raised to «national hero» by the simple citizens of Versegères near Verbier. He is the very opposite of Bernard Russi. The olympic champion who carefully analyses all the elements of a track, who studies various possibilities for a descent when out reconnoitering, and who avoids heavy meals, does not get any further. Collombin who admires Russi enormously, represents a totally different type.



(Keystone)

One has heard it said that Collombin was mentally deficient. What nonsense! He needs less time to confuse his slanderers than he needs for a descent over one kilometer. His brilliant victory at Morzine gave the lie to the accusation of his critics (experts) who maintain that he lacks technique. Roland Collombin is modest and of

unusual frankness, and he is probably the most famous Swiss sportsman, even though one knows that certain people did not exactly help him on. His popularity is justified by his unaffected joy of living, although this displeases those who want to make him an other top sportsmen into ascetics. This simple Valaisan who, thanks to his stay in England, is almost quadrilingual, has reached the top of his career. His laughter, expression of a happy disposition, confirms this. The victories waiting for him in the coming season are the finest in the world and will increase his popularity even further. But Roland Collombin looks upon these exciting events with a disinterested eye. For him, life does not consist only of such culminating points and world cup victories: ski sport and friends — they all belong to it! This wonderful attitude and almost avid joy of living are typical characteristics of this unassuming, congenial superstar in the world of skiing.

Bertrand Zimmermann

In full effort during the descent of the Lauberhorn, Wengen (Keystone)

