

**Zeitschrift:** Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad  
**Herausgeber:** Organisation of the Swiss Abroad  
**Band:** 38 (2011)  
**Heft:** 5

**Artikel:** Cuche - the star of Swiss downhill skiing  
**Autor:** Wey, Alain  
**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-907361>

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## Cuche – the star of Swiss downhill skiing

The king of downhill has started his 16th World Cup season. At the age of 37, Didier Cuche has never been so strong. The spearhead of the Swiss ski team will defend two crystal globes this winter. Will it be for the last time? Destiny will decide.

A profile by Alain Wey



Didier Cuche with the silver medal in Garmisch-Partenkirchen on 12 February 2011.

He has never let the side down. A warrior of the slopes, Didier Cuche has shown incredible resilience to overcome some major setbacks. His maxim is: "Pick yourself up and go again." At the start of his 16<sup>th</sup> season, the runner-up in the overall 2011 World Cup rankings is in the twilight years of his career. Last March, after lengthy consideration, he decided to continue for another year. At the age of 37, the Neuchâtel skier has won practically all the most prestigious titles. But above all he has equalled the achievements of one of his idols, the legendary Austrian Hermann Maier, by returning to the top after two serious injuries

(1997 and 2005). The oldest champion in World Cup history is like a good wine – he has improved with age and has achieved his best results after the age of 32.

### 60 podium finishes

Adored by the public, the man with the trademark end-over-end ski flip at the finishing line has shown unbending character over the years, refusing to be bowed by his critics. He is a man of great tenacity, prone to the odd falling-out and outburst. But it's thanks to him that the Swiss team is enjoying success once again. In 2006, Didier Cuche came back from surgery on

*"A great champion is emerging in him. His character has shown one vital thing – to be successful you must have desire."* Lara Gut

torn cruciate ligaments in his right knee and finished third in the overall rankings in the following season. The skier from Les Bugnenets has since achieved many podium finishes, 60 in all to date, including 17 victories. When he won the legendary Kitzbühel downhill (Austria) for the fourth time, he equalled the record of the Austrian Franz Klammer, further enhancing his status as a skiing legend. He clearly has some regrets about Olympic medals and he has yet to finish top of the overall rankings, but the speed king's exploits are not over yet.

### Adrenaline rushes and what else?

What is he going to do after skiing? He is going to put his incredible drive to good use and is already looking towards the next chapter in his life. "I am already planning my post-skiing career with my brother and another person. We have contacts with sponsors and things are already in motion", he revealed in March. He enjoyed his best season in 2011. What does he have in store for us this winter? Victories, podium finishes and adrenaline rushes – what else? There are also those last remaining challenges. Used to finishing in second place on several descents on the circuit, he will seek to finally emerge victorious in classic races such as Wengen, Val Gardena (Italy), Beaver Creek (USA) and Bormio (Italy). Will this definitely be his final season? In March he mused philosophically: "I had great difficulty in deciding to continue for another year. We'll see what happens next spring."

### OUTSTANDING LIST OF HONOURS

**Overall Ski World Cup rankings.** 3<sup>rd</sup> in 2002, 5<sup>th</sup> in 2003, 3<sup>rd</sup> in 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010, 2<sup>nd</sup> in 2011.

**Crystal globes.** Four in downhill (2007, 2008, 2010 and 2011) – only Austrian Franz Klammer has won more with five globes between 1975 and 1983. One in super-G (2011) and one in giant slalom (2009).

**World Championships.** Bronze in the giant slalom in Are (Sweden) in 2007, gold in the super-G and silver in the downhill at Val d'Isère (France) in 2009 and silver in Garmisch-Partenkirchen (Germany) in 2011.

**Olympic Games.** Silver in Nagano (Japan) in 1998.