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metres – because of her height (1.83m) and her strength,” explains her coach. As such, in the finals of the World Championship in Doha in 2019, where Sprunger beat the Swiss 400 metres hurdles record, only two athletes out of eight completed the course in 14 strides, with the others completing 15 strides between the ten hurdles.

A further difficulty with this technique is the change in the number of strides for passing over the hurdles, which are spaced 35 metres apart. In Oslo, the Swiss champion scrupulously followed a programme that had been prepared down to the very last metre: 21 strides at maximum speed for 45 metres, twice 13 strides between the first two hurdles, then twice 14 strides and then twice 15 strides. These adaptations cost the athlete a lot of energy. For all of these reasons, she will not necessarily be using the technique in future competitions, “but she will continue to work on it” states Meuwly.

The historic 13 strides were achieved at a time where Lea Sprunger was in peak form. Her sporting career will effectively come to an end at the close of the 2021 season. “For three years, her body and her mind have been aligned and top results have kept coming. It is the peak of a long journey, which she began at the age of ten,” explains her trainer. What is the next goal for this athlete from the canton of Vaud, brought up by two Swiss-German parents? “A medal at international level,” replies Sprunger, who is now preparing for the next World Athletics Indoor Championships, which will take place in Nanjing (China) in March.

One of Switzerland's most successful track-and-field athletes, Lea Sprunger – pictured here at the 2019 World Athletics Championships in Doha. Photo: Keystone

Switzerland in figures

Noisy neighbours, long hiking trails, dog waste bins

49

Switzerland is a nation of tenants – and noisy neighbours. Some 49 per cent of the country's apartment dwellers admit that they get irritated by the racket next door (Homegate survey, 2020). Use of the shared laundry room is the second most common, but more classically Swiss, source of conflict (18 per cent) – as immortalised in the novel “Der Waschküchenschlüssel” (The laundry room key); Hugo Loetscher, 1998, Diogenes Verlag.

65000

Annoyed by the neighbours? Go hiking. More and more people have been discovering the delights of Switzerland's 65,000-kilometre hiking trail network this year. If the country's entire population were spread out evenly along all these trails in single file, everyone would remain socially distanced seven metres apart.

39600000

The Swiss tourist board Switzerland Tourism reported record figures for the month of July: 39.6 million overnight stays. Too good to be true? Unfortunately, yes: these are the figures for July 2019. Thanks to COVID-19, the current holiday season may break the wrong sort of records.

99

Another coronavirus statistic: 99 per cent of Swiss SMEs and start-ups have been negatively affected by the pandemic, according to the Berne University of Applied Sciences. Eleven per cent say that COVID-19 threatens their very existence.

40 000

Finally, some doggy-related business. Robidog – the Swiss-produced dog waste disposal system featuring an in-built waste bag dispenser – was patented in 1981. Around 40,000 of these contraptions can be found all around Switzerland. However, the dog waste bin has become a victim of its own success: its numbers are shrinking, because dog owners have become more conscientious in picking up and disposing of their pooch's mess.