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ICE HOCKEY VISIONARY IN THE MEN'S WORLD – SPORT



Goalkeeper with the men, then broken neck, now head of sports at SC Bern at 31: the unusual career of Florence Schelling leads her to the top of the Swiss series championship.

Florence Schelling has never seen what is written about them overseas. There is no time for reading. Toronto Star, Washington Post and Boston Herald have reported extensively on their appointment as sports director at SC Bern. The trade magazine The Hockey News hopes that their commitment will open the gates for the entry of additional managers in sports, not just in ice hockey: "Those in charge of the boardrooms should now consider more women as decision-makers for the big jobs."

An echo was waiting for her, says Florence Schelling, she was the first woman in such a role, "and in these weeks sports are no longer relevant." But she would never have thought that it would be so extreme, even if her vocation has sport-historical dimensions. Few women before her managed to get into the operational business of men's ice hockey, such as the North American player legends Hayley Wickenheiser, 41, and Cammi Granato, 49. Six days before Schelling's appointment in Switzerland, Jenny Silfverstrand, 47, became CEO of the Swedish company

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League promoted; before that she worked for Djurgarden Stockholm for eight years. But everyone is significantly older than the 31-year-old from Zurich and works in countries where women's ice hockey is of far greater social importance.

In Switzerland, talented girls still have to move abroad today so as not to lose all hope. Florence Schelling also learned that. She played in the United States, Canada and Sweden, learned languages and made contacts, and also advanced her business studies, which she completed in 2018 with a master's degree in Sweden. "All of this will help me now," she says. She had always been goal-oriented, capable of learning and willing to learn: "And if I do something, I do it with 100 percent commitment. Or something more."

When the request from those responsible for SC Bern reached her, she knew immediately that she wanted to take on the challenge: "When I see what I bring with me, I thought: Why not?" A solo show is not planned, however: Christian Marcolli, an expert on the optimization of top performance, who has already worked with Roger Federer, will advise her. She also hopes to have a lively exchange with other sports managers because she wants to "keep developing", as she says.

Florence Schelling comes from a sports family, and because she has two brothers, she learned to assert herself early on as a child. "I've been in the men's world since I was four," she said once. "When I said I wanted to play ice hockey, I was told that it was a sport for boys." Her two brothers put the little sister in the gate because they needed a goalie. And, as it turned out, that was a fraternal decision of unimagined vision. At the age of 13 she was appointed to the national junior team for the first time, then for years she gave Swiss ice hockey a face and a voice: her brilliant career spanned eleven world championships, four Olympic games, 190 international matches. The undisputed highlight is the bronze medal at the Sochi Winter Games, which made it possible for her to go it alone. She was considered the world's best goalkeeper and "Miss 60 percent".

In addition to the national team, she played for the EHC Bülach in the first division of men. "She was young, aspiring and ambitious, she wanted to take the step into men's ice hockey," says her then coach Thierry Paterlini. "I was convinced that she could handle it." Florence Schelling explicitly waived special treatment in the men's team – and with the exception of her own shower cubicle, she didn't get it either. In 2014, two days after the bronze medal game from Sochi to the playoff kick-off, she once again guarded the goal of the Bülach men as if nothing had happened – and although her knee pads had not arrived from Russia in time. She absolutely wanted to play and picked up a replacement pair, Paterlini recalls.

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After retiring from ice, she initially trained the U-18 juniors in Switzerland. Now, less than two years after the end of her active career, she directs the sporting concerns of Europe's ice hockey club with the highest number of spectators and has to guide the 16-time Swiss champion through the corona virus break after the broken season. "Crazy!" She says.

How crazy their mission actually is, especially at this point in time, is made clear by their personal stroke of fate. In February 2019, Schelling's life was literally turned upside down: she suffered a broken neck in a serious skiing accident in Davos, and permanent damage was impending. She had to stay in bed for months and got to know herself better. "I came down from 200 to 0 and had to deal intensively with myself." She thought about her future and realized: "I want to stay in sports. And a management position in sports."

At some point Florence Schelling wants to write a biography. No matter where the career path at SC Bern leads, one thing is already clear: your story has bestseller potential.