

Lara Gut-Behrami, good bye champion !

A thrilling chapter of women alpine ski racing closed in the middle of this summer when Swiss ski star Lara Gut-Behrami announced with a smile her decision to step down from the World Cup tour nearly twenty years after her debut on the circuit, back in December 2007 in Lienz, Austria at the tender age of 16. It was the first step of an amazing career crowned by several Olympic and FIS Gold medals and two overall crystal globe. She will be missed by her fans and the international ski community!

"I consider myself very lucky to be able to make this choice. After nearly twenty years of elite-level sport—despite the falls and injuries—I suffer from no chronic pain. And I have no desire to," a very relaxed Lara explained in Italian at the Swiss TV.

She had been planning to step down at the end of last season with the goal to claim another Olympic medal in February at Cortina d'Ampezzo, her favorite stop on the circuit - five years after grabbing there her first FIS gold medals!

Her promising 3rd place on the Rettenbacher glacier above Soelden in October 2025 was a strong boost for her confidence and determination... Unfortunately, a few weeks later while training Super-G at Copper Mountain, Colorado, she once more seriously injured herself at her left knee during a crash, forcing her to undergo surgery and a long reeducation instead of fighting for hundredths of second and victories.

Speculations about a possible comeback and a more glorious end of her great career regularly popped out during the season and the springtime - yet Lara took her time to make up her mind. She was not worried at all about her future and didn't feel any pressure! Married since July 2018 to Valon Behrami, a very successful Swiss football player, who worked afterwards as an assistant-trainer in an English Club, Lara had soon discovered with him that her life was no longer only about winning races. At the start of the following 2018/19 season, she openly spoke about the changes in her attitude also affected by her painful knee injury caused by her crash while training slalom during the 2017 FIS Worlds at St. Moritz.

"I learned a lot during my reeducation and then getting married," she explained afterwards to reporters at Lake Louise, Canada. "This injury may have turned out to be a chance for me to reflect a lot about myself and my goals in life," she added. "Being married and living with my husband at Udine was also an important step to mature and to develop myself. Now happiness is no longer only depending on winning races, but also to be able to fully enjoy what I'm doing on and off the slopes," Lara also said in November 2018. Her superb string of great victories in the following years fully confirmed that her new mental approach had helped to reach a higher level on snow. Within four winters, she became the skier to beat in major events!

Yet, at the end of last spring, Lara finally felt fully ready to start a new life and reflected on creating one day her own family with Valon. "I knew the time has come, the time to stop stubbornly pushing my limits at all costs, and to stop subjecting my body to such grueling demands and strain," she mentioned in July during her excellent interview on the regional TV station. "I have had the good fortune and the honor of experiencing a very long and intense career, of expressing my dreams and aspirations through my skiing, and of sharing this journey with extraordinary people.

A tough and stubborn fighter!

Lara Gut-Behrami will not only be remembered for her triumphs but also how she could achieve such an impressive career. The 35 year-old-champion from Ticino, in the southern Italian speaking part of Switzerland, fought hard with herself and sometimes her environment to celebrate nearly fifty wins on the circuit, including at Kronplatz-San Vigilio, in South Tyrol, where she beat in January 2024 by over a full second the rest of the field including established experts such as Alice Robinson, NZ, and 2022 Sweden's Olympic champion Sara Hector who tied for 2nd place.

Strongly supported by her family since her younger years – her dad Pauli was her technical mentor till the end of her career – Lara was not only remarkable for her immaculate technique which allowed her to excel in downhill, Super-G and giant slalom, but also for her strong mindset and her willpower which pushed her towards a stunning total of 101 World Cup podiums celebrated in over twenty resorts over the world, including the most prestigious “Ski Classics”! Her fans will always remember her first podium reached in December 2018 at St. Moritz, finishing 3rd in her very first World Cup downhill despite her crash a few meters prior to the finish line.

In her earlier years on the tour, Lara wasn't only gutsy on the racing slopes but also sometimes ruthless when openly expressing her opinion on her life or on the way the Swiss Team was training or racing. She often preferred to prepare the seasons away from her teammates. In December 2009, the management of the Swiss Ski Association suspended her for a couple of races in Austria because she openly criticized her head coach who used to be her former personal trainer. She was also blamed for often wearing her own brand of clothes and missing official training camps.

Gut-Behrami was not shy to express her opinion to the media and even avoided to talk to some of its members who criticized her sometimes harshly for her behavior! Fortunately, this image of being considered as a brad person vanished after a while after finally establishing herself as a true champion and a team player. The public soon started to understand and accept her drive and her uncompromised personality so that she became quite popular after clinching her first overall World Cup globe in March 2016.

Leaders of Swiss Ski or reporters also began to better appreciate her manners after a while. She received her great credit for her contributions to women's ski racing in general and the Swiss Team in particular, and her shiny charisma. "She challenged all of us when sharing her straight opinion, she was not easy to handle, but she also fascinated and impressed us by her talent and her determination to excel at the highest possible level," wrote recently a reporter from an important newspaper from Zürich.

For sure, Lara is looking forward for more freedom and privacy in her next future! Good for her...

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"For me, skiing is something magical and natural. Forcing my body and mind to endure and manage pain would tarnish the image I hold within me of everything I have experienced with such passion. That feeling of absolute freedom on the snow has never left me. It was there when I was a child, it stayed with me throughout my athletic career, and it will continue to be a part of my life."

"The list of memories is endless. Only now do I fully appreciate and savor them. For years, I worked tirelessly with a single goal: to excel and to win. Today, I feel only profound happiness, and I am moved when I reflect on how beautiful it all was."

"I believe there is a time for everything in life. Today, I know the time has come for me to stop pinning on a race bib and lining up at the start. I look forward to continuing to ski. And I am happy with that."