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Bernhard Russi & Matthias Hüppi



They were a well-oiled team, but also a tight-knit unit. Matthias Hüppi and Bernhard Russi spent decades travelling together from one ski resort to the next. They shared hotels, cars and flights. They ate breakfast together and spent more time with one another than some married couples. By the end the sports presenter Matthias Hüppi and the high-profile expert Bernhard Russi had forged a deep friendship.

When the pair commentated on ski racing on Swiss television, they demonstrated great professionalism but also tremendous respect for one another. Hüppi had no issue with the fact that Russi was still a bit more of an expert than he was. When it came to the technical details, he gladly handed over to the former skiing ace and Olympic champion. Conversely, it was clearly Hüppi who guided the programme and steered the discussion.

Some people said they in fact were like an old married couple. But Hüppi and Russi quarrelled far too little for that, including off-air apparently. They did not interrupt and rarely contradicted one another. Despite all the emotion, they appeared composed, pleasant-natured and moderate – very Swiss. A touch more punch in the discussion occasionally would probably not have hurt.

However, the dream team made their final appearance in February. After 31 years Matthias Hüppi and Bernhard Russi provided commentary together for the last time at the home Ski World Championships in St. Moritz. An era came to an end. However, the two darlings of TV will still appear individually for a little while longer. Matthias Hüppi, who is now 58 years old, will present “Sportpanorama” and certain live events. Bernhard Russi, who is eleven years older, will continue to contribute as a TV expert at major events.

MARKO LEHTINEN

Fall in the number of asylum applications

A total of 27,207 people applied for asylum in Switzerland in 2016. That is almost a third less or 12,316 fewer applications than in the previous year. The State Secretariat for Migration is estimating an even lower figure for this year. The decline is primarily attributable to the closure of the Balkans route in March 2016. By comparison, the number of applications in Europe overall remained steady last year at 1.3 million. This also means that the proportion accounted for by Switzerland of all applications made in Europe has also fallen. While the Swiss share stood at 8.2 % in 2012, it fell to around 2 % last year.

Extract from the criminal records database for Ticino

The National Council's Political Institutions Committee (PIC) has approved a cantonal initiative from the canton of Ticino. This states that the authorities should be able to systematically request an extract from the criminal records database, without justification, from EU citizens applying for a residence or cross-border commuter permit in Switzerland. The canton of Ticino has been using this procedure for two years and has now sought legitimacy for it. The PIC voted narrowly in favour by 13 to 11. Its Council of States sister committee will now draw up a draft bill.

Free trade after Brexit

Johann Schneider-Ammann, Minister for Economic Affairs, wants to conclude a free trade agreement with the UK as soon as possible after Brexit. In an interview with “Sonntagsblick”, Schneider-Ammann said that not a day should go by without a new agreement entering into force after the UK's departure from the EU. The Federal Councillor indicated that Liam Fox, the UK's Secretary of State for International Trade, had assured him at the WEF in Davos that he was extremely keen on an agreement with Switzerland.

Literature prize for Charles Linsmayer

Charles Linsmayer, a journalist and literary scholar from Zurich, has received a “special award for promoting literature” at the 2017 Swiss Literature Awards. This Federal Office of Culture prize endowed with 40,000 Swiss francs acknowledges the efforts of a person or institution in promoting literature in Switzerland. The award was presented for the third time. Linsmayer also writes a regular literature series for “Swiss Review”.