

## Martina Sáblíková

Martina Sáblíková (1987) is a speedskater and cyclist from the Czech Republic. She is a three-time winner of the World Championships allround, and holds the world record for the 5000 meters. She won five medals in the Winter Olympics (three gold, one silver and one bronze). On the bike she excels in time trialling. She has competed in the World Championships every year since 2011, with a 9th place on the World Championships in Valkenburg (2012) as highest classification. This year she qualified for the 2016 Summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, with her 12th place during the Worlds in Richmond. She will be the second Czech athlete to have competed in both Summer as Winter Olympics.



# Sáblíková

## winter queen on the road to Rio

BY JESSICA MERKENS

Martina Sáblíková, the 27-year old icon of long track speed skating from the Czech Republic, is pretty unknown in the world of cycling. She already has five Olympic medals in her trophy case, won at the Winter Olympics of 2010 and 2014. Next year she will make her debut on the time trial in the Rio de Janeiro Summer Olympics. Winning in both Summer and Winter Olympic Games is something only a few athletes have done in the past, such as Canadian Clara Hughes. She won a stunning total of six Olympic medals (two in cycling, four in speed skating) during her career as an athlete, which ended at the London Olympics in 2012 where she placed a respectable fifth in the time-trial at age 40. No wonder Hughes is a prominent role model for Sáblíková.

“Clara saw me racing at my very first World Championship time trial back in 2011 in Denmark, the year before the London Olympics. She was 5th, I ended in 28th place. She said, ‘You should go for the Summer Olympics too!’ Back then I was so new and inexperienced, cycling in the Summer Olympics was something I didn’t even dare to dream about. I mainly raced on a National level, National Championships, that kind of thing. But I kept getting better and better! My coach said, ‘Maybe we should just give it a shot.’ And that’s when we started planning and preparing for Rio 2016. So I was ecstatic with my 12th place and qualification for the Olympics at the Worlds in Richmond this year. Especially because it wasn’t an ideal course for me, 30 kilometers long and technical riding.” The goal was simple: qualifying for the Olympics. “The fact that I made that happen is unbelievable! To be part of both Winter and Summer Olympics, that is something only a few people experience.” Interestingly, Sáblíková will not be the first Czech athlete to have accomplished

this. Kateřina Neumannová was a Summer and Winter Olympian, having raced in cross country skiing and mountain biking. She is (for now!) the most successful Czech athlete, having won six Olympic medals in her career.

### Speedskating

There is little room for down-time in Sáblíková’s busy schedule. A meagre one week of rest was all that the slender Czech had after the World Championships in September, after that her focus was back on the upcoming speed skating season. “My main focus is on the current speed skating season. That works pretty well for cycling as well, since in winter time there’s not much opportunity to bike outside anyway.” Sáblíková plans to race as many of the international races as possible. That includes the World Single Distance Championships in February, and the World Allround Championships in March. “We’ll see how that goes,” she continues. “I’m currently in really good shape and I hope I can hold on to that for the upcoming races. In March, my

focus will shift to cycling. Then we’ll focus completely on Rio, with specific training sessions for the time trial.” Sáblíková is used to winning on the ice, but cycling, that’s a whole new chapter in her athletic career. When talking about her expectations for Rio, the experienced athlete transforms into an enthusiastic hopeful. “I aim for the top ten, but frankly I have no idea what to expect of myself. I’ve been doing speed skating for such a long time, I can predict pretty well how I will ride and what I can achieve. But cycling is a whole new world for me,” she says.

### Winter Training

Sáblíková proves that you can excel both on ice as on the bike. For speed skaters, cycling is a cornerstone in preparing for racing season. Alternatively, skating can be a great way to prepare for cycling too. It’s not a coincidence that many professional female cyclists skate in winter time to work on their fitness. However, there’s only a handful of athletes that compete on top level in both disciplines.

It's crucial to stay active and train during the winter if you want to be comfortable on your bike and even be successful in summertime. A stationary bike is often used for cross-training, but can be mind-numbing if it encompasses your whole training schedule! As an alternative, many cyclists are active on the cross bike or mountain bike. Speed skating as cross-training is less common, but can be a perfect addition to your training schedule, to get you through those dark winter days! Jolanda Spruit, exercise physiologist, trainer and former speed skater/elite cyclist can tell us more about this.

"The essence of cross-training is doing something else than your primary sport," she tells us. "Variety is the spice of life, and that applies to training as well! By doing something else every once in a while, you can fulfill an intense training schedule and stay fit. A stimulus that might be less sport-specific (that's where you'll mostly give in), but that stimulates your mind and body will get you further than always solely doing sport specific training sessions. Combining speed skating with cycling is ideal from that point of view, because the muscles you use are similar while you're still doing two completely different types of sport. A muscle will stay strong if you regularly command it to get active. By skating in wintertime, you command those muscles, which will keeps the underlying physiological processes active as well, such as oxygen circulation and supply. A big difference between the two sports is that with speed skating you carry your own weight, while in cycling the sitting position on the bike will give relief. That's why cycling is often experienced as a 'lighter' form of exercise, and easier to keep your heart rate in check. Only a few people are gifted enough to do multiple sports on high level, but athletes such as Hughes and Šáblíková prove that it is definitely possible.

### Diversity

When you lose your joy for the sport that you're practicing, no type of training will be beneficial. That's the challenge for the trainer, to keep it fun. That means sometimes you have to do things that are less sport-specific. Enjoyment and diversity in training sessions

are really important to be able to follow and complete a training schedule. When I started skating as a kid, I did dryland sessions where we had to roll off dikes. That wasn't in any way related to skating of course, but I still remember those training sessions vividly and loved it as a kid! We probably did some speed skate hops somewhere too, I can't recall. In that sense, I believe that for your body, but also your mind, variety is the key. Otherwise you just can't endure a lot of training. In addition, when your training is too monotonous, you risk overloading yourself. Generally speaking, this is the process of exhausting 'something'. It could be either your muscles or tendons, but also one of your energy systems (aerobic or anaerobic). That's why it is so important to alternate between different energy systems in your training schedule. If you incorporate different types of movement, such as running, cycling or skating, you minimize the chance of training too monotonous and as a consequence overloading yourself somewhere. That's why as a trainer, you try to alternate as much as possible between different types of training and energy systems. In the end, this diversity will enable you to train in large volumes, without exhausting one single system.

### Competing in summer and winter

To enroll in a full competing schedule in both in summer as in winter is a whole other story. I believe a body can cope with that amount of racing for maybe a couple of years, but not more. Some big talents can accomplish this. Marianne Vos was able to compete in the top of both cycling and cyclocross, but you see that even a great talent as Marianne experienced a setback last summer. I think it is possible to combine two racing seasons, for a while. But you definitely need a big bucket of talent for it! Other riders are much more selective in which races they race, and which ones to skip. When you want to race competitively in both summer as in winter time, it's really important to be smart about your energy. Skating and cycling are definitely complementary. The key is to time your training sessions and races well, to make sure you don't become overextended or over-trained. A big pitfall for many athle-

tes is insufficient amounts of rest. They believe 'training will make me better'. Of course, training is a prerequisite to improve, but in the end rest will actually make you better. Without rest, training like a Spartan will have make no sense. And that's definitely true for athletes who want to combine two types of sports! When you dare to take rest at the right moments, I really believe you can be successful in multiple sports. In an athlete's multiple year plan, you're constantly busy making steps, especially in the periods outside competition. You can choose to shift your focus to your second sport (like cycling or skating) for a season, but it will have consequences for growing in your other sport."

Are you thinking about trying a new, second sport (like speed skating) then the golden rule is to look at it as something extra. Look at it as something that will spice up your weekly training routine. When you want to use skating as cross-training for cycling, you should still continue your cycling sessions in winter time. Make skating a fun game, a new challenge, something fun, while simultaneously doing something that contributes to cycling. It's good to have a new stimulus for your body and mind. And of course a great alternative for rainy days!

That new challenge is something Šáblíková definitely found in cycling. "I have no idea how it will go in Rio, I'm mostly just super stoked." She looks up to cycling champions. "Just to be able to see those heroes ride, like Marianne Vos or Tony Martin. I have a lot of respect for these cyclists. I just can't wait to experience all of it!" she says. For now, speed skating will be her main priority, but a switch to cycling in the future is something she doesn't rule out. "Speed skating has just brought me so much in life. But cycling is a whole new challenge, and therefore also really special for me. It's just so exciting to start exploring your abilities in a new sport again, and try to become the best you can be. And it's something new besides going left after every 100 meters, like in speed skating, haha! When I'm on my bike I'm outside, in nature, with so much to see. There's hills to conquer, and warm weather. Yes, cycling gives me so much energy. There's new life running through my veins!" **i**



“ I have no idea what to expect of myself ”