Is it tough to be an elite athlete today?
I think it has never been an easy job being an elite athlete. It always has – and always will - require a lot of work and sacrifice, but I guess nowadays, with all the new technology and knowledge, there is a lot to assist athletes to reach their full (physical and mental) potential.

With the athletic schedule the way it is, do you ever get any downtime?
After each major championship I take some time to go on vacation and empty my mind. I think it is super important to recharge the batteries and not to think about sport for a few weeks at least. A
sports career is short. Every year there is some new goal to reach so we tend to always focus on what is coming next - but everybody needs to have some time for themselves once in a while. Also, sometimes during the season, I try to get away from training for a few weekends to relax a bit.

Who makes up your medical team?
I see a physio several times a week - depending on how my body feels. I also work with a nutritionist for in- and out-of-competition feeding and body evolution over the years. I see a doctor for general health and another one if I have problems related to athletic injuries. I also see an osteopath regularly.

My goal is always to get better and be the best I could be.
Who makes decisions around your health?
Me – together with the medical team.

How important is your coach is for you?
My coach is, of course, a very important person in my career. I’ve been training with him for 10 years and I think we’re both learnt a lot working together over the years.

Do you follow any injuries prevention program?
I do more and more injury prevention as I get older. I’m still young but I can feel that my body is, of course, not recovering like it used to when I was 18 for example. So this is indeed something I pay more intention to than before.

What advice you can give to a team doctor?
To really talk with the athletes to know what eventual struggles they have before a championship so you can adapt any follow-up. It is, of course, easier to have a more personal approach when you have a small delegation like Belgium than with very big teams.

Do you think doctors should have a more performance focused approach to dealing with high level athletes?
What I expect from my medical team is to keep/get me healthy but, of course, performance is something that they must take into consideration when you work with all elite athletes. My coach is the one in charge of the performance - but if I have a physical problem, for example, I want to know how best I can fix it and also the best way to fix it to allow me to come back strong and perform at my best.
How do you balance high level sporting obligations and university study?

It takes a lot of organisation. I have to plan things in the most effective way possible in order not to lose what little time I have left. It also takes a lot of discipline to go through very long days but keep doing both athletics and university at 100% everyday. 6 years at university is a very long and tiring course – it takes a lot of energy to do both at the same time but it has always been my desire to get a degree.

Do you have support and understanding at University?

My university actually has a great program for student-athletes. It allows us to split years to have time to train on the side. My teachers are also very understanding and I can change my exams date if I have a training camp or competition at the same time.

What is your advice to young people who would like to become Champions?

To be patient and resilient – nothing comes quickly or easily. High level sport is a long journey so you have to learn to enjoy the process with all its ups and downs as well.

World Championship in Doha – how do you see it?

It has been a tough year for me but I feel great. Doha has been my main goal since the beginning of the season and I have worked very hard to be back and perform here.

I aim for a high score and will do my best to keep my title!