

Jürgen Klinsmann

Taking center stage as a coach instead of a player

Interview by Andy Roxburgh, UEFA Technical Director

To say that Jürgen Klinsmann was a good player is an understatement. He was extremely gifted, and his playing record proves it: FIFA World Champion (1990), European Champion (1996), Olympic bronze medalist (1988), twice UEFA Cup Champion (1991 with Internazionale and 1996 with Bayern München), 108 caps and 47 goals for Germany. There is more: Footballer of the Year in Germany (1988 and 1994), Footballer of the Year in England (1995), European Footballer of the Year Runner-up (1995) and goals galore in the top leagues of Germany, Italy, France and England. What a player, what an image! Inevitably, Klinsmann, the great communicator, went through a metamorphosis from elegant player to hungry coach (not to mention shrewd businessman). As leader of the German National Team at the 2006 FIFA World Cup, he tried to satisfy the aspirations of his countrymen and capture football's ultimate prize. Despite the heavy burden, he carries his responsibilities with impressive dignity, focus and style. Named the coach of Bayern Munich in July 2008, he was released from that position on April 27, 2009. This interview by UEFA Technical Director Andy Roxburgh was conducted prior to the 2006 World Cup.

When you were a player, were you already thinking about a coaching career?

No, not at all. As a player you focus on giving your best for the team and trying to be the best you can be. In England, where they sometimes go for the player/manager solution, it was an option, but this does not happen anywhere else, and I never really thought about becoming a coach or manager. There are some players who already show the characteristics for becoming a coach when they are playing or training, but I was not one of them.

For you, what are the biggest differences between coaching and playing?

As a coach, you realize that your influence on the game is minimal once the action begins. The emphasis as a coach has to be preparation and communication with the players, but once the game starts, it becomes mainly a game for players. From the technical area you can have an influence through tactical moves or substitutions, but you really have to let go a little once the action starts. As a player, you can take responsibility because you have the power to make things happen. As a coach, you have fewer possibilities to make an impact once the game is in progress.

What has changed around the national team since you were a player?

Things are always changing. For example, the media attention now is far greater than it was 10 or 15 years ago. The professional environment has changed and in many ways has improved. Different aspects have grown: the professionalism of scouting, the analysis systems and the medical side, which continues to reach new levels of expertise. You always are looking for ways to make a difference. The new generation of players has grown up in a different environment from my day. The work has become more individual, whereas in my day everything was team-oriented. Now we have small groups or we work with individual players. It

is a fascinating evolution, and you try to do the best you can for every single player. Money, of course, has had an effect – it is not easy for young players to deal with large amounts of money, but that has always been the case. It is clear that the education of players will become even more important in the future. You need to develop people, not just football players. You need to help the players to develop their abilities and make them better players and you must offer them assistance to help them become stronger personalities. Players will become more conscious about their careers – they will plan their careers better and will invest in their own development, which was not the case before. In U.S. sport, the athletes take part in preparation programs to make sure they are ready for the preseason training with their teams. Areas like sports science and psychology have become more significant in recent years. But we must remember that it is in the games and the tournaments that your work will be measured and the players will be judged.

How would you describe your style as a manager/coach?

I see myself as the leader of a team – I am a team player. I have a big staff who all give me input on matters. Of course, I have to make the final decisions if we do not have an agreement. So far, we have always had a solution before a decision is made, and that makes me feel very comfortable. I was used to making my own decisions as a player – I did not have an agent and I negotiated my own contracts. There will be times when it will be difficult, especially when you need to say no to people. I can make the difficult decisions even though it is not pleasant. I deal with everyone on a personal basis when I am communicating my decisions.

Who have been the biggest influences on you as a player and as a coach?

I was very lucky. For almost 18 years as a professional player, I worked with people like Franz Beckenbauer and many other successful coaches. I also worked with Otto Rehhagel, Giovanni Trapattoni, Ossie Ardiles, César Luis Menotti, Arsène Wenger – an amazing number of high-profile coaches. And I picked up something from them all. I learned a lot from Arie Haan during my time in Stuttgart, and with Arsène Wenger at Monaco, such as the way to handle people and to be respectful because the person comes first. I am very thankful for the opportunities I have had. Each coach has had his own style and I learned from them that it is much more than just thinking about the result at the end of the week.

If I think back to my time in the national team, I was impressed by Franz Beckenbauer's easy way of handling things and how he was always positive. Above all, he was incredibly charismatic. Bertie Vogts was such a detailed



NSCAA photo by Perry McIntyre Jr.

worker – he was extremely prepared for every training session. Arte Haan was very influential in my early years, but all the others gave me something. The way Arsène Wenger developed players was very impressive – at the time in Monaco, I often wondered why he did certain things, but then later I would see the positive results of his work with particular players.

What are the main difficulties you have faced since becoming Germany's national coach?

First, it was important to analyze the problems I was facing. Then, how to build the "team behind the team." Deciding who was responsible for what. You need to put a group of people together that you feel comfortable with and who are extremely competent in their roles. I had to learn quickly to deal with the players' side and also the environment I was facing. Certain questions took priority. For example: What type of football would we like to play with the German national team? What will we stand for? What is our identity? I had to learn fast to understand the various mentalities I faced in my new role. The media were critical and curious – my age was a big factor, as was the residence issue with my commitment to commute between the United States and Germany. Although the media would like to have you available 24/7, not being there actually helps me focus on our priorities. I don't get caught up in the day-to-day domestic issues. The Confederations Cup helped us a lot – it was a big step. The people saw that we were doing a good job and working very hard, and it has developed from there.

What are your priorities when preparing the German National Team?

My priority is to get the team working together to produce the right chemistry in the squad. To make sure that the fitness is right and that our young players have the confidence to perform. It also is important to keep the environment around the team as relaxed as possible. This is very important especially as we are playing a World Cup in our own country and the pressure, especially through the media, might get too high. I want all of us to feel relaxed, but very focused. Our goal is to win the World Cup, and we have declared that early so that the players learn to deal with that expectation. When top countries like England or Italy play a tournament in their own country, people dream about winning it. In Germany, the expectations are there, and the players must handle that.

In your view, which teams will start out as favorites for the 2006 World Cup in Germany? Any surprises?

Based on our experience of the Confederations Cup, we see that Brazil and Argentina are ahead in terms of quality and how to deal with certain moments in the game. Other big teams – like England, France, and Italy – are strong and capable of making a difference. We believe that Ukraine could be a surprise because Oleg Blokhin has developed them very well over recent years. Pre-tournament, it looks like Brazil and Argentina are up to the challenge, but we will see.

What do you think about the UEFA Champions League?

The UEFA Champions League sets the tone for football because you have the best players in the world performing in the competition and they put their stamp on it. Top coaches also are there, and they influence how the game is developed. They lead the trends because they are working at it every day. If you look at the big teams there, they are international teams put together from many different countries. The UEFA Champions League coaches/players definitely lead the way.

How do you handle pressure from the media?

I have no problem with pressure. Everybody talks about it,

but it is not a physical thing and therefore does not create a problem for me. As a player, the higher the expectations, the more I liked it; the bigger the game, the more I liked it. Maybe that is why I always pushed myself in big tournaments. In every tournament, I was right there, at the right time, because I felt those special moments had to be grabbed. Even as a national coach, I accept the challenge and the responsibility. Being in control, you can set the limits and decide how much you do yourself, for example with the media. It is not easy for the media today. Their focus is on selling and not just information. We have to find our way to deal with it. For sure, we will not change it. But, as I said, I have no trouble dealing with the pressure. I am used to it.

Tactically, what do you expect the trends to be during the World Cup?

As with the UEFA Champions League, the World Cup will emphasize compact play, less and less space, team efficiency. Even with teams well prepared, including physically, it often will be down to the mental aspect and who can make a difference. A set play, a counter, an individual effort can be decisive. The transition becomes more important throughout the game, and fitness is vital. Players must be alert and in peak physical condition. Even in training, this awareness must be developed.

To what extent do you believe in using technology, psychologists, and fitness specialists as aids for your team's preparation?

I think we will go in this direction more and more because it is not possible for a coach to be an expert in all these areas. You need to have a big staff that can filter information and pass it down to you. You learn a lot from these experts. I profit a great deal from their input. In the past, the coach did everything – now you manage a big staff and a team. You could say that you are the manager of two teams. I try to communicate both directly to the players and to them through my staff. If I feel that certain things are better relayed by a third party, then I do it that way.

How do you deal with the stress of the job?

I am a workout fanatic. I train for an hour-and-a-half every day and I play for a local amateur team. I swim, cycle, run, etc. I even went running in Montreux on the morning of the EURO 2008 draw in January. If you come up with a veterans' World Cup, I could maybe make a comeback as a player!

You were a great striker. To what extent has that background influenced your philosophy as a coach?

It definitely has had an influence on my coaching philosophy because I am definitely more attack-minded than I might have been. To make sure I was not on the wrong track, I asked the national team coaching staff and the players if they agreed with my view of playing attacking football, to put people under pressure, to be very physical, to be very dynamic and attack-orientated. We defined our style in discussions with the team. The key players, the leaders on the team, have a big influence on how we play, especially with so many youngsters on the squad. In my day, we were more playful, probably because we learned to play in the streets.

Today's young players are more focused – they are planners. They are more calculating in their attitude towards their performance and careers than we were.

What has been your best moment in football so far?

There are so many personal memories that you carry around with you. A special moment for me was in 1994 when we played in South Africa. As the captain of Germany, I introduced my teammates to Nelson Mandela, and this is something that I will never forget. It is all those moments that prove that football is about so much more than just a result. It goes so deep into the social and educational aspects of life. It helped me to develop as a young person. I learned languages, created a worldwide network of contacts. I would never have met my wife and lived in another continent if it had not been for football. I would never have had any of that without the game. Jürgen the player is now in the archives. It is my role as a coach that now takes center stage.



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