

“All of Germany is World Champion” (July 14, 2014)

Abstract

Excited sports reporters describe Germany's path to victory during the 2014 Soccer World Cup in Brazil. The “*Mannschaft*” played a sophisticated passing game to defeat a highly talented Argentinian side in the final, thus winning its fourth title overall.

Source

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Both teams were out on their feet. They had fought, gone into extra time, and then André Schürrle started one of his few good plays to the left. He left two opponents standing, smoothly centered to Mario Götze, who had just been subbed in and then chested the ball and volleyed in the goal with perfection. It was the shot of the evening, it was the German 1–0 in the World Cup final against Argentina, it was the goal that brought Germany their fourth World Cup title.

After 1954, 1974, and 1990, the most important trophy in world soccer again went to Germany, which many of those involved weren't quite able to fathom afterwards. "It's incredible," said the ever-capable goalkeeper Manuel Neuer. "We suffered some setbacks, all the injured players." Then he mentioned the Bender twins, who were already missing from the roster before the World Cup, and uttered the line of the evening: "They're world champions too, all of Germany is world champion now."

The fact that this was an historic event—Germany is the first European team to win the title in South America—made Sunday's title in Rio de Janeiro doubly precious. "What we managed to do today in 120 minutes was unbelievable," said captain Philipp Lahm. "Whether we have the best individual players doesn't matter. We are the best team."

Germany in the Final without Khedira

The road to this apt conclusion was a long one. As at so many World Cups, the final of the global tournament in Brazil had been anything but a soccer festival. Neither of the two rivals wanted to make a mistake, so the match turned into a dogged final in Rio de Janeiro's totally renovated soccer temple Maracana—also, perhaps, because of personnel problems. On the German team, Sami Khedira had to be replaced shortly before kick-off because of a calf injury, and on the Argentinian side, Angel Di Maria missed the final after tearing a muscle.

Christoph Kramer substituted for Khedira, and the Argentinians kept on Enzo Perez to replace Di Maria. It would be some time before the pace picked up. On the Argentinian side, Gonzalo Higuain was rejoicing after a half hour, but the SSC Neapel striker's goal was clearly offside. Before that, an error by Toni Kroos had already left him completely unmarked. On the other side, Benedikt Höwedes almost took his team into the lead, but his powerful header only hit the post. A shame for the Schalke player, a shame for Germany. And too bad for Löw, who had already been forced to replace the unfortunate Kramer (suspected concussion) with André Schürrle just 32 minutes into the game.

Much Ado about Neuer and Higuain

The grappling continued after the substitution. The heretofore rather lackluster Lionel Messi did get an opportunity and just missed. But that was it for a long time. Fans of tactics may have enjoyed

themselves, but connoisseurs of offensive actions had to bide their time. They nearly got what they were hoping for when Toni Kroos took a shot from the penalty line. But what the then Bayern Munich player managed splendidly in his third goal of the semi-final against Brazil failed this time: His attempt landed wide. And so Manuel Neuer's trip to the penalty line and his hard collision with Higuain remained the only excitement in the second half. The score stood at 0–0 in regular playing time.

Who would make the first fateful error? No one. Germany continued to be in possession of the ball more often, but game-changing opportunities remained elusive. In the second half of the extra time, however, the nasty surprises multiplied. Agüero struck Bastian Schweinsteiger, who had to be treated for a bleeding wound under his eye. He came back—this, too, a signal that preceded the subsequent, final co-production by Schürrle and Götze.

Personal Satisfaction for Joachim Löw

For national team coach Joachim Löw, the Germans' fourth World Cup title is also personally gratifying. He had to assert himself against much resistance following the 1–2 at the European Cup semi-finals two years ago, for which he was largely responsible, and which led many in Germany to call prematurely for his dismissal. Löw, this much is clear since Sunday evening, has proven the doubters wrong. He is not the bullheaded coach that not only *Spiegel* magazine considered him; he altered his tactics, changed personnel, and ultimately succeeded.

It is unthinkable that he will quit now, after this crowning event. His contract with the German Soccer Association (DFB) runs for another two years, anyway. "I have to talk with the president again; maybe he will kick me out," Löw joked before the final. But now there is no reason to believe that Wolfgang Niersbach will take any such action.

"Staying at the Top in Years to Come"

Especially after the triumph in Rio, Löw sees no need to make any radical changes on the way to the European Cup in 2016 in France and the next World Cup finals in 2018 in Russia. "We certainly have players who are at the height of their careers at the moment," Löw said even before the greatest match of his career, "but we also have many younger players on our team." The foundation is excellent, he said, "I believe we do have the potential to be at the top of world soccer in years to come as well. With this team, or perhaps also with this or that new player."

Only Miroslav Klose Likely to Retire

Only the 36-year-old former World Cup record goal scorer Miroslav Klose hinted, before the second World Cup final of his career and his performance at the soccer temple of Maracana, at plans to withdraw from the national team after more than thirteen years. "I enjoy every moment that I can be on the field," the senior team member explained before his 137th international match, which saw him rise to the top at his seventh major tournament. He would decide on his future "spontaneously," a weeping Klose announced after the final whistle: "I'm still able, unfortunately, I must emphasize that!" An assessment that applies to his coach as well.

Source: L. Wallrodt, L. Gartenschläger, J. Wolff, F. Haupt, "Ganz Deutschland ist Weltmeister," *Die Welt*, July 14, 2014,
<https://www.welt.de/sport/fussball/wm-2014/article130112682/Ganz-Deutschland-ist-Weltmeister.html>

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