



BUNDESLIGA 1

BY BEN EAST



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0 ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE



When Borussia Dortmund and Bayern Munich led a German invasion of Wembley Stadium in May, it wasn't just a mouthwatering UEFA

Champions League final between two clubs clearly playing the best football in Europe. It was confirmation that German football has come of age, on and off the pitch. Fans fell in love with Dortmund's passionate supporters and idiosyncratic manager. Pundits purred at Bayern's tactical masterclass in the semi-final, when they fearlessly demolished Barcelona with pro-active, attacking play.

And unlike the increasingly corporate and brand-heavy English Premier League sides (who were all out of the competition by the end of the first knockout stage), the only brand in evidence at the hierarchy of these Bundesliga clubs was a brand of football – exciting, attacking, athletic and full of young talent. The final may have lacked the superstar pull of a Messi or a Ronaldo, but it showcased something far greater than that – a commitment to teamwork and sides willing themselves to win for their supporters. Put simply, every football fan suddenly wanted their team to be a bit like Borussia Dortmund or Bayern Munich.

So as Pep Guardiola shunned a move to the EPL, Ligue Un in France or Serie A in Italy for a chance to manage Bayern Munich next season, something became abundantly clear. The Bundesliga had become the place to be, the league to watch.

It was natural that after the Bundesliga sides took apart their Spanish counterparts at the semi-final stage of the Champions League last season, there should

be talk of a changing of the guard. In truth, football is less certain than that, but what is clear is that the very set-up of the Bundesliga gives its sides a better chance than most, developing footballing talent in a targeted and intelligent way. But to find out how Borussia Dortmund and Bayern Munich could dominate teams with far larger spending power, you have to go back 13 years, and, paradoxically, to a complete footballing humiliation.

"The German national side performed so catastrophically at Euro 2000, we knew we had to change something," laughs Jörg Daubitzer, managing director of Bundesliga's worldwide operations. "What we came up with was a system entirely focused on youth development, and more than €700m [R9.5bn] has been spent on building up very good, technical, young players since then."

Academies were created across the Bundesliga. No different to the state of affairs in England, of course. But while EPL sides focused their riches on the big stars, Germany's young players actually made their debuts in the

Bundesliga as teenagers; world stars such as Mario Götze, Mesut Özil and Manuel Neuer all playing regularly, rather than being left to rot in the reserves or farmed out to a lower league club. The results were never clearer than in this year's Champions League final, where 26 members of the playing squads were homegrown and largely products of the German Football Association's deep talent development scheme, which runs alongside the professional clubs' own coaching. The commitment to youth is staggering: all coaches dealing with young players from age eight upwards must hold a UEFA B licence at the very least, and 28,400 do so. In England it is just 1,759.

"There's another effect of all these young players coming through, though," adds Daubitzer. "It means the supporters feel a really special bond to their clubs because these boys are also from their hometown and understand what it means to play for their team. It generates the feeling that there's more to this league than simply buying expensive international stars for millions of Euro."

Which gives some indication as to why, alongside the increase in quality on the pitch, there's been a huge upsurge in Bundesliga's profile. Every supporter would say they feel passion for their favourite team, but there is genuinely something special about fan culture in Germany. The fans feel a part of their club – not least because, Wolfsburg and Bayer

Leverkusen aside, Bundesliga

regulations state that clubs must be controlled by their members – their supporters.

Such involvement means the cheapest season ticket at Bayern Munich this season is R1,600. At Arsenal in the EPL, it's R15,692. "In the EPL, the supporters that the teams are playing for are not the number one priority in the mind of the owners, and I can't understand that," says Daubitzer. "Surely you have to encourage a price structure that allows everyone, rich or poor, to go to a game. The only way you can build a strong relationship with your fans is to get a broad range of people understanding and feeling the special atmosphere."

The atmosphere of togetherness extends to the players themselves. There was some suggestion that Borussia Dortmund's players were being triumphalist when they sat in front of their own fans after beating Real Madrid at the Bernabéu. Far from it. Win, lose or draw they do exactly the same, and thank them for their support. There is no skulking off to their expensive cars after a defeat.

All of which might sound slightly parochial, but it has a subtle impact on the world stage. SuperSport, of course, broadcasts Bundesliga games in South Africa both live and in a highlights package. Its head of acquisitions, Brandon Foot, thinks the atmosphere around Bundesliga matches is almost as important as the quality of football. "Virtually every match is a full house," he says. "And the vibe they create is fantastic. They're very colourful, they vocally participate in the experience and you don't get racism or hooliganism. The crowds lend every game a sense of occasion. So what that does is to tell potential viewers, who live thousands of miles away, that this is premium content – we

BELOW LEFT: Robert Lewandowski of Borussia Dortmund attempts a shot past Manuel Neuer of Bayern Munich during the UEFA Champions League final match at Wembley Stadium in London (25 May 2013).

BELOW RIGHT: Borussia Dortmund midfielder Mario Götze (l) and Real Madrid defender Sergio Ramos do aerial combat during the UEFA Champions League first-leg semi-final in Dortmund. (24 April 2013).

THE EPL'S BLIND SPOTS

There are several things about the EPL you simply won't miss if you tune into the Bundesliga

TUMBLEWEED

Except in the very biggest games, the noise for which grounds such as Old Trafford were once famous is sadly lacking. Manchester United's fans know they're going to beat the likes of Norwich City – the only sound you hear is a quiet murmur from the away supporters of "where's your famous atmosphere?" In the Bundesliga, most grounds are full, and rocking, no matter the game.

BLAND MANAGERS

EPL bosses no doubt heaved a sigh of relief when José Mourinho returned to Chelsea this year. Browbeaten by pressure for results, most coaches come out with bland platitudes in fear of displeasing their owners. Meanwhile, Jürgen Klopp calls Dortmund's relationship with Bayern Munich "a bit like James Bond," with the Bavarians as the baddies.

DEPRESSING EMPHASIS ON DEFENCE

The prize for merely staying in the Premier League is now around the R1.4bn mark. But all that does is reinforce a desire not to get beaten, so two thirds of the league's teams set themselves up not to lose rather than approach a game with a winning mentality. The Bundesliga goals per game average is of course way higher.

OVERPAID PLAYERS

For all the riches the EPL brings in through television money, most of it leaves the club in wages. Unsurprisingly, this leads to huge wastage, with players happy to pick up their astronomical paycheques for average (or sometimes non-existent) performances. Stuart Taylor, for example, was on the books of Manchester City for three years without ever playing a league game, but picked up an estimated R62m. The Bundesliga isn't exempt from such frippery, but here's a stat: this season, Freiburg spent R231m on wages in total and finished fifth. It would take Wayne Rooney, in the shadow of Mario Götze these days, just two years to earn the same sum on his own.

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Bayern Munich players celebrate with the UEFA Champions League trophy after beating Borussia Dortmund 2-1 in the final (25 May 2013).

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often find that the bigger the crowd, the greater our audience."

Foot says that the audience figures for the Bundesliga in South Africa have significantly grown since broadcasts began in 2010, and he expects them to rise still further in the wake of the all-German Champions League final and Guardiola's arrival at the helm of Bayern Munich. "Personalities are always important, and the Bundesliga is beginning to attract them. His arrival is a bit of a game changer," he says.

Foot does, however, admit that the ace in SuperSport's pack is still the EPL – "It's still the market leader here," he says – and La Liga when either Real Madrid or Barcelona (or both) are playing. But for how long? The EPL boasted a game between Manchester United and West Bromwich Albion which ended 5-5 last season, and is often celebrated for its thrilling matches. But if goal-scoring is any guide to a league's excitement, there were more on average, per game, in Germany last season (2.93) than any other major league in Europe. There were more goals in total in the EPL and La Liga (1,063 and 1,091) but that's only because there are 74 more games in those competitions.

Meanwhile, the gap in talent on display is closing. As Real Madrid's Iker Casillas and Juventus' Gianluigi Buffon had shaky seasons,

Bayern's Manuel Neuer has clearly become the top goalkeeper in Europe. Defensively, Marcel Schmelzer of Borussia Dortmund can lay claim to overshadowing Barcelona's Jordi Alba as one of the best left backs. Bastian Schweinsteiger is clearly now on a par with Xavi as the best defensive midfielder in world football, while Mario Götze, Thomas Müller and Robert Lewandowski is an attacking threesome which will be unrivalled in its power and verve should they all turn out for Bayern next season.

Of course, naysayers might point to Bayern Munich's 25-point winning margin at the top of the Bundesliga this year as proof that it has become uncompetitive. But leading German football writer Raphael Honigstein says it was an exception, "something that hasn't happened for 50 years. I don't think it will be repeated any time soon."

He's right: in the previous three seasons only 6.6 points separated the top two on average. And while the same four English sides have qualified for the Champions League in that period, there's always the sense that any German team could have a good season and play at Europe's top table. Eight, in fact, have done so in the last five years.

"Borussia Dortmund might embody the ideals of the Bundesliga, in terms of steadily growing a team of exciting young players and seeing them become successful, but they're not the only ones," says Daubitzer. "There are other teams which have the same possibility – Schalke or Hamburg, for example. Frankfurt has a young and talented team, as do Borussia Mönchengladbach. There are so many little Dortmunds – which is what makes the Bundesliga so attractive, I think."

Honigstein agrees, with qualification. The Bundesliga has witnessed, in the recent past, teams such as Wolfsburg recovering from near relegation two years previously to win the title for the first time in 2009. To put that in context, it would be like Aston Villa winning the EPL next season, or Norwich City gaining a Champions League place. It just isn't going to happen.

"We do have a lot of clubs that have the same structural situation to be another Dortmund," agrees Honigstein. "With Schalke, Stuttgart and Hamburg, there's a lot of potential quality there, but not everyone has used their resources as well as Dortmund – and not everyone has Jürgen Klopp as their manager."

Ah yes, Jürgen Klopp. The enigmatic Borussia Dortmund coach could perhaps only have come from the Bundesliga, a passionate man who expects his teams to perform in his image. It made no difference that their wage bill was a third of their opponents in this year's semi-final. They played them off the park.

"Give Schalke a Jürgen Klopp, for example, and they might do something," suggests Honigstein. "They lost their way a bit last season at points,

BELOW LEFT: Borussia Dortmund's head coach Juergen Klopp acknowledges the crowd after his team lost the UEFA Champions League final to Bayern Munich (25 May 2013).

BELOW RIGHT: Bayern Munich's Thomas Mueller scores the penalty spot during the DFB Cup Final match against VfB Stuttgart at Olympic Stadium in Berlin (1 June 2013).



but they do have a decent side, with Klaas-Jan Huntelaar, Julian Draxler and Jefferson Farfán. They're trying to sign a kid from VfL Bochum called Leon Goretzka, too, who is seen as the next big thing in German football. Look at the way they beat Arsenal 2-0 last season at the Emirates – they were really impressive. I'm just not so sure about the manager, Jens Keller."

Honigstein is also excited by Bayer Leverkusen – who have lost André Schürrle to Chelsea but added Son Heung-Min from Hamburg, who had a lot of interest from EPL sides. "And Hamburg are interesting too," he says. "It's a city that is the same size as Munich, it has wealth, a similar fanbase, and has won the European Cup in the past, but they haven't had the same kind of smart management. With a bit of cleverness they could also be another Dortmund very easily."

Although, having said that, Bayern Munich did beat Hamburg 9-2 last season. Which is the worry. For all the plaudits surrounding the Bundesliga and its treble-winning champions, there is a faint sense of alarm in Germany that the league might become a monopoly. On the one hand, it's fantastic for German football that the brilliant Mario Götze and the most dangerous striker in Europe, Robert Lewandowski, are transferring from Dortmund to another Bundesliga side rather than casting their attentions abroad. But what does it mean for the league when Bayern Munich simply cherry-pick the best players?

"Well, for one thing, Bayern have always done this, and history proves that they don't always win the league," says Honigstein. "The question is, will they have the same kind of hunger they showed this year? My guess is maybe not."

Certainly, how Bayern Munich – and Guardiola – follow up winning pretty much everything is exercising the finest minds in European football. Some think the former Barcelona manager is on to a hiding to nothing, while others, including Honigstein, believe that it's better for him to take on a team used to winning and mold them in his own image. What is interesting is why Germany is Guardiola's choice in the first place, when the turbulent state of English clubs surely meant a high profile and handsomely paid job in the EPL was his if he wished. His decision to coach Bayern Munich said much about how Germany has become the most interesting place to play, watch and coach football.

"A coach like Guardiola isn't going to be proud of simply spending millions of Euros to win titles," says Daubitzer. "Sure, Bayern spend some money on a few players, but he wants to have the challenge of building something really special, and creating a footballing philosophy that lasts for years.

"I think that having Guardiola at Bayern Munich not only reflects how far we've come, but also Bundesliga's potential for the future, too."

So, has the tide really turned? Has German football become the model to follow?

"I don't know about that," laughs Honigstein. "I think the national side would have to win the World Cup or Euro 2016 to act as real signs of change. But for now, everyone's just enjoying the football, and I think you saw that at Wembley in the Champions League."

And, as football becomes more about finances, watching a league that is all about pure enjoyment become so successful is surely reason enough to tune in. **SEMI**

R9.5bn

The amount the Bundesliga has spent on development since 2000.

26

The number of squad members in the Champions League final who came up through the ranks in Bundesliga's development programme.

28,400 vs 1,759

The number of coaches qualified (UEFA B license) to coach from the age of eight and upwards, for Germany and England respectively.

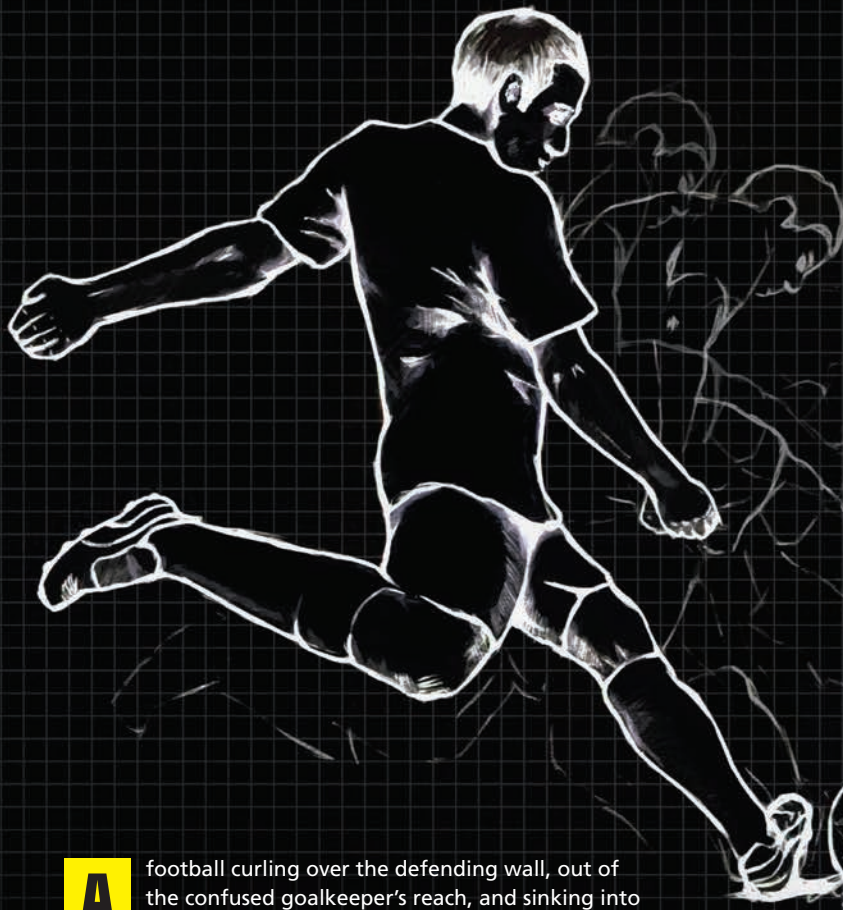
R1,600 vs R15,692

The cost of a Bayern Munich season ticket compared to the cost of an Arsenal season ticket.

2.93

The average number of goals scored per match in Bundesliga last season.





HOW TO... *curl a* **FREE KICK**

A football curling over the defending wall, out of the confused goalkeeper's reach, and sinking into the corner netting is one of the most beautiful sights in all of the beautiful game. For our money, no player could take a free kick like Juninho Pernambucano, the Brazilian free-kick master who, during his time at French side Olympique Lyonnais, had a conversion rate so high he earned the nickname "Mr 50%." Here is a step-by-step guide to how he did it.



CHECK OUT THIS COMPILATION OF JUNINHO'S GREATEST FREE KICKS.

1 Place the ball with the air valve facing you. This is the hardest part of the ball and striking it sweetly will add pace and spin.

2 Take between five to seven long strides back.

3 Pick your target, then breathe and focus on the ball. Take your time, as rushing will only lead to a shank.

4 When you start your run, lead with the foot you're going to connect with. Begin with two short steps and then run. When you get to the ball, place your weaker foot as close to the ball as you can with your toes pointing in the direction you want the ball to take off.

5 Now is the fun part. Kick the ball, and kick hard, slightly off-centre in the lower hemisphere with the side of your laces, as opposed to straight on as with a driven shot. Don't try to slice the ball as this will lead to a weak and inaccurate shot. Lean back and try and connect with the ball at a 45-degree angle – this will produce the curl.

6 Follow through with your kick. Even though you are kicking at an angle, let your leg go straight through the ball. This will also ensure that you kick with a lot of force. Remember it's the spin of the ball as well as the forward velocity that produce the desired curl.

7 Watch as the ball curls gracefully into the top corner of your opponent's goal.

REMEMBER IT'S THE SPIN OF THE BALL AS WELL AS THE FORWARD VELOCITY THAT PRODUCE THE CURL.

ILLUSTRATION BY PAUL CRAFFORD



As with all skills, practise, practise and when you got the hang of it, practise some more. Achieving an accurate curl from a ball at rest is one of the most difficult skills in football; it is also one of the most valuable, so do not be discouraged. With enough practise you will be the go-to man on your team, like Serbian defender Siniša Mihajlović, another master of the free kick, who once scored a hat-trick with all three goals coming from free kicks – a record that still stands.

