



Klose encounters in alien culture build right mentality

Soccer

Glenn Moore
in Berlin

MIROSLAV KLOSE took up football in an attempt to be accepted in Germany, a country in which he felt, and was, a stranger. As the number of Germans wearing shirts with "KLOSE" on their backs at the Olympiastadion this afternoon will demonstrate, he succeeded beyond imagining.

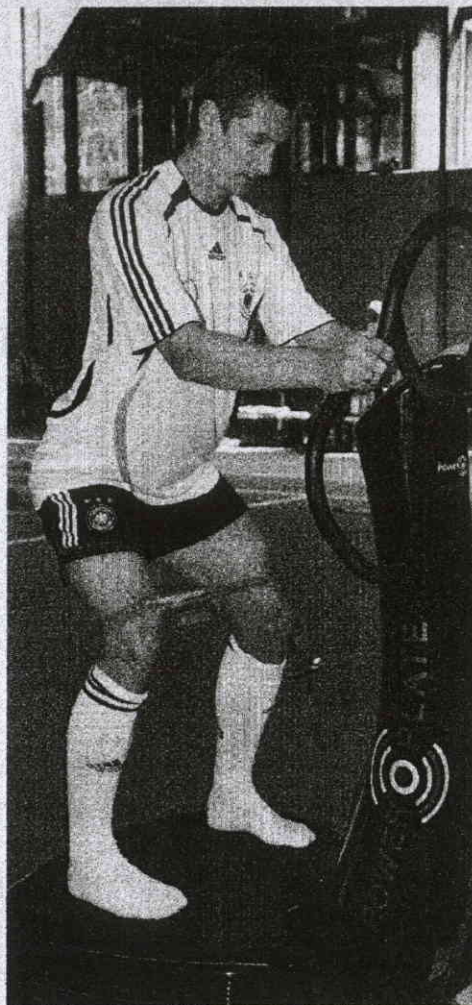
Klose carries the burden of Germany's hopes in today's quarter-final against Argentina, but at eight years old he was a lonely immigrant boy, trying to make friends through football after his family moved to West Germany from Poland. Just as improbably, at 22 his only involvement with professional football was as a spectator, watching Kaiserslautern from the terraces when not playing in the part-time regional leagues.

At this point Kaiserslautern's amateur division signed him. Within nine months he won his first cap and within two seasons he was runner-up to Ronaldo as leading scorer in the 2002 World Cup with five goals.

Struggled

It was a meteoric rise and Klose's form dipped as he struggled to cope with his new status, going goalless in Germany's disastrous Euro 2004 campaign. He persevered and, at this World Cup, is the leading scorer with four goals. He has also forged a partnership with Lukas Podolski, making both goals for the younger striker — who is also Polish-born — in the win over Sweden.

Unsurprisingly, he has been linked with a move away from Werder Bremen, even though he has three years remaining on his contract and they have again qualified for the Champions'



German striker Miroslav Klose works out during a training session in Berlin this week

League. At 28 — his birthday was on the opening day of the tournament — he is at his peak and his next move is the one that should set him up for life.

Not that Klose appears to be money-oriented. He drives a modest car, is devoted to his wife and twin

children, scandal-free, dedicated to his profession, and popular with fans, press and team-mates. He has, though, become more assertive in this tournament, perhaps due to his status as senior striker, perhaps due to the influence of Jurgen Klinsmann's can-do approach.

"It's bad luck for Argentina to meet us," he said this week, "because we want to reach the next round — and therefore we will beat them. We know they are a strong team, but if we keep them under pressure for 90 minutes they will commit mistakes and then we will capitalise."

This boast is uncharacteristic of Klose, but symptomatic of Germany's rising confidence.

Klose's form is a major factor even if critics note that his nine World Cup goals (five in 2002) have generally come against weak opposition (three against Saudi Arabia, two each against Costa Rica and Ecuador.) He has, though, scored 28 goals in 60 internationals and scored 25 goals in 26 Bundesliga appearances last season.

Klose was born, in 1978, in the Polish town of Opole. His father, Josef, had played for Auxerre, in France, and his mother represented Poland at handball. But Klose did not play organised football until the family moved west.

Everything

"Football meant everything to me," he recalls. "I just threw my stuff in the corner after school and raced to the local park. I was always a little better than the others, so I was always first pick."

Even as he settled, he retained strong family links with Poland. "I really like the people. My aunt and uncle still live there. We phone regularly, and I go and see them whenever I have time. When I was at Kaiserslautern they asked if I could imagine playing for Poland. But I knew I was in line to appear for Germany, and four weeks later I was called into the national squad for the first time."

He scored on his debut, the winner in a World Cup qualifier in Albania, and has not looked back.