

From 1955 to July 1971, "Kicker" did not comment on individual players in separate sections but only reserved one or two sentences for the highest-ranked players in their general commentary.

July 1970

... we can be highly pleased with the success of our team (third place!) and with individual performances of our players in Mexico. After a critical assessment of our players, which in some cases gave us headaches, we can now – dear reader – introduce you six players of world class: Berti Vogts, Franz Beckenbauer (even twice, once as central defender and in midfield), Karl-Heinz Schnellinger, Wolfgang Overath, Uwe Seeler and Gerd Müller. **Beckenbauer** and **Overath** held on to their world class evaluation from our last ranking in a supreme way. **Vogts** had to battle hard to remain in that category. But who, after all, managed to trump the little Terrier from Mönchengladbach when he had his ups and downs as a full back? No one. One man virtually bombed his way into world class: **Gerd Müller**, with ten goals the top scorer of the World Cup. But Müller did not only shine brightly as a goalgetter. He disproved all know-it-alls who claimed that he had no sense for combination play. The Bomber from Munich certainly is not one of the greatest in terms of technique. He knows that himself. In Mexico he proved however that his uncontrived, straightforward style also beats the world elite. And he also proved that additionally to his matchless instinct for scoring goals he is capable of providing good crosses and well-timed 1-2s. Also with – or especially with! – **Uwe Seeler**. Uwe returned to world class as a midfield player. We can only take our hat off to him. This is no bow to his age or his accomplishments. Uwe's performances were the only thing we measured. In the column "central forwards" Uwe is also appearing as 'international class'. And the sixth man of world class, **Karl-Heinz Schnellinger**? Usually Germans that play for foreign clubs do not get considered in our ranking, because we cannot observe them thoroughly like the other players. This will remain that way. Volkert, playing for FC Zürich, for example, is not included. However with Schnellinger and Haller this time we have made an exception. Our Mexico staff was able to observe both players. Schnellinger took his chance. Haller, who only played 45 minutes against Morocco, wasted it. In his woefully short appearance it showed that Haller has no fitness going together with his still world-beating technical skills. But fitness and endurance are necessary to find a place among the best.

Note: The December 1970 ranking is basically a repeat of the summer ranking of that year, as the December ranking looks back at the complete year of 1970, instead - as normally done - only the time from August to December. Thus the only player that gets a few sentences is the 'new-comer' to 'world class', Günter Netzer.

December 1970

If we had based our December ranking only on the form of our top players in the last few international games against Hungary, Turkey, Yugoslavia and Greece, we arguably would have had to class a few of them lower than world class. But a World Cup, which only comes around every four years, is simply setting the measurements, giving a ranking the final touches in the top categories. Even if Mexico now is six months in the past. One player, who missed out on Mexico, we now classed as 'world class' despite not having played in the World Cup: Günter Netzer! We believe that the majority of our readers agrees with this.

The Mönchengladbach player not only showed non-stop top performances for his club, he also he proved his absolute class in international games. Among it European Cup games and friendly games of his club against national teams.

July 1971

... we believe that due to the development of modern football we have to separate the central defenders between liberos (sweepers) and stoppers. This of course does not mean that players do not play both roles. We listed them in the position where they played most often. Why did we put "sweepers" in brackets behind "liberos"? Our competent readers of course know themselves that we only possess few players that truly fulfill the role of the "last man", that of the "free man" convincingly, players that know how to exploit the abundance of possibilities that this role offers to them. The "sweeper" first has to "develop" into a "libero". The prototype of the modern libero is still Franz Beckenbauer. After he now also plays in his favorite position in the national team, we have decided not to include him among the midfielders anymore, although of course we know that Franz is still able to deliver performances of world class in that position. After a rigorous evaluation we only ranked Berti Vogts (full back), Günter Netzer (midfielder) and Müller (central forwards) next to Beckenbauer in the 'world class' category. Thus Günter Netzer asserted himself while Wolfgang Overath was demoted after a heated debate. The playmaker of Mönchengladbach provided world class performances in his club almost non-stop and also in the national team he has a leading part. Overath however did not look as convincing for his club Köln like he did in the first part of the season and of course during the World Cup in Mexico. It is up to himself to work his way back to the place which he should occupy due to his footballing skills: that of world class.

December 1971

World Class

Franz Beckenbauer [Libero]

If the role of libero, the most modern position in modern football, would not exist, one would have to invent it - for the man who plays that role like no one else, because no one else can play it that way: Franz Beckenbauer. The libero role is tailor-made for the Munich player. "Libero" - the free man. In the beginning only meant as a sweeper. In the beginning only meant for 'firefighters' who would quench a fire. Still today most players in this role remain sweepers. It is no coincidence that the Bundesliga's three best clubs all do not operate with sweepers but with liberos. Beckenbauer at Bayern - that's clear. Nobody has the same overview of a game like him, no one knows the right moment when to risk attacking the opponent's goal. The ideal libero - like Beckenbauer - must be able to play 1-2s to get himself and his teammates into a good position. He must be able to pass the ball over long distances without the opponent getting the ball. Beckenbauer is the commanding boss of his defense, taking care for not opening gaps in his back when he is moving forward to join the attack. Beckenbauer is the measure of all things libero. He sets the limit - world class. Sieloff is unlucky that there is a Beckenbauer. His game is more forceful, not as elegant as the Munich player. The difference between the two lies in the playful genius of the Bayern libero. This does not rule out that Sieloff is as important for Mönchengladbach as Beckenbauer is for Bayern and Klaus Fichtel is for FC Schalke 04. Fichtel resembles Sieloff, although his offensive thrusts don't look quite as vigorous as Sieloff's. But he too is 'boss' of his team, dictating pace and rhythm. These three players make the most out of their tasks by moulding them into roles that have a fundamental function for their teams.

Gerd Müller [Central Forward]

"We had plenty of goal chances; all we lacked was a cold-blooded goalgetter ...". This is a lament that still most managers utter these days. Typical goalgetters are far and few between. Gerd Müller remains the prototype of the safe scorer who scores from all possible situations. Nobody right now can hold a candle to him. Critics that used to blame him for a lack of technique have long since been silent. Also those that claimed that he couldn't do well with 1-2s. The majority of his goals (already 17 in the first half of this season!) do result from blitz-like 1-2s! Even on foreign shores we are envied for the Bomber. His place in 'world class' is not up for debate.

Introduction

... there are four players who in our opinion showed performances of world class in the last six months: Franz Beckenbauer, Günter Netzer, Gerd Müller and Paul Breitner. That we classed the young Munich player this high might be surprising to some. But the only measurement in this case can be the international competition. We literally saw all European top teams during the last few months, both clubs and national teams. We did not see another full back anywhere of such class, a full back of such a rich technical repertoire, such football intelligence as Breitner. Who met his prime defensive tasks so self-assuredly, who intervened so intelligently in the attacking endeavours of his team, who menaced the opposing goal more frequently? In this past half year he managed the biggest jump! When today the best full backs in the world are named, then the name of Breitner is always mentioned. There shouldn't be any discussions about Beckenbauer and Netzer, and surely also not about Gerd Müller's world class. Nobody today can seriously write off his 51 goals in 41 international games (and nine goals in the last six games for the national team) as 'accidental products'. The whole world envies us for having a center forward like him!

World Class

Paul Breitner [Full Back]

Our editorial staff 'found' three German world class players pretty quickly. And we didn't have too much difficulty in finding a fourth one. Who else has managed a better, a more world class performance during the last six months than the 'discovery of the year', Paul Breitner? His performances during the games for the European Championships were only the icing on the cake. Will we meet resistance with our classification of Breitner as 'world class'? I think that such a meteoric rise deserves a corresponding evaluation. Everyone has his 'bogey' team. Everyone has his 'black day' some day. Breitner had his in the 1-5 defeat to Köln in the German Cup and against his opponent Bernd Rupp. We consider it to be fair to mention this yet believe that this is not detrimental to Breitner's overall performance level. Breitner thus managed to skip the category of 'international class' by jumping straightly from 'broad circle' to 'world class'.

Franz Beckenbauer [Libero]

I was just talking to Gunter Baumann about the strenghts and weaknesses of a libero. Our discussion soon got passionate when I portrayed what Franz Beckenbauer is getting out of the role of the 'last man'. Baumann, himself a born inside forward (in the old WM-system) and later a great center half himself saw this with different eyes: "but this unique talent is wasted in the libero role. This exceptional footballer would unfold much better in midfield. As libero, last man, an older player can be used instead, someone that should not get a too demanding job. Well a man that is already in a storage siding." I have the opposite view. Beckenbauer, who is doing everything but holding back, who does everything but taking a rest at the back, has firmly and consistently shown what can be made out of the libero position. He himself defends his role as follows: "When I move forward into midfield, there are one or two players standing on my feet. As libero I can not only act as 'fireman' and conductor of the defense, but also act like a forward when the opponent does not expect it."

Günter Netzer [Midfielder]

This was the half year of Günter Netzer! After the mysterious elimination in the European Cup, which led to a dip in form of the Mönchengladbach team in the Bundesliga championship, the captain of the 1971 champion finally grew into the role that he deserves. Now also in the national team the attacking play is centered wholly around him, underpinned by a sparkling understanding with Franz Beckenbauer. For an exceptional appearance like Netzer it was of course hard to come out on top. It is not sufficient for Netzer himself to be in form. To get the optimum out of him, Netzer depends on his fellow midfielders and forwards to fully get into his ideas and mannerisms, to accept his leadership, to take work off of him, to follow his rhythm dictate. Wolfgang Overath, friend and great rival of Netzer, lost his form due to injuries. The individualist Overath himself can only unfold if he has a leading role.

His comeback in the national team depends on him moving more forward and to adapt to the rhythm of Netzer. Is that possible? Meanwhile Uli Hoeness has blended in organically with the Mönchengladbach duo of Netzer/Wimmer as the third midfield player that it does not look advisable to sacrifice this triad for a dubious experiment.

Gerd Müller [Central Forward]

Gerd Müller world class! Two years ago, in our ranking issued in nr. 54 of 6 July 1970, we attributed him as 'world class' for the first time. My personal opinion: it was long overdue. At the latest during the World Cup in Mexico Müller disproved the know-it-alls who claimed that he had no sense for combination play or even that he couldn't play 1-2s. These Müller has mastered not only with Franz Beckenbauer years ago, but also with Rainer 'Oki' Ohlhauser back in the day! In the meantime the 26-year-old has further matured in terms of playfulness. Who still talks of a 'strictly-goalgetter-nothing else' has tomatoes on his eyes. Nobody shields the ball as cunningly as Müller. Nobody finds the 'right gap' after dropping the ball back to a midfielder as quickly as Müller. Günter Netzer said: "He literally forces me to play a 'deadly' through ball in the right moment." Not to mention the 1-2s played almost 'blindly' with his ideal partner Beckenbauer.

December 1972

Introduction

... being called up to play for the national team is fundamentally linked to how a player performs for his club team. Unfortunately some players that sparkle for the national team seem to have forgotten this. Thank God there are only few of these players but unfortunately Günter Netzer has to be counted among them, although he has suffered some injuries which he might consider as an excuse. Some very good games - also in the UEFA Cup - saved him from being demoted from 'world class' to 'international class'. After a lively debate within our writing staff this happened to Paul Breitner, who pushed into the 'world class' category after an meteoric rise in our summer ranking. We will address this more closely in our commentary in the full back section. Thus the number of our world class players is reduced to three - Beckenbauer, Müller and Netzer - three players that also topped the poll of the "European Footballer of the Year".

World Class

Franz Beckenbauer [Libero]

The "monument" Franz Beckenbauer is reigning supremely over his competitors in such a way that all that is left to ask is how this gap can be decreased in the future. Several players show vague promises in that regard but nowhere is the breakthrough already achieved. with regards to the international competitions we have to cross our fingers that Beckenbauer won't get injured because a successor is nowhere to be seen.

Günter Netzer [Midfielder]

Europe's sports journalists ranked him at no. 2 together with Gerd Müller in the poll for the "European Footballer of the Year". They too confirmed Netzer's status as a player of undisputed world class. However at home he did not confirm that status as undisputedly. The reason of course is that in our ranking, not the full year is mirrored but only the last six months. And in this time frame the Mönchengladbach player was stingy in regards to top class performances. True, on the international level (UEFA Cup and the international game vs. Switzerland) he performed scintillatingly, impressing with his technique, his overview and his smart passes. For now Netzer remains the ideal player in midfield, like before him his friend Wolfgang Overath. The Köln player is fired up to return to the national team. He won't have an easy time achieving this. In the last half year, Wimmer and Hoeness have crystallized even more as being the two ideal partners of Netzer in midfield. The first one with the additional benefit of playing in the same club as Netzer, the latter one having the benefit of playing in the same club with Gerd Müller, with whom he has developed a blind understanding in terms of 1-2s.

Gerd Müller [Central Forward]

The 'world class' attribute belongs to Gerd Müller not least because he is the undisputed no. 1 goalgetter in world football. His accolades are numerous: the first German to be voted "European Footballer of the Year", twice Europe's best goalscorer, scorer of the most Bundesliga goals in history, scorer of the most goals for the national team. Gerd Müller does not only remain indispensable, but also insatiable. When Uwe Seeler was voted "German Football of the Year" in 1970 instead of Müller, despite being top scorer of the World Cup in Mexico, Müller complained to the writer of these words plainly: "You have betrayed me". The manager of Borussia Mönchengladbach, Hennes Weisweiler, stated en passant in a conversation recently: "To me Gerd Müller is the greatest player already for years." And with that he did not only mean Müller's attributes as a goalgetter. Weisweiler's own goalgetter, Jupp Heynckes, would replace Gerd Müller in the national team if need be. Possible that Heynckes would blossom *without* Müller next to him, possible that he would rid his bad luck in the national team of not having scored a goal in his last 17 games during the last six years. For his club Heynckes remains a dangerous goalgetter while in the national team he only hits the woodwork.

July 1973

World Class

Franz Beckenbauer [Libero]

Helmut Schön wouldn't need to worry for the 1974 World Cup if in all positions we had such competition as among the liberos. Naturally Franz Beckenbauer is still head and shoulders above the others in this category, yet some younger players succeeded in closing the gap considerably. First of all, there's Horst Blankenburg, who of course is only moving into the picture from the edge as he's achieved his big successes outside of Germany playing for Ajax Amsterdam. Yet the Swabian from Heidenheim still possesses German citizenship and thus he could play for Germany in case something should occur to "Kaiser Franz", which we of course do not hope. Horst Blankenburg thus is mentioned noncompetitively in our ranking on all but honorary grounds. He may be adversely affected by adventurousness, apart from that he is nearly perfect, knows just like Beckenbauer how to time his offensive thrusts. He also proved that he has improved a lot in pure marking ability. He and Beckenbauer taking turns in offensive endeavours, each one securing the rearward space behind the other, to imagine this is a pleasure!

I* had the fortune to witness these two players playing together in the London game of "Old EC" vs. "New EC" and can thus measure how effective this combination could be

*note: the author is Hildebrand Kelber

Introduction

... since our national team won the World Cup much to our delight, naturally there is a 'boom' among the 'world class' rated players compared to our last ranking. With goalkeeper Sepp Maier, the full backs Breitner and Vogts as well as libero Beckenbauer, already in this edition we have four players who we granted the grade of 'world class'. Among the stoppers the highest rating was 'international class', with the Munich player Georg Schwarzenback being the sole representative, climbing one position upwards compared to our last ranking. The debate among our staff was far less passionate than in our winter ranking at the end of December 1973. The World Cup had set the standards, the impressions are still fresh and the assessment thus a little bit easier. Sure enough the performances for the club teams are not disregarded. After all only 18 German players performed in the World Cup. Among all others, the performances in their club teams during the first half of the year were decisive. And among these club games, the competition of the European Cups and the UEFA Cup as well as the promotion round were considered with a special weight.

World Class

Sepp Maier [Goalkeeper]

"Whenever Sepp is concentrated, then he is world class!" This used to be Beckenbauer's standard answer when he was asked about the quality of his goalkeeper. A lack of concentration and hence non-consistent performances were thus far the reason why the grade of 'world class' has eluded Maier in previous rankings. It is uncontested that he has always been capable of world class performances for Bayern and the national team in the years gone by. However, with Sepp it has always been that next to his world class games he also always had his "black hours". In the bygone six months however all this has changed, as Maier managed to become virtually a paragon of consistency, capping this off with winning the German championship, the European Cup and the World Cup. A triple triumph in which Maier played a major role with his great saves. Especially after the World Cup the applause was undivided. In our great survey after the World Cup about the best players, only Ronnie Hellström received more votes among the goalkeepers than Maier. Whereat the Swede had the "benefit" of being far more tested right from the start of the tournament than Maier.

Paul Breitner and Berti Vogts [Full Backs]

Among the most noticeable players of the World Cup winners were the two full backs. Both were also highly graded internationally. Next to Sepp Maier and Franz Beckenbauer, Paul Breitner and Berti Vogts performed most consistently among our players. Both managed to raise their level over the course of the season and then managed a further boost during the World Cup (unlike Uli Hoeness, who was not able to raise his level any higher), and in the final itself, Berti Vogts swung aloft to an unexpected level of greatness. Despite Vogts' fantastic showing of fitness, the final itself revealed the differences between the Mönchengladbach and the Bayern player. Paul Breitner can also score goals. That's the reason why he is more revered, also by foreign experts. After all Breitner scored three goals, two of them from a distance of over 20 meters: the first goal of our team against Chile and then the all-important first goal against Yugoslavia (where he managed to vanquish the 'super-man' goalkeeper Maric) and finally the equalizer in the final game. He showed his strength of nerves by taking that penalty despite not being designated to take penalties. By the way, in our last ranking neither Breitner nor Vogts were rated as 'world class', as Breitner was clearly not in his form of 1972 and Vogts had been injured for so long and so thoroughly that he didn't even expect to make the World Cup squad back then.

Franz Beckenbauer [Liberio]

In our great international survey after the World Cup asking for the best player of the tournament, eight of 67 experts did not mention the name Beckenbauer. Remarkable that these experts apparently had never heard of his name. But then again, six players could be chosen from....in any case, this World Cup 'birthed' world class players more than ever before in our ranking and this not without reason. But not only the World Cup was regarded, also the performances during the last six months in the league and the European Cup. Franz Beckenbauer's position is uncontested. That he was not rated 'world class' in December has been reasoned by us thoroughly in the last ranking. This World Cup presented to us the 'other' Beckenbauer, the fighter, which he so far seldomly was, because he was unchallenged, the exemplary captain, who guided the path, who could be brazen, could be seen fuming but who was also seen praising others.

Gerd Müller [Central Forward]

We don't have to make many words about Gerd Müller. Whoever is disappointed that he failed to become top scorer of the World Cup again like in Mexico, has to arrange that with himself. Once, after a weaker game of Müller, when the press expected of Helmut Schön to make a critical comment regarding Müller, he replied - a little bit petulant - "I am glad that I have him!". There is nothing to add to this statement. Both Bayern players, only rated 'international class' last December, managed to advance to the 'world class' category this summer, a place well known to Müller from previous rankings.

Uli Hoeness [Central Forward]

Within the last 12 months, Uli Hoeness managed the biggest jump forward. A year ago, the Munich player was rated 'broad circle', at the end of December 'international class', and now he even managed to advance to the 'world class' category. Admiration and congratulations for this enormous rise! But there, where we expected world class performances from Hoeness, he didn't deliver them: during the World Cup in June and July. Some had hailed him prematurely as the "star of the tournament". He still managed a very good performance altogether. But what counted especially: his unforgettable games in the European Cup and the league. This ranking obliges, Uli!

December 1974

Introduction

The last Kicker Rangliste was much influenced by the 1974 World Cup. With pride and a good conscience we ranked six players as 'world class'. They were Maier, Vogts, Beckenbauer, Müller and Hoeness. A good five months later only two players distinguished themselves as 'world class' in our view. Namely Beckenbauer and Vogts. Breitner left our ranking because he is now playing in Spain. As usual, we do not rank German players from foreign clubs because they evade our observation. Thus no Netzer, too. It was encouraging though that again many younger talents moved into the spotlight. Let's think about Dietz (25), Zander (23), Kliemann (25), Körbel (20), Pirrung (25) or Seliger (23). The turnabout in the Bundesliga, its almost never-before-seen balance naturally rubbed off on our ranking and enlivened it. Also seasoned players like Kostedde (28), Haeberrmann (28), Volkert (29) were calling the challenge. And let us remind ourselves that even Hölzenbein managed to get called up by the national team only at the age of 27. And what a smash he was!

World Class

Berti Vogts [Full Back]

The tenacious Berti managed to keep his world-cup-winning form up in the first half of the season. Let's look back: shock for all spectators in the first minute of the World Cup final, when Cruyff got rid off Berti and was felled by Hoeness. Penalty and 0-1. But not a shock to Berti, who raised himself to a sublime performance, helping our team to reach the summit of the mountain. Only lacking for a culmination was him scoring a goal, but after one of Berti's blitz forays goalkeeper Jongbloed denied him. In the Mönchengladbach team, which started weakly into the new season but then managed a series of winning games which was then followed by a series of defeats, thus a team that was changing between highs and lows, Berti right from the start was the most steady man, the calming influence. Berti simply is a bloke. After a long-winding injury his international career seemed to be history, he was not part of the European Championship team, but he came back

Franz Beckenbauer [Libero]

Dietrich Weise's prophecy that only when Beckenbauer is not playing anymore, other teams will be winning the championship very likely will be disproved already in this season. But I still think that this sentence is a remarkable opinion which extends in an even stronger sense also to our semi-annual ranking. Franz now for years has been our most stable player of 'world class', and even if one day he will not be rated as 'world class' anymore, he will still be our best libero. By the way, a year ago he was only ranked as 'international class' - you sure remember: form crisis, thigh strain, renal colic etc. ... But in our summer ranking he was on top again.

July 1975

Introduction

A partly tumultuous season has been completed. Some of that turbulence rubbed off on our ranking, of course, which has shown more movements than our last ranking in December 1974. A good sign, because stagnation equals regression. The number of players we classified as 'world class' has increased from two to three. Joining Vogts and Beckenbauer now is Sepp Maier, who was elected unanimously by our staff into this highest category. Grabowski and Heynckes were two further candidates for the 'world class' level, they only barely failed to make it. Enjoyable to see that again many young talents crowded our "broad circle". Just look at Dürnberger, Glowacz and Sziedat among the full backs. Neuberger, who was not considered last time due to a long-winding pause caused by a club transfer, even managed to top that list.

World Class

Sepp Maier [Goalkeeper]

The ranking is uncontested. Rarely was Sepp Maier the number one goalkeeper without any doubt like this time, the number one which he always claimed to be himself, despite a number of crises in the bygone years. This time there was no crisis. It is mainly Maier's merit that Bayern did not get in danger of relegation in their direst need this season and despite their mediocrity achieved to win the European Cup. If Billy Bremner's shot from a few yards had been a goal, which Maier prevented, Bayern for the first time in five years would have failed to win a trophy. Since the World Cup victory, of which he can claim a great share of merit, Sepp Maier 'infects' the players of Bayern and the national team with his calmness. The experience of one decade is paying off.

Berti Vogts [Full Back]

We actually never were at a loss regarding good defenders. And if one compares this ranking with our last ranking from winter 1974, this illustrious circle has well increased. Only in the hierarchy some changes have occurred. If one asks Berti Vogts about his hobby apart from football he promptly answers: "football". This is basically a confirmation of his attitude towards this profession and of the stable value of his performances, almost always 'world class'. This is where he belongs due to his commitment, his ambition and his prowess.

Franz Beckenbauer [Libero]

Franz Beckenbauer remains the measure of all things 'libero'. If the role of the 'free man' had not yet been invented, one would have had to invent it especially for him, for the man who has gained all glory that a footballer can gain - and who especially proved in those days, when Bayern and him or him and Bayern slipped into a crisis, that he is a brilliant player and a commanding captain, but mostly also a passionate fighter. Some thought in those first weeks of 1975, that Franz was saturated. Saturated of success, of victories. And who would have blamed him? But Kaiser Franz, rushing from game to game without break, only showed an understandable reaction which hits anybody unstopably who is exposed to such a continuous 'football stress'. He even scored own goals, he tottered but didn't fall. Bayern's way out of the dilemma was also Beckenbauer's way back to the top. That way on which Beckenbauer proved that he is capable of playing the libero double role: when Bayern were under great pressure, he suddenly was the masterful 'pure-sweeper'. When Bayern relieved itself from the pressure, and also the national team, he slipped back into the role which he can play so masterfully like no one else: that of the free man, who directs the course of the game from a deep position, who orchestrates his team. The distance in our ranking mirrors the gap to the others caused by his class performances.

December 1975

Introduction

Rankings are and will always be problematic. Especially those in football, as here one can't measure performances in meters and seconds like in track and field. And it is not about single players like in Tennis but team players. This makes a proper evaluation difficult and creates diverging opinions. Also in our Kicker staff twice a year heated debates emerge about the ranking of single players. It was no different this time. Especially in the category 'world class' oftentimes disagreement was seen. Five players finally this degree was bestowed upon: Sepp Maier, Berti Vogts, Franz Beckenbauer and the Mönchengladbach Danes Henning Jensen and Allan Simonsen.

Although we use a demanding benchmark for this category, we are ready to receive protest from our readership, maybe because some will argue that five players is not enough for the World and European Champions, a league that has the European Cup winner and the UEFA Cup winner. At the same time some readers will disagree with Sepp Maier being rated as 'world class', pointing to a number of games in which the Munich player from time to time looked poor, not always showing a level of world class. Thus for example in Frankfurt, when he even was tricked by a corner kick. However, decisive to us is the overall impression over five months, the reliability in this time frame. One should be wary of forming an opinion based on a few clips from television reports. Mistakes by our top players will always stand out more than class performances which are simply expected.

Too bad that we do not have to offer much regarding forwards. None of our players could hold a candle to the class of the two Danes Jensen and Simonsen. Helmut Schön sure would be glad if he could draw on forwards like the Mönchengladbach players. It's also sad that due to long-going injuries Gerd Müller and Uli Hoeneß could not be assessed and thus are missing. But we are certain that both will have a comeback next year when our next ranking at the end of season 1975-76 is published.

The cry for midfield playmakers, cold-blooded goalscorers (like Gerd Müller was for many years), for tricky wingers, who can shoot and cross the ball at full speed, is growing louder each year. Our only solace: it's not just us, the whole football world has the same worries

World Class

Sepp Maier [Goalkeeper]

Sepp Maier's role model was and still is Lev Yashin, the tall Russian, who was still active at the age of 40. Maier indicated already early on that he too wanted to remain active into his late 30s. That Bayern for a long time had a better rank in the table than they actually deserved based on their performances was also a merit of Sepp Maier. That the European Cup winner did lose four consecutive games at the end of the first half of this season (in Bochum and Frankfurt, at home against Köln and Berlin) Sepp Maier could not prevent, albeit blunders (corner kickers) by Maier weren't absent. A goalkeeper among all players should the least be measured according to single game performances, because he is the one who is most dependent on the performances of his teammates. Often he is a poor man. Essentially Maier managed to keep his World-Cup-winning level of 1974 intact.

Berti Vogts [Full Back]

We can confidently repeat our first sentence of our last ranking in summer: we never were at a loss regarding good defenders. No wonder that the top two categories were enriched by an additional name. Hardly anyone really doubted that Berti Vogts would retain his place in the 'world class' category. Regardless in which position he plays, be it on the left side or the right side: his opponent always bangs his head against a wall. And his performances for the club and the national team are unchanging. Berti's profession simply is football and he takes it as seriously as anyone with a profession in civil life.

Franz Beckenbauer [Libero]

Which footballer wouldn't want to be like him? From the little boy to the well-paid professional: countless try to emulate him, to dribble like him, to treat the ball like him, to address inch-perfect passes nonchalantly with the outside of the boot. The captain of the World and European champions and of the European Cup winner, the German record holder for caps with 95 international games again in this ranking is placed in his regular seat – that of 'world class'. Only seldomly in his ten year career in the national team did Franz Beckenbauer slip down a category: when he was plagued by injuries, which made him lose his form, which in turn made his team Bayern slip into a crisis. Still, we had to think a long time about how we rated the Bayern defense due to the 29 conceded goals. A defense, which is also represented in our ranking by Sepp Maier, Katsche Schwarzenbeck and Bernd Dürnberger. But wasn't Bayern always under constant pressure in away games during the last five months because the forwards didn't accomplish much, because the weak midfield regularly couldn't keep possession? And, coming along on top, Bayern's defense also had to score the goals.

Henning Jensen & Allan Simonsen [Foreign Players]

Foreign players, who earn their money in German clubs, stepped into the spotlight most notably during the first half of this season. On top the two Mönchengladbach Danes Jensen and Simonsen. Of the 35 goals scored by the Bundesliga champion, they alone scored 18 (Simonsen 10, Jensen 8). Arguably, there is no doubt about their assessment as 'world class'. Further successful goalscorers among the Foreign Players are Sandberg (10 goals), Lippens (7) and also the Hamburg midfielder Björnmoose. In general, one could form a powerful team with Bundesliga Foreign Players alone, a team which by all means could stand up to the national team. Perhaps someday we will see such a game, which was suggested recently in Baden-Baden in the context of the honouring of athletes.

July 1976

Introduction

The dramatic end of the European Championships in Yugoslavia and the German Cup Final in Frankfurt between Hamburg and Kaiserslautern formed the tail of a colourful season. With the Rangliste of German football, already a tradition, we intend to assess the performances of the players in a critical way. in our last ranking we had classified Sepp Maier, Berti Vogts, Franz Beckenbauer and the two Mönchengladbach Danes Jensen and Simonsen as 'world class'. This time we 'only' classified four players in that category. They are Maier among the goalkeepers, Beckenbauer among the liberos, Bonhof among the midfielders and Gerd Müller among the central forwards.

World Class

Sepp Maier [Goalkeeper]

The latest impression always sticks most freshly in memory. While Sepp Maier made a crucial mistake in each of the two last games in the European Championship, he still showed performances of world class level which was also conceded by foreign critics. We can even state that the Munich player has never been in a better form and especially never been that consistent like he was in the last five months. Only one poor performance in the second half of the Bundesliga season when Kaiserslautern's Toppmöller twice fooled him. Magnificent performances in the European Cup in Lissabon, in Madrid and finally in the Glasgow final. Impressive that Maier even after a blunder never got nervous, remaining unimpressed. Sepp Maier belongs to those players who train more each day they get older. Like once Martin Lauer's gymnastics, Maier's gymnastics is also worth seeing. Sepp already before a game is sweaty. His world class is defined by his grasping a situation, his routine, his quick response and his strong nerves. Viktor Ponedjelnik, years ago the center forward of the Soviet national team, now chief editor of "Sowietski Sport", called Sepp Maier the best goalkeeper since Lev Yashin. Sepp Maier also stated that Yashin is his role model.

Franz Beckenbauer [Libero]

Former national team manager Sepp Herberger, who grew up with the leather ball and is part of the "business" since football is around (note: in Germany), ranks Beckenbauer in his own hierarchy of all world stars at the very top: "he belongs to the unmatched ones. Like Di Stéfano, like Pelé". During the 1966 World Cup the young Beckenbauer almost overnight became part of the world elite – and he managed to stay there ever since. In 100 international games he has proven his prowess, soon in a position which he had to invent for himself: the libero. In this role, Franz is regarded as the measure of all things. Many were benchmarked against him during the last ten years. But for all the standard was too high to reach. Almost all of those that have accused the Munich player of arrogance meanwhile have recognised that a tenacious battle will and commitment is hidden behind Beckenbauer's elegant playing style. Hardly likely that Bayern had managed to win the European Cup three consecutive times if it wasn't so. And hardly likely that the famous club from Munich would have managed to rally the Bundesliga in the second half of the season like they did. And also hardly likely that the national team would have managed to force the Czechoslovakians into extra-time if it wasn't so!

Rainer Bonhof [Midfielder]

It's the midfield where things must happen, where the decisive impetus must come from, where the unexpected ideas must be conceived. Our current ranking meets these requirements like almost never before. A midfielder of 'world class', which we haven't seen for a while, is now seen in Rainer Bonhof. In the 'international class' the

number of players has increased from five to seven and in the broad circle from four to seven! The Mönchengladbach all-rounder Bonhof, who is rated as 'international class' among the full backs already and whose versatility cannot be stressed hard enough, finally managed to reach a world class level during the European championship. The model athlete, who was playing as center forward in his youth and from time to time as left winger, blossoms the most when he is playing in midfield. This he has shown in his club and also the national team. Bonhof can mark and can be a driving force, he has power and stamina, is great at heading and hard in tackling, feared as a freekick-taker and known as a subtle corner-kick taker that can bend them with a real swerve. Some corner balls he swerves towards goal, some away from goal. You remember the European championship: the 2-2 against Yugoslavia (Dieter Müller) was preceded by a Bonhof-corner just like the 2-2 versus Czechoslovakia in the last second (Hölzenbein). With his attitude towards being a professional footballer, Bonhof should be able to maintain his position as 'world class' for many years.

Gerd Müller [Central Forward]

We've never seen this before: a player rated as 'world class' who was not even playing in the national team. Gerd Müller makes it happen. The decision was not an easy one: we had long debates over Müller's assessment. Finally the vote after assessing pros and cons barely leaned towards 'world class'. Reasoning: his strong form and his wonderful, priceless goals for Bayern in the Bundesliga and the European Cup, among them three goals against Real Madrid, one of them a super goal (1-0) in Munich in the style of Uwe Seeler and two goals against Benfica. And with a bombshell he said goodbye to this season which saw his great comeback by scoring five goals in the last game against Hertha BSC. Thereby he has now broken the 'sonic barrier' of 300 goals in the Bundesliga. Abroad, people cannot understand why he is not playing for Germany. Real Madrid manager Miljanic said: "Müller should be forced to play for Germany again."

December 1976

Introduction

There are things that become boring due to constant repetition. To our joy, this is not the case with our Rangliste of German football, which we publish twice a year. Our readers again and again confirmed their interest in this ranking. They know the difficulty in creating an objective assessment of a footballer's performance level over a longer period of time because unlike other sports in football one cannot measure the level of an athlete's performance in meters or seconds. Therefore we again expect to be criticised by some of our readers in some cases. This is simply the nature of things. But then again it is pleasant if a debate is stirred. Having said this, such debates must be led in a fair manner. And local patriotism should be left out of such a debate. Decisive in our assessment – as always – were not short peak performances but a solid consistent level over a longer period of time. Likewise players that have been injured for a longer period will not be included in our ranking. Example: the most unlucky player in this respect surely is Peter Nogly, who almost certainly would have been ranked as our no. 1 stopper if he hadn't been forced to pause for so long. The Hamburg player certainly would have been Helmut Schön's first choice for the national team, too. And it is absolutely possible that a player is ranked in two separate positional categories. Example: Karl-Heinz Rummenigge, who, when playing for his club, mostly was used on the left wing played very convincingly as a right winger for the national team. And it looks as if his future will be in that position.

The most heated debates always are caused by the term 'world class'. It would be ridiculous to dispute whether Franz Beckenbauer belongs into that category. But who actually is equal to him? Practically no one. To stress his special role among our footballers, we could have introduced a new category of 'super world class' especially for him. Although we try to be as strict as possible in our assessment, German football is not as devoid of class players as one might think. Apart from Beckenbauer we also listed Sepp Maier, Berti Vogts and Gerd Müller in the 'world class' level. Rainer Bonhof, who had a number of really great games in the first half of the season, still

failed to convince us over the complete five month period. He was the victim of an extremely marginal poll result and was thus 'degraded' from 'world class' to 'international class'.

World Class

Sepp Maier [Goalkeeper]

A mere ranking does not show how much actual difference there is between individual players: while Sepp Maier has defended his position as our no. 1 goalkeeper, his edge over Rudi Kargus has decreased. And the difference between 'world class' (Maier) and 'international class' (Kargus) is not as big as may be discerned by merely looking at the two terms. The ambitious Sepp does not tolerate other 'gods' next to him, but with Rudi Kargus, he has a good very relationship, especially since he is the ideal supplement of Maier, but tomorrow he might already catch up to Maier. Principally, Helmut Schön would be well advised to deploy Kargus more often during the next year with sight towards the 1978 World Cup in Argentina. Not only once in Istanbul or once in Cardiff. He should be interchanged regularly with Maier.

Berti Vogts [Full Back]

Our last ranking was published immediately after the European Championships. There was no full back rated 'world class' back then. For the first time in years the Mönchengladbach player Berti Vogts was not classified as 'world class' back in July. His poor form was one of the reasons why the national team failed to defend the European trophy. In the final Vogts played a 'classic' bad pass which led to the Czechoslovakians first goal. Hennes Weisweiler, who had discovered Berti and who had boosted him over ten years, conceded: "Yes, Berti was poor. But every player has the right to play badly one time. Berti will come back." Berti himself conceded without hesitation: "yes I was poor and I am partly to blame that we did not win the European championship." But that episode is over. Yesterday's news. Vogts managed to regain his former level, was a vital part of the Mönchengladbach team that established a new Bundesliga record in being unbeaten in 13 consecutive games from the start of the season and who conceded the fewest goals. Berti Vogts is the last of the 'old defender regime' of unyielding man-markers, the specialists of pure defense. After all he only once scored a goal for Germany in 75 games ... against Malta. But how valuable Vogts is, particularly for his club, was seen during the past few weeks. A class player is not only proving himself on the ball but also in the hearts and minds of his teammates. Admittedly Berti Vogts is also the last player who addresses his manager with "chief".

Franz Beckenbauer [Libero]

The number of available players for the position of libero is getting ever smaller. Actually peculiar because in Franz Beckenbauer the arguably best footballer in the world right now is playing this position as the ideal role model. Additionally, this is the position that many players name as their favorite position. But in fact it is not that easy to meet the demands of the modern libero. Of 'mere' sweepers, players who are fully occupied with their defensive task, we certainly have a great number. But a libero of class is expected to be a player that can conduct his teammates, who can stimulate the offensive actions of his team. Who, most of all, knows when he can surge forward without great risk, when he can support his midfield, when he can inspire the attack. A poor libero who has a bad judgment can actually weaken his team, a strong libero can act as an 'extra' player for his team. Whoever thinks that the libero is a position 'to rest' is fundamentally wrong. Especially in professional football of the highest level. Franz Beckenbauer has set the highest standards. Almost untouchable, but desirable. The Munich player is in the form of his life. But still he trains the football ABC every day which some may think is superfluous.

Gerd Müller [Central Forward]

Back in summer when we issued our last ranking, not everyone agreed with our assessment of Gerd Müller having been 'world class' despite not having played for the national team for two years. A level of 'world class' could only be proven in international games for the national team, as some readers argued. That was the stage where the true value of a player could be seen, the European Cup notwithstanding. The 'Bomber of the Nation' has confirmed during the last five months that he is rightfully assessed as 'world class'. He scored 19 goals in the Bundesliga, making him the no. 1 goalgetter again, five goals ahead of Jupp Heynckes, six ahead of Dieter Müller and eight ahead of Klaus Fischer. And add to that his priceless goals for Bayern in the European Cup and the World Club Cup: who would dare challenge Müller's ranking now? Even the black day in October does not change this, when Bayern lost 0-7 against FC Schalke 04 at home, with Klaus Fischer scoring four goals. Thus one has to regret that Gerd sticks to his decision of not playing for Germany anymore. The only event in which he would play for the German national team again would be a farewell game.

July 1977

Introduction

... the four games our senior national team played in South America against Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil and Mexico are reflected in our summer ranking. For example we rated the Hamburg player Kaltz and successor of Beckenbauer as 'world class' due to his performances in South America, Rüssmann made a giant leap into 'international class' and Fischer as well as Abramczik are on the brink of 'world class', but not quite yet. Some of our editors shared the opinion that both Schalke players are already to be rated as 'world class' and we are sure many readers will think the same.

World Class

Sepp Maier [Goalkeeper]

Although not everything went well in the European Cup competitions, German football still has a worldwide recognition. There are few positions in which we are as carefree as in the goalkeepers category. Here we are nearly ideally manned, from the national team down to the second division. Alone six goalkeepers were rated as 'international class' and Sepp Maier managed to defend his no. 1 position and the 'world class' grade. While it is possible that there have been doubts here and there about Maier in the everyday Bundesliga business – only the three relegated teams conceded more goals than Bayern – Maier mostly managed to prove his ability to concentrate, his strength of nerves and his world class in the international games.

Franz Beckenbauer & Manfred Kaltz [Liberos]

While Franz Beckenbauer still holds the no. 1 position among the world-class-rated players undisputedly, it was surprising how quickly a replacement for him was found in the national team. No assessment in our ranking has been as striking as that of Manfred Kaltz in the rank of 'world class'. This audacious decision of our editors was made after a long pondering not without concerns, but still well-founded. The concerns: Kaltz during all the years as a professional in the Bundesliga and in the European Cup has never played in the role of a libero, he only conquered this position at the very end of the season in altogether six games. Mind you, international games, but he was carried by a team that wanted to prove itself after Beckenbauer's goodbye. The pros: Manfred Kaltz has managed to impress in a completely unfamiliar position in an unfamiliar environment in South America instantly in a magnificent way, thus that his paramount predecessor Franz Beckenbauer overnight has not been missed at all. The taciturn tall man who was erstwhile discovered by Gerhard Heid in the North Baden's Neuhofen has justified Helmut Schön's dare to risk. One wonders how Hamburg in all those years never had the idea of using Kaltz as libero, the position he obviously is most suited to and where he attains his maximum.

Only few might remember that Manfred Kaltz at the very beginning of his 'international' career (namely in the DFB youth team) already played stopper and sweeper under manager Herbert Widmayer, together with Kargus, two players that have gone a long way together. Calmness, vision, coolness, good technique and dangerousness in offensive actions especially over the right wing cannot fully conceal his raw point: his left foot is pretty weak. But he is dogged, strong at heading and has the luck that he is now partnered in the national team by Rolf Rüssmann, a stopper who complements him ideally. That being said, of course Franz Beckenbauer is not 'forgotten'. His charisma and importance for German football is indelible. Therefore it was wise of Helmut Schön not to demand of Kaltz to copy Beckenbauer, to play like a second Beckenbauer. Kaltz does not copy Beckenbauer, he has his own style, not as glamorous and commanding, but he is already remarkably bold and assured. This assuredness he acquired as a full back. His most splendid game: how he neutralized Anderlecht's superstar Rensenbrink in the Cup Winners Cup final. One may not forget this when he will go through a weaker phase, because he will not be measured against Franz Beckenbauer but against his performances in South America and that was an all too short episode, unable to fend off the fuelling of the slightest doubts should they arise. Among the Bundesliga liberos Kaltz's position as no. 1 looks most clear, most likely Wittkamp, the seasoned one, could contest it, yet what speaks for Kaltz is his youth and thus the chance for a long-term development after the 1978 World Cup.

Allan Simonsen [Foreign Player]

Keegan and Simonsen were in a class of their own! That was the verdict of our Parisian colleague Rethacker after the European Cup final in Rome. The Dane's playfulness and wit, his workrate, his superb passes and his unrelenting morale again impressed the man of 'France Football' after Liverpool's 3-1 victory over Mönchengladbach. In many Bundesliga games Simonsen also was in a league of his own. Especially in the second half of the season the little will-o'-the-wisp, who looks like a dwarf, proved that he is a real man. When Mönchengladbach's attack was reduced to one man (after Jupp Heynckes' injury), Simonsen was boldly waging the struggle against the superior numbers of defenders all on his own. The witty dribble wizard didn't lose his bottle when he faced hardball markers that were a head taller than him. He also never gave up even when everything seemed to conspire against him, when he was hitting the post or barely missed the goal with his shots and headers. No surprise that Simonsen, who was the only Mönchengladbach player that was featured in all 34 Bundesliga games, appeared ten times in our "Team of the Week" which assured him also a place in our "Team of the Season".

December 1977

Introduction

Things that repeat itself involve the danger of getting boring after a while. The exception proves the rule. An exception is the Rangliste of German football, which is published semi-annually by 'kicker sportmagazin' and which is highly anticipated by our readers (and also by the active players!). We separate four categories: 1. World Class, 2. International class, 3. Broad circle, 4. considered. The players of the second Bundesliga are by default grouped into the last category because the standard of comparison does not allow us to group them in the three top categories. Moreover, in the fourth category players are ranked alphabetically while in the other categories the ranking mirrors a classification. For the top Players - whose ranking is of the highest interest to our Readers - next to the performances in the Bundesliga our reasoning also included the international performance tests against Finland (1-0), Italy (2-1), Switzerland (4-1) and Wales (1-1). Additionally to that, seven German teams started in European competitions (Mönchengladbach, Köln, Hamburg, Frankfurt, Bayern, Schalke and Braunschweig). Noticeable in this ranking is the absence of Franz Beckenbauer, the most illustrious name for many years. German football has been deprived of one exceptional phenomenon, just like our ranking...

World Class

Bernard Dietz [Full Back]

The story of the full back category this time is mostly that of two dynamic prototypes of modern full backs: Bernard Dietz and Berti Vogts. Especially Bernard Dietz is out of the ordinary. He was a late bloomer, never a call up in the DFB youth team or the juniors team. First cap in the B-team at the age of 26, six weeks later his first A cap. He literally forced himself on the national team due to his consistently convincing performances for MSV Duisburg. He was one of five rookies in the 1-0 away win against Malta in 1974. The other rookies back then were Körbel, Seliger, Nickel and Kostedde. Back then our spontaneous verdict was: "Dietz has seized his chance of being the successor of Paul Breitner one day. He played as if he belonged to the team for a long time. The fiery and fast Magro was under his total control. Also in the offensive he was very impressive." And already the next 'kicker' issue had Dietz on the cover with the headline "Dietz gets another chance". However he had to wait almost a full year for that second international game. It was the 1-0 victory in the Euro qualifier against Bulgaria which Helmut Schön dubbed "our best game since the World Cup". There, Dietz was among the best players and we observed: "Bernard Dietz acted so full of self-confidence as if this had not been his second but his 30th international game. He blended ideally into the team, a man of hot temper, his hot-blooded ways resembling Berti Vogts. His positioning is remarkable." Since that day Dietz only missed one of the next 22 international games and has soared to a world class level. In this last half-year he achieved the best average grade among all outfield players. He established a new Bundesliga record when he scored four goals against Bayern – as a full back! Dietz has set new standards. He is the real discovery since the 1974 World Cup.

Jürgen Grabowski [Midfielder]

Two players share the same birthday in July: Jürgen Grabowski turned 34 and Hansi Müller of Stuttgart only 21. Both do not belong to the national team roster. Grabowski retired from the national team after the 1974 World Cup, Hansi Müller so far only operates in the amateur national team and the B-team. The mere thought alone seems adventurous: both of them together for Germany in Argentina! The senior and the junior. Grabowski, the soul of Eintracht Frankfurt was always a man of inspiration, someone able of the unexpected. Because Grabowski is a player that can make a game take a dramatic turn, Helmut Schön contacted Grabowski repeatedly (both live quite closely). But Grabowski time and again declined. Reasoning: "I just had so much luck in 1974. After the defeat to East Germany I was already out of the team. Against Sweden I was subbed in near the end of the game, when the score was 2-2 and on the edge. I scored the 3-2 and thus stayed in the team and became world champion. You can hardly have any more luck than that and also you can't have a better way to go out than that." Moreover Grabowski added for consideration: "if I returned to the national team at this point, I would be under a strong mental pressure. All would expect me to repeat my performances for Frankfurt, which came about in a familiar Environment". Still, all this is a real shame!

Heinz Flohe [Midfielder]

Heinz Flohe finally became consistent in his performance level, certainly also a merit of his manager Hennes Weisweiler. Some months ago Helmut Schön said: "Actually I have anticipated Heinz Flohe's breakthrough for about five years." Everyone is glad that Heinz Flohe finally has been nurtured to show that kind of hardness which in football circles is described as "biting through". When Flohe is dribbling brilliantly around two opponents but is *not* trying to fool a third one, *then* he is world class. A forward that knows how Flohe is crossing the ball, that knows how he is taking corner kicks, that forward can score goals non-stop.

Allan Simonsen [Foreign Player]

In the poll of the “European Player of the Year” the Dane Simonsen won with a paper-thin lead over the Englishman Keegan. However in our ranking the two superstars among the Foreign Players in the Bundesliga are separated by a bigger margin. Simonsen – world class. Keegan ‘only’ international class. This assessment arguably is justified. While the Dane from Mönchengladbach shines as executor and provider, as fighter and as soloist, the new Hamburg player Keegan needed a long time for warming up. This certainly was not solely Keegan’s fault, as he met some reservations in Hamburg – yet in a ‘trade balance’ such handicaps must not be considered. Ultimately the commendable fighter Keegan showed that in the long run, class will win through anywhere!

July 1978

Introduction

... after World Cups our Rangliste traditionally is especially anticipated by our readers. Because this is when the standards are set in international football for the next four years. And ‘world class’ can only become apparent in comparison with other ‘world class’ players. Argentina was the springboard that the German elite players were expected to use. Yet Argentina also involved the danger for the chosen players to lose some of their image, to even get relegated one or two steps in recognition. All of us secretly hoped for a better upswing for our Bundesliga players yet instead the bygone World Cup brought us even more disappointment. What was already indicated in the disappointing faring of our club teams in the European Cup unfortunately was continued in the World Cup. It cannot be denied anymore: German top professional football is at the bottom of the valley. It is now imperative to do something about this quickly. Regarding our ranking, the sad occasion has come that for the first time we do not have a single player of ‘world class’ after a World Cup! In 1974 we had six in Maier, Breitner, Vogts, Beckenbauer, Müller and Hoeness. In 1970 we had also six in Vogts, Beckenbauer, Schnellinger, Overath, Seeler and Müller! The nomination of Schnellinger was an exception, because Germans that play abroad usually are not considered in our ranking. It’s the same today and will remain that way in the future. Simply because they evade our observation. With Schnellinger in Italy however, our Mexico staff had enough opportunities to examine him carefully and to form an opinion. In our last ranking we still had four players rated as ‘world class’ in Dietz, Grabowski, Flohe and the Dane Simonsen. This time it is only two foreign players who – after critical assessment – we awarded that highest grade: The Swede Hellström, goalkeeper of Kaiserslautern and the Englishman Kevin Keegan of Hamburg. Nevertheless, we should not look towards the future with depression. Although the level of ‘world class’ was not reached by German players, we have observed a number of promising new players in the categories below. It may look more joyful already in half a year!

World Class

Ronnie Hellström & Kevin Keegan [Foreign Players]

The Bundesliga still possesses players of world class, but unfortunately they are currently coming from abroad. In our last ranking the brilliant Mönchengladbach player Allan Simonsen received the grade of ‘world class’ and on top of that he was also voted “European Footballer of the Year”. This time however we had to demote the Dane one category below to ‘international class’. A long-winding injury threw Simonsen off the track and thus he was not able to link to his magnificent performances of last year. Instead, for the first time Ronnie Hellström and Kevin Keegan were rated as ‘world class’. The Kaiserslautern goalkeeper appeared in almost all ‘Best XI’ issued the world over after the World Cup. So much the Viking from the Palatinate managed to impress the international experts, although the World Cup was over for Sweden already after the first round. Kevin Keegan needed a surprisingly long time for warming up in Hamburg. But in the last six months he managed to assert himself as the supreme personality on the pitch and he also shone playing for England.

December 1978

Introduction

The unsatisfactory performances of the national team in the World Cup in Argentina bore the impress on our last ranking in July. For the first time after a World Cup we could not award the grade 'world class' to a German player. Only the two foreign players Hellström and Keegan sat enthroned on the top. We had hoped that five months later our ranking would look a tad more pleasant. Yet unfortunately with regards to German players again we have to report negatively. The only one remaining from all Bundesliga players is the Englishman Keegan who has shown sublime performances for Hamburg and has set the standard for the others. It would however be wrong to talk more negatively about German football than it would actually deserve. Instead we have observed a change that is indicated. A change that will also affect Jupp Derwall in rebuilding the national team. Real top teams, like we have had for many years in Bayern München and Borussia Mönchengladbach are currently lacking in the Bundesliga. This of course also has a negative effect on our ranking. Of course there have been quite some debates whether Karl-Heinz Rummenigge, Bernard Dietz or Hansi Müller warrant a place in the highest category of 'world class'. Our reasoning why we left them in the category of 'international class' can be seen in our commentary.

World Class

Kevin Keegan [Foreign Player]

... contrary to Belgium we cannot talk of a dominance of foreign players in our highest division. Apart from the year 1978, when Kevin Keegan burst all his limits and soared to being the all commanding man on German football pitches. Keegan – the total centerpiece of Hamburg, Hamburg on the way to the top: a logical consequence of the freedom that this absolute whiz finally is granted by Hamburg. Kevin Keegan, the only player who fully deserved the grade 'world class' in our ranking without any constraints.

July 1979

Introduction

It is unfortunate that we have to concede that for the third consecutive ranking we have not a single German player in the category of 'world class'. About that practically everyone in our meeting agreed rather quickly. We also agreed that the only player who deserved the attribute of 'world class' was the paramount Englishman Kevin Keegan of the German football champion Hamburg, a non-German. The absolute star not only of the second half of the season but of the complete season.

World Class

Kevin Keegan [Foreign Player]

The ranking of foreign players in German clubs is without a doubt the jewellery box of the Bundesliga. Here we find not only the only player of world class in the English superstar Kevin Keegan but also the number of players in the category of 'international class' is the highest in all of our Rangliste. In our winter ranking only Kaiserslautern's goalkeeper Ronnie Hellström warranted a place in that category of 'international class'. That we now have a further six players added to it only allows one conclusion: as the race for the championship was finishing, the fight against relegation and the fight for a place in the UEFA Cup, our clubs could especially rely on their foreign cracks. The diamond among these high-carat gems is doubtlessly Kevin Keegan from Liverpool. No grading was so uncontested in the many hours that our editorial team meeting lasted as Keegan's grading as 'world class'. For the 28-year old Englishman this season was a thorough act of unleashing from his chains.

He finally was accepted by his teammates as the centerpiece of Hamburg and thereby rose to being the absolute exceptional phenomenon of the Bundesliga, the outstanding player on German football pitches.

December 1979

Introduction

There was only one Bundesliga player in our July ranking who we could grade as 'world class' which was a little bit depressing. On top of it, that sole Bundesliga player of 'world class' was a foreign player, namely the formidable Kevin Keegan of Hamburg. All the more pleasant to note an upswing during the past five months in German football. In four international games and 36 European Cup games in that period that tremendous upswing was also made clear internationally. Of the seven Bundesliga clubs that started in the European competitions six managed to reach the quarterfinal. A new, almost unbelievable record, that was greatly recognized abroad. Hence naturally there's a lot of movement within our ranking and this time we can also show some movement in the top categories – certainly to your delight. Altogether we can celebrate five players of 'world class'! In our editorial meeting it was unanimously agreed that Manfred Kaltz, Paul Breitner and Karl-Heinz Rummenigge have absolutely deserved a 'place in the sun'. However some doubts arose regarding the star of our last ranking, Kevin Keegan. The Englishman needed quite some time to warm-up this season, but then he improved enormously, proving his top class in the national team and in the international games for Hamburg. Next to him a second foreign player stepped into the spotlight. The Korean Cha Bum-Kun, who was not only the darling of the fans in Frankfurt. The exotic player, who is athletic, hard-shooting and dangerous at heading to the surprise of many held his own ground instantly in the "chalybeate bath" of the Bundesliga. Doubtlessly, next to Kaltz, Breitner and Rummenigge it was Keegan and Cha who were the highlights of the first half of the Bundesliga season. Together with the German trio they formed a bright-shining quintet of 'world class' level.

World Class

Manfred Kaltz [Full Back]

If only the Bundesliga clubs were as well equipped as they are with full backs. The supply in this position is enormous, the quality splendid, no less than two dozens of side backs are represented in our ranking, seven of them in the upper regions, five more than in our last ranking. The flagship among them is Manfred Kaltz. In his case one could even debate whether he could be ranked among the outside rights as well. But his main job still is that of a right back, only secondarily is he meant to foray into the opposing half. From his onrushing on the right side not only his club Hamburg is benefitting enormously but also the national team. Kaltz is even responsible for a new tactical trend in the Bundesliga: his performances lead to many opposing teams sacrificing a midfield player in order to constrain his area of operation. Still, the Hamburger played cat-and-mouse with his opponents. He doubtlessly deserves the grade of 'world class'.

Paul Breitner [Midfielder]

For years the opinion reigned that the progress of football had left out the midfield since the famous triumvirate Beckenbauer/Overath/Netzer had resigned and the Mönchengladbach players Bonhof and Stielike went to Spain. This opinion was still heard in the recent past, especially since the 'foreigners' Bonhof and Stielike still were a vital part of the national team and Flohe's international career ended abruptly after Argentina 1978 and his club career ended tragically in Munich, while Rummenigge was moving ever more out of the midfield to a pure attacking role and Hansi Müller after a great start did not develop as we had hoped. One even concluded that the time of the midfield pillars was over anyhow. Probably fear was the judge in that case as unexpectedly Paul Breitner showed a level of world class, mind you not as a fighter and runner which he already was but as a real player, which we didn't see of him sufficiently before. This Breitner is indeed the best Breitner there has ever been, much more mature and effective than the world class full back.

Athletic as ever but by no means not only as a stimulator and workhorse but as the kind of player he longed to be for so long: Paul has become a real conductor. He hits dream passes like the old playmakers did, fights, bullwhips his teammates but knows how to measure this well. This excellent overall impression is not changed by the less impressive performances in Belgrade and Braunschweig. What a pity that Paul has closed the door to the national team, which once again was wide open. We could have used him very well against Turkey.

Karl-Heinz Rummenigge [Central Forward]

Let us celebrate! For three years we lacked a central forward of 'world class'. Now finally Karl-Heinz Rummenigge managed to step into this territory! You surely won't have to think long about who was the last player we ranked that highly: It was Gerd Müller, "the Bomber of the Nation", who scored 68 goals in 62 games for Germany and who contributed in a decisive way with his goals and his instinct to Bayern München having become the most successful club. Gerd was unique. Someone like him, the prototype of a center forward, will not be seen again in this century. His successor in the level of 'world class' who in his club actually is not his successor – there, Dieter Hoeness was bought to play in that position, which we will deal with later – is a completely different kind of player. The Bavarian from Lippstadt embodies the modern playful central forward, who could just as well be listed among the two winger positions or among the offensive midfielders.

Rummenigge's close control, his dribbling art, his body swerves look fascinating. In the last few weeks he brought this technique to perfection. What he lacked was scoring goals. And that's what a forward is generally measured by. In October still in the home game against Köln (1-2) he missed several chances after spectacular solos. Four, five times did he face Schumacher all alone and each time he failed to score. Even friend Breitner criticized him harshly: "As an executor he is a failure". This peeved the self-critical Rummenigge who started to study his failures in front of the goal intensively using video recordings. "Something like that shall never again happen" he swore. And henceforth he not only scored for the national team but also for his club Bayern.

Cha Bum-Kun & Kevin Keegan [Foreign Players]

While a number of players in the category of 'foreigners' were downgraded in comparison to our summer ranking (especially the category 'international class' was halved thus that we're only left with three players there), generally we can attest that due to the still high number of foreign players in the top three categories that these stars are by and large worth their money. There are even two players categorized as 'world class' this time. In the first place the meteoric rise as 'man of the season' of the South Korean Cha Bum-Kun is mirrored. Our staff decided to classify the 26-year old East Asian as 'world class', breaking a 'holy rule' that a player in that category and also 'international class' has to prove himself particularly for the national team. For that however Cha during the last months had no possibility. His performances in the Bundesliga and in the UEFA Cup however were so impressive that we decided to make an exception this time. Yet we did not only classify Cha as 'world class', on top of that we also ranked him ahead of last year's superstar Kevin Keegan. Mirrored was the circumstance that Keegan needed a considerably long time to reach his usual level and we honored Cha as the no. 1 foreign player because the Korean managed to set himself apart under difficult circumstances.