

**July 1980**

## **World Class**

### **Introduction**

... compared to our winter rating of the five players we rated 'world class' only Breitner and Rummenigge could be rated 'world class' again this summer. Manfred Kaltz did not manage to remain in this highest category as he did not keep up the highest and consistent performance level needed for a world class rating in the games for Hamburg, not in the Bundesliga and neither in the European Cup. Next to Kaltz, also Kevin Keegan and Bum Kun Cha had to be relegated from world class to international class. The Englishman in his games for Hamburg but also in his games for the national team in the Euro in Italy had lost a good amount of the form which made him the star of the Bundesliga last year. Also Frankfurt's Korean star was by a long shot not as efficient and successful as in the first half of the season. This may also be explained because defenders figured out much better how to contain Bum Kun Cha.

Thus only Paul Breitner and Karl-Heinz Rummenigge remained 'world class' and no new player was able to reach this category. For the two Bayern players, their performances for their club already were sufficient to remain world class. There is no stronger pair of players in the Bundesliga. Unfortunately the two cannot repeat their strong performances in the national team together because Breitner does not want to play for Germany any more.

In Italy, Rummenigge did miss his club partner a lot. As the ace of the Bundesliga, Rummenigge already was sure to be rated 'world class' before the European championship. He himself was not entirely satisfied with his performance in Italy since he did not reach his highest possible level there, yet still was voted best player of the tournament. Arguably there is no objection possible in his rating as 'world class'.

### **Paul Breitner [Midfielder]**

The midfield .... the soul of the game. If German football managed to get over the stagnation of its football after the era of Beckenbauer, Netzer, Overath and Müller was over, then it is our midfield which did play a big part in getting over that stagnation. After the victory of Rome we were able to name two players from our four-man midfield: Bernd Schuster and Hans-Peter Briegel. Yet in that formation the best player we have in that position was missing, the only player in that position who we rate as 'world class': Paul Breitner.

It doesn't bear contemplating what could have been if Paul the Great would have chosen to leave his exile and play for Germany again. But that is just a dream. Breitner himself seems to feel well in the role of the outsider. He is now at the peak of his maturity and of his personal success since the World Cup victory and the European Cup victories with Bayern are mostly credited to Beckenbauer, Müller and Maier, not Breitner: this championship in 1979-80 with Bayern, it was "his" championship. Meanwhile Breitner also was the player who made the "team of the week" most often, he is someone who has learned how to control the space and the pace, he is captain and spokesman of his team, mostly though he is the instigator with a still adamant ambition, a professional through and through. If Breitner didn't have his "Derwall complex", he could have had become the King of European football in 1980. But without national team action and no European Cup win this is not possible.

### **Karl-Heinz Rummenigge [Central Forward]**

The star of the Bundesliga, the player who received most accolades in this season has remained in the world class category in a sovereign way. There was no debate whatsoever about his rating. The only debate we had was about which position to classify him in. The Bayern player from Lippstadt could have been placed in any offensive category. We could have listed him in the midfield category, as central forward, as outside left and outside right. That's how versatile he is. Playing for Bayern, he has all liberties in the offensive half of the game and hardly any defensive duties. Jupp Derwall also allowed Rummenigge this freedom in the national team and it was a wise decision. Rummenigge is not a center forward of old, like Uwe Seeler and Gerd Müller or today Klaus Fischer, Dieter Müller or Horst Hrubesch.

He is a wizard of dribbling, someone who can stick the ball at his feet, who can shield the ball in a cunning way and he is at his best when he can attack coming from a deep position, at his most dangerous when the ball is passed to him so that he can pierce the gaps in a defense. In his club he has the ideal partner in Paul Breitner, two players with a blind understanding, be it in 1-2s or when addressing passes. Breitner knows about Rummenigge's moves even before Rummenigge starts to move. Understandable that Rummenigge regrets Breitner's decision not to play for Germany. What Rummenigge lacked in the previous season was cold-bloodedness in front of the goal. He has eradicated this only weakness that he had because he analysed his mistakes in a self-critical way and worked on that weakness. To the 11 goals he scored in the first half of the season he now added 15 goals in the second half and became top scorer for the first time with 26 goals scored. It is this title that he enjoys almost as much as winning the German championship for the first time this year.

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#### **Introduction**

... of course in every ranking that we published the interest focused mostly on the 'world class' category. In our last ranking we only rated two players in that category: Karl-Heinz Rummenigge and Paul Breitner. We rated both of them 'world class' in our newest ranking, as well but also added Toni Schumacher, Hans-Peter Briegel and Bruno Pezzey while Manfred Kaltz and Hansi Müller are very close to it.

#### **Harald Schumacher [Goalkeeper]**

"If I only had a goalkeeper like him, then I wouldn't have to worry that much about qualifying for the World Cup..." is what Austrian manager Karl Stotz said after watching Schumacher playing for Germany in Sofia against Bulgaria. Germany won that game and it was mostly due to Harald Schumacher. Praise from the opponent always outweighs praise from your own folks. And thus we can absolutely claim that Germany again has a keeper of world class and his name is Harald Schumacher of Köln. Surely, he is not yet a Sepp Maier but he is on the best way of becoming a comparable authority and character like the former Bayern keeper. Schumacher managed a uncommonly fast ripening process during the last six months. For the Euro in Italy he was considered a fill-in but already then he played in a sovereign manner and increased the distance between himself and talents like Eike Immel and Walter Junghans. The Bundesliga gave him the last finishing touches when his club Köln was in trouble it was Schumacher that became the great support. His statement back then: "I even have to play libero at our club" clearly show where his strengths are: he is fully concentrated, anticipates everything and cannot be surprised. The space between the goalline and the penalty spot is his territory. Good positioning on the line, knows immediately when he has to leave his goal, sober without showboating antics. In short: the perfect goalkeeper, if, yes if he wouldn't sometimes had the devil in him.

#### **Hans-Peter Briegel [Stopper]**

Over the course of the year we always rated Briegel as "international class" but by the end of the year the majority of our writers were now sure he had to be rated in the highest category. Briegel, the former 'muscle man' from Kaiserslautern who was more known for his athletic abilities than his football skills by now has mastered the ABC of football in such a high degree that he even managed to oust the national team's stopper Karlheinz Förster from the first place in this, his strongest position. And he managed this despite him not being able to show what he has to offer as stopper for the national team. His performances for his club already were sufficient to rate him as a stopper of world class. How glad Jupp Derwall can feel for having two such highly-rated players available for the stopper role!

## **Paul Breitner [Midfielder]**

... compared to our last ranking we remain with one world class midfielder, the best players are the same as in summer: Breitner, Müller, Magath, Briegel. The midfield has stabilized, only Bernd Schuster left this group since he is now playing for Barcelona in Spain. Paul Breitner has now managed the first position in the midfield category for a third successive time and in each of the last three rankings we classified him as 'world class'. There is no other player that can dictate the rhythm and the direction of a game (also off the pitch!) like the captain of the German champion Bayern München. No one oozes such charisma and influences his teammates like Breitner. This was especially notable when he missed games due to injury this last half of the season, which happened three times. Breitner now has a reputation as a superstar like before only Uwe Seeler and Franz Beckenbauer.

## **Karl-Heinz Rummenigge [Central Forward]**

In the category of the central forwards we can present you the one player whose rating as 'world class' is above any doubt: Karl-Heinz Rummenigge! It was a year ago that Kalle stated in an interview with "kicker": "I can play much better than what I play now". Well, meanwhile it looks as if he has reached the peak of his performance level. Although Rummenigge is still not satisfied with himself as he stated that he can only be satisfied when he manages to convert 80 percent of goal chances (now he claims to be at 60 percent in his own count).

This statement comes from a professional who is collecting silverware like few before him: German Footballer of the Year, best player of the European championship, Man of the Year, several times player of the month (as voted by the team captains of the Bundesliga clubs) ... there really was never much doubt that "our superstar" would also be voted European Footballer of the Year. Rummenigge is not a central forward of old, not someone who is lurking in the box for his chances like Gerd Müller was. This exceptionally gifted technical player has all liberties to roam wherever he likes, he is at home in any offensive position, be it offensive midfielder or in the center of attack or on the wings. We could have classified him in four separate positions.

## **Bruno Pezzey [Foreign player]**

After a while there is foreign company for our German world class players! With Bruno Pezzey a man managed to enter this circle whose classification was never in any doubt.

After the tall Austrian only played in 14 games last season (the reasons are well known...) he managed to come up trumps in the first half of this season. Not only his supremacy as defensive organisator but most of all his power in offensive actions made the libero one of the most sought-after players in European football. Jupp Derwall is so fond of the Austrian that he recently said: "I would take him immediately if I could". And many in Germany think the same.

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#### **Introduction**

...after we had rated five players as 'world class' in our last ranking - Harald Schumacher, Hans-Peter Briegel, Paul Breitner, Karl-Heinz Rummenigge and Bruno Pezzey - this time we only rated four players in this category. Briegel from Kaiserslautern could not keep up his sublime form of the first half of the season and also he hardly ever was deployed as a stopper, the role in which we classed him as 'world class'. Instead he now rose in the ranks of the full backs to the first position in 'international class', ahead of Manfred Kaltz and Bernard Dietz.

## **Harald Schumacher [Goalkeeper]**

Harald 'Toni' Schumacher without a doubt has been the 'king' among German goalkeepers over the last six months and even among his competitors there is no one who would deny that. He was both in the national team and for his club Köln very consistent, showing high class performances non-stop and he was one of the most important pillars in the teams of Jupp Derwall and Rinus Michels. Schumacher has improved his positioning on the goalline in comparison to the past couple of years and was an absolutely calming influence in defense. His hot temper however sometimes breaks out but when push comes to shove, one can rely on Toni. Hence there was no question about it in our editorial team: Schumacher is world class!

## **Paul Breitner [Midfielder]**

... outranking all other midfielders once more is Paul Breitner who we classified as 'world class' for the fourth successive time. Surely, Paul did have some lows in the second part of the season, for example during the icy winter months, but how he managed to get out of that low - and with him, that of his club - deserves unshared appreciation. Regarding morale and attitude nobody can compare to him. The ability to inspire a whole team, the ability to decide a game almost on his own - these are qualities which make him stand above the rest. With the motivation of the 1982 World Cup in his beloved Spain in view, Breitner will hardly allow to get pushed from his throne as Germany's no. 1 midfielder by anyone.

## **Karl-Heinz Rummenigge [Central Forward]**

The 'shooting match' of the two top scorers Karl-Heinz Rummenigge and Manfred Burgsmüller was arguably the most thrilling duel of the Bundesliga. Similar to Bayern trailing Hamburg by three points during the season, Burgsmüller once even had scored nine goals more than Rummenigge and still he was caught by his rival on the finishing line. True, with the help of his teammates Rummenigge scored seven goals in the last three games of the season while Burgsmüller didn't score a single goal. Now then, we are well equipped regards to central forwards. The fine distinction to the center forwards is noticeable: These 'tanks and bombers' were lurking for crosses and through balls, were positioned in the center, were using head and feet: Uwe Seeler and Gerd Müller were like that. Our successful central forwards of today have a more broad area of operation. They expand their reach to the neighbourhood of their position. Burgsmüller is coming from midfield, Rummenigge from the right wing. 'Kalle' especially could be categorized in every offensive position. That's how modern football goes.

But even our super-fast, multi-variant goalgetter no. 1, now even captain of the national team, had to learn to wait: he went through a low phase between the 13th and 20th round when he failed to score a single goal. This phase started at the end of the first half of the season, spanned the Mini World Cup in Montevideo and the time when Bayern struggled and everything looked determined for a championship of Hamburg. But then the breakthrough! Rummenigge pushed through his proposal: Breitner (and not Beckenbauer) back to the national team. It was a double-dealing of Bayern's superstars and it bore fruits. Not everything worked. The European Cup remained in England, but Rummenigge scored his goals here as well and in the national team and most of all in the Bundesliga. There were goals among it of which people spoke of for days, for many observers the goal scored in duet with Paul Breitner was the goal of the year.

## **Bruno Pezzey [Foreign player]**

What has happened to the foreign players in the Bundesliga? For years foreign players were the crown jewels of the Bundesliga as no other category could show off 'world class' and 'international class' ratings as often as this one. In our summer ranking of 1979 there were Kevin Keegan (world class) as well as Buljan, Hellström, Oblak, Pezzey, Popivoda and Jara (all 'international class') - seven players in the two highest categories.

In Winter 1979 there were Keegan and Cha (both 'world class') as well as Buljan, Hellström and Pezzey - five players in the highest categories. While no foreign player was rated 'world class' in the summer of 1980, there were still six players rated 'international class' (Keegan, Pezzey, Woodcock, Jara, Cha and Hellström). But since then things are going downhill for the foreign players. Half a year ago only Pezzey ('world class') as well as Hellström and Jara were rated in the two highest categories.

And this time, our editorial team in fact only rated two players in these categories: Frankfurt's Bruno Pezzey as 'world class' and the reliable Ronnie Hellström, a regular in the 'international class' category. Pezzey's rating as 'world class' again was absolutely undisputed, mirroring his sublime performances for Frankfurt and the Austrian national team equally.

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#### **Harald Schumacher [Goalkeeper]**

Years ago Muhammad Ali said of himself "I am the Greatest". Harald Schumacher has said something similar these days. Self-confident, casual, loose - a man full of self-confidence! He is convinced of himself. We want to and we have to concur. In the Bundesliga, Toni really is "the greatest" among goalkeepers. His performances in the national team and for his club Köln have caused us to rank him in the category of 'world class'. Presently Schumacher has no competition in the Bundesliga. The goalkeeper of Köln distinguished himself with his level of consistency in the Bundesliga, he almost always was rated among the best players of his team, leading his teammates by example. Not without reason did Schumacher save three of the five penalties against his team! But also national team manager Jupp Derwall was rejoicing in Schumacher's performances. Without any discussion, Schumacher today is considered peerless as the national team's no. 1 goalkeeper. Toni also is counted as a trump card for Germany in the World Cup in Spain. He didn't have a single weak performance for the national team this season so far.

#### **Manfred Kaltz [Full Back]**

The surprises coming from Hamburg go on and on: Manfred Kaltz for example stated recently that he is flirting with the libero position "in his old age" if Beckenbauer would retire by the end of the season. Hieronymus will have been startled by that statement. But there is also manager Ernst Happel under whom Kaltz again rose to the category of 'world class'. The last time we ranked him there was in December 1979, Kaltz even had slipped to second place among the full backs in summer 1981 behind Hans-Peter Briegel. After 18 months the Hamburg player has made it again thanks to constantly good performances for the national team, where he also stood out as a successful goalscorer, and on the international level of the UEFA Cup. In view of the World Cup next year in Spain everyone will take note of the distinctly better performances of Kaltz with satisfaction. His urge to join the attack has made Kaltz even our best right winger (in disguise). Anybody that once has studied Kaltz's way of movement closely will have assessed that whenever Kaltz is joining the attack, he fully acts like a forward without the bumpiness that defenders usually show when they go forward. We must also mention that Kaltz is ranked as the no. 1 right back in all European and Overseas rankings. What Kaltz and the second-ranked Briegel share is that whenever they move forward, they degrade 'their' forwards to defenders, as suddenly the forwards have to chase the defenders.

#### **Karl-Heinz Rummenigge [Outside Right]**

He shows as much on the right wing as on the left side, in central attack or in offensive midfield. We could have easily ranked him 'world class' in all of these positions: Karl-Heinz Rummenigge, the superstar of the Bundesliga. We were content with ranking the captain of the national team in the highest category there is as central forward and outside right, a position where he was 'only' ranked as 'international class' last summer. The man from Lippstadt has become a great personality playing for Bayern München and is setting the highest standards. When the allrounder is coming from the right wing, when he has more space, his art of dribbling and his elegant ball control are captivating. Rummenigge's crosses are 'pure candy' for his teammates Dieter Hoeness (Bayern) and Klaus Fischer or Horst Hrubesch (Germany).

## **Karl-Heinz Rummenigge [Central Forward]**

The other central forwards of the Bundesliga should actually go green with envy. Or they have accepted it as irrevocable fact that for years the allround forward Karl-Heinz Rummenigge is stealing the show, relegating them to second place. The exceptional forward who feels like he is in the best form of his life (as he recently said to 'kicker') would even look better if he would convert his goal chances more optimal. This is the only thing he lacks a bit right now. 7 goals in the Bundesliga is actually not enough for a player like him. Instead, he bagged many goals playing for the national team, outranking Klaus Fischer and Horst Hrubesch considerably.

## **Bruno Pezzey [Foreign player]**

The changes in the assessment of the category 'foreign players' by nature are markedly. Every year players come and go like last summer Jara and Nastase (left the league) while newcomers like Six and Bastrup were new entries. The king of this category remains Bruno Pezzey. The libero of Eintracht Frankfurt and of the Austrian national team was part of the teams that qualified for the next rounds of the European Cup and the World Cup in Spain. The tall Bruno played a huge part in these accomplishments. In the Bundesliga no other player in that position appears as dynamic as him. Bayern München knew what they wanted but the reaction from Eintracht Frankfurt is well-known. This Bruno Pezzey has become a symbolic figure for the club from the River Main. The future will belong to Eintracht if Pezzey can lead the talents Falkenmayer, Anthes and soon also Sievers and Trieb. While Pezzey confirmed his ranking as 'world class' in immaculate fashion, from the six players we ranked behind him last summer only two remained, namely Hintermaier and Cha. The previous no. 2, Hellström, was set back due to an injury.

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... four years ago after the World Cup in Argentina it occurred for the first time that we did not class a single player as 'world class'. The lacking performances in Argentina are certainly still in everyone's memory. Only two foreigners (Hellström and Keegan) were reigning supremely in the highest level back then. Now, after the shameful performances in Spain in the first round, it looked as if there was another failure on the horizon. Thankfully our team boosted its level over the course of the tournament. Eventually the two players that played most consistently over the tournament were classified as 'world class', confirming the high performance level that they showed for their clubs: Karlheinz Förster and Pierre Littbarski. On a less positive note, Rummenigge slipping down shows the difficulty in creating such a ranking but at the same time the criteria by which we measured the players. For this ranking, the performances during the last six months are exclusively looked at. And in this period, the Munich player - also due to his injuries - could not reach his true level and was not sufficiently consistent.

## **Karlheinz Förster [Stopper]**

The best Förster there ever was: that was Karlheinz Förster during the World Cup. The dread of every center forward. Only the best of the '82 World Cup, Rossi, once managed to score against him. And even then the guilt was not even half on Förster's side. His goalkeeper had a bigger share in that. The younger Förster has been our number one stopper for quite some time now. But this high he has never been categorised, he has never been the number one in his position by such a big margin as today. Behind him in our last ranking we classified Hans-Peter Briegel but he did not play as stopper anymore during the second part of the season, only nominally in few occasions. The second place is now reserved for Rolf Rüssmann. Next to the captain of our Junior World champions - Ralf Loose - he has confirmed his reliability and great strength at heading and had a big share in Dortmund reaching the UEFA Cup this season. Rüssmann brings back memories. During the last World Cup in Argentina he was our stopper and Förster the stopper of our amateur national team, which was third in the 1978 European championships in Athens. For Förster the 1978 World Cup was too early.

We remember being asked by a DFB official who the blond young man was, to which we answered: "our stopper of the future, soon to be our no. 1". And indeed: Karlheinz Förster has managed to fully meet all the expectations, and these were high expectations. The boy from Odenwald is a true student of the Waldhof school. His youth coach Kobberger put the first touches on him. Kobberger especially valued Förster's total commitment on the pitch, in training and even in his sparetime. The role of stopper is not an appealing job, for getting that much out of this position, a real man is needed. And at the same time he's a fine chap. Tough, yes, but not tougher against others than he is against himself. Förster has a fast acceleration and over the course of a game, his grip on his opponents gets ever firmer. That his impact decreases when he goes forward is well known. But for a stopper who has a far more important job on the pitch, this is only a sidenote since he is doing so well in his actual task.

### **Pierre Littbarski [Outside Right]**

The smallest man is the greatest to us! There was only little debate in our editorial staff regarding his classification as 'world class'. Too definite and obvious is his edge in terms of witty playfulness, understanding of the game and his qualities as an executor over all other German forwards. The 1982 World Cup, for many a personal disaster, made him a winner. He assisted six goals of our national team, two he scored himself. His way of playing always served his team, his cunning dribbling and his feared shots made him the horror of defenses, often cutting through them like a knife through butter. Decisive for his classification however also is his maturity as a man. In this respect the 22-year old Littbarski was ahead of many of his older teammates. He was the first one that faced the press after the disaster against Algeria. He was the one consoling Uli Stielike and Didier Six after the misses in the penalty shoot-out. He was the one who admitted that he was not strong enough in the World Cup final. Altogether, a super half-year for the native Berliner, who for the first time also left Karl-Heinz Rummenigge behind.

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Nothing is as steady as change. This dictum is also applicable for our ranking. This time especially regarding our 'world class' category, which naturally attracts the biggest interest of our readers. In summer we had only classified two players in that category in Karlheinz Förster and Pierre Littbarski. Both of them managed to shine brightly despite the overall shadow of the World Cup while Karl-Heinz Rummenigge, Harald Schumacher and Paul Breitner had to make do with being ranked as 'international class'. Especially in the case of Rummenigge, as we expected, did we receive many protest letters from our readers. He had suffered from a half year full of bad luck, just could not reach his normal performance level which he usually does due to his enormous talents. And that's the way it is with our ranking that we only count what a player actually accomplished on the pitch. During the last half year - synonymous with the first half of the season - it eventuated what was to be expected: 'Kalle' conquered back his place in the sun, he is now listed both in the central forwards and wingers categories as 'world class'. Along with him, also Schumacher and Breitner came back, while Karlheinz Förster, the German footballer of the year, and Pierre Littbarski slipped down to 'international class'.

### **Harald Schumacher [Goalkeeper]**

Harald 'Toni' Schumacher made it again. After he had "only" been ranked as 'international class' in our last ranking, which also incorporated the World Cup in Spain, we had to rank him in the 'world class' category again this time. Schumacher, our national team goalie, was in absolute top shape playing for Köln as well as Jupp Derwall's team. He never let his teammates down, especially when it mattered, he was on the spot! The Köln goalkeeper suffered a long time from the bad publicity about him after the World Cup, something he brought about himself and which lasted for months. Still he proved to be strong-nerved when it mattered, so that even a big French paper, which had criticised Schumacher massively after the Battiston incident, acknowledged that "Schumacher may not be a good character, but in any case he is currently the world's best goalkeeper." Schumacher meanwhile certainly is his old self again. Each weekend he demonstrates his absolute class.

With his age of 28 he now is at the peak of his powers. Behind Schumacher we have ranked three goalkeepers as 'international class' but all of them will have a hard time ousting Schumacher for good.

### **Paul Breitner [Offensive Midfielder]**

They are the centerpiece of the game, they are the control center of their team. When they fail, nothing works: the offensive midfield players are expected to combine all virtues of a professional footballer: technique and combat power, inventiveness and playfulness, pace and shooting. No wonder that they are usually traded for more money than their colleagues of the defensive section. Usually as much money as the goalgetters. Moreover, additionally to their already mentioned abilities they also are expected to score goals themselves regularly. A glance at the list of the top scorers proves it. At every possibility opportunity they are expected to get close to the goal, to try to score themselves. Shots from outside the box have to be part of their repertoire anyway. Offensive midfielders and central forwards - these two positions in our ranking - are very often intertwined in modern football. The most fitting example for this is Manfred Burgsmüller. But let us first address the number one. Paul Breitner has reappeared in the category of 'world class' after an absence of one year. Whether his addition to the national team was a benefit remains controversial, whereas his value for Bayern München is inestimable. Not to mention the impact of the Breitner-Rummenigge duo, which is peerless, Paul is the "spiritual centerpiece" of his team. When things are not going well, it is Breitner who is hitching up the sleeves, the one who is instigating his teammates. Five goals in the first half of the season (two penalties) prove his shooting prowess along his general offensive prowess. Bayern is right now trying to persuade Breitner to continue for another year. Bayern München without Breitner at the helm right now is inconceivable.

### **Karl-Heinz Rummenigge [Central Forward]**

While our last ranking suffered from a lack of perspective regarding central forwards, this time we can look into the future more optimistically. Behind Karl-Heinz Rummenigge, who after classy performances in the first half of the Bundesliga season again moved back to the 'world class' category, two young players established themselves in the 'international class' that played in the second division last season (Völlner) or who were not even assessed at all (Milewski).

### **Karl-Heinz Rummenigge [Winger]**

.... Karl-Heinz Rummenigge has ousted Pierre Littbarski this time, regaining his world class form distinctly and without any question marks just like Toni Schumacher and Paul Breitner regained their world class form. No one will aruably doubt this. Pierre Littbarski was burdened with tasks the 22-year old young father could hardly cope with: he was active for his club, for the U 21 team and in the World Cup.

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...Felix Magath, the great playmaker of the European Cup winner Hamburg and the scorer of the 'golden goal' in Athens, for the first time has managed to be ranked in the 'world class' category, as did 'newcomer' Jean-Marie Pfaff, the goalkeeper of the Belgian national team. Our national team goalkeeper Harald Schumacher remained in the highest category while Stuttgart's stopper Karlheinz Förster had a comeback after a pause of half a year. Thus four players were rated as 'world class' after some heated discussions. Where is Rummenigge? Where Breitner? Many will ask this. We did receive already armor-clad protest letters after we did not rank Rummenigge 'world class' in the summer of 1982. But precisely his example - and that of Breitner - emphasizes the criteria by which we rank the players. Only the performances during the six months that we look at matter. And during this time frame, the super technician of Bayern did not show the high level which he undoubtedly is capable of. Neither in his club nor for the national team. Paul Breitner had to labour with constant injuries and hence only appeared in two European cup games and seven Bundesliga games.



Players that were injured over a considerable spell during the timeframe we look at (like Breitner) or did not play due to other reasons are not assessed in our ranking. Also those players that play abroad are not assessed (Schuster, H.Müller, Stielike).

### **Harald Schumacher [Goalkeeper]**

Toni Schumacher certainly is not everybody's darling, like Sepp Maier before him was. A gag for the fans here, a shoulder clap there - people loved Sepp Maier. But "popularity" was never Schumacher's strength, which was also seen recently after the Cup final when Schumacher insulted the fans. But there is one thing that Schumacher and Maier share: both dominated their position in the Bundesliga and the national team in a way that their reserve keepers were never viewed as 'rivals', but really only as reserve. This was the same in the second half of the 1982-83 season. Schumacher commanded the goal of the national team in a sovereign way, he even shined in the game of the national team in Portugal where his teammates disgraced themselves. No different in his club. Toni, Toni über alles. Not least because of him did his club Köln reach the UEFA Cup despite all setbacks and form fluctuations of his clubmates. And then he crowned his performances by winning the German Cup. Schumacher thus still the no. 1 German goalkeeper and the only one rated as 'world class'.

### **Karlheinz Förster [Stopper]**

Yes, he made it again! The player from Stuttgart once again climbed into the 'world class' category, from which he fell due to adverse circumstances in our last ranking. Back then he had suffered a nagging injury in the game against England which set him back during most of the first half of the season because he started to play again too early after his injury and could not meet the expectations. But in the second half of the season he more than made up for that, was constantly in very good shape and again 'world class'. Not least because of the very good impression he left in the 1982 World Cup did journalists vote him as 'German footballer of the year'. Karlheinz Förster is still the highest measurement for stoppers in this country.

### **Wolfgang-Felix Magath [Offensive Midfielder]**

After an impressive first half of the season he again sat enthroned at the very top as our only offensive midfielder in the highest category. Now he retires without getting a place in our ranking. Bad luck for Paul Breitner. He only played in two European Cup games and seven Bundesliga games (five of them 90 minutes), which was not enough to be assessed in our ranking. In Felix Magath, Breitner has a worthy successor. To be sure, the playmaker of HSV does not appear as dynamic as Breitner but he is more inventive and technically superior. Wonderful are his crosses that he bends so well and his freekicks and his well-timed passes. Magath's fantastic ball control also was seen when he scored his "goal of the year" in Athens against Juventus. Too bad that the 29-year old has resigned from playing in the national team. Magath could be very useful for Derwall's team.

### **Jean-Marie Pfaff [Foreign Player]**

At the start of the season he was considered a flop but this was only the humble start of an astonishing victory parade. Jean-Marie Pfaff, who in the very first game had touched a throw-in by Bremen's Uwe Reinders which made it an own goal, is one of the few foreign players who managed a breakthrough already in their first season due to superior performances. In essence, the Belgian national team goalkeeper was the guarantee for the highly-bet Bayern team not to miss every one of its aims this season and at least managed to qualify for the UEFA Cup. In autumn the 29-year old Belgian - who combines a joker nature with a high performance level like Sepp Maier in the past - still had to fight off certain reservations. Also among our editorial staff. A bare majority in winter was of the opinion that Pfaff had to be classed 'merely' as 'international class'. But this time there were no doubters! His performances in the second half of the season have been so convincing that we have to rank him on the same level as Harald Schumacher of Köln and thus in the 'world class' category.

**December 1983**

## **World Class**

### **Introduction**

German football has lost some of its class. At the same it has become poorer in terms of class players. .... of the four players that we rated 'world class' this summer only two have remained in the same category: Harald Schumacher and Jean-Marie Pfaff, the two goalkeepers. Felix Magath, who was a great playmaker and scorer in Athens against Juventus couldn't keep his position in the highest category just like Karlheinz Förster slipped down a category. And new names didn't manage to crack the highest category just like Karl-Heinz Rummenigge didn't manage a return to 'world class' level. The player from Munich, who shows sign of wear and who constantly was troubled by injuries, is a prime example of the criteria which our ranking is based on, where only factual performances are measured, not the performance level a player is capable of. In 'international class', where we rated 22 players last time, only 14 players can be named this time. ...

### **Harald Schumacher [Goalkeeper]**

Two goalkeepers are the top stars of the Bundesliga. This says more than thousand words about the lack of quality the top division has shown the past half year. Well, goalkeepers are part of the game, too. And if they happen to be better than defenders and forwards, one should not withhold that. Toni Schumacher and Jean-Marie Pfaff currently outclass all other players in the top division. We will write about the sunnyboy from Belgium, who had a main share in some of Bayern's success in the European Cup and in the Bundesliga, in the 'foreign player' category. Toni Schumacher, the only German player of 'world class', defended his top position among goalkeepers due to his enormous ambition. Even in bad games like the one against Albania, which was so important for the qualification for France 84, Schumacher beat his 'crown prince' Dieter Burdenski to the second place. The Bremen player, driven by his good performances for Werder, risked a showdown and demanded a starting place in the national team. Toni Schumacher responded laconically: "I will play. Period." An argument that also manager Jupp Derwall couldn't close his mind to. And why should he annoy his absolute number one? The critical statements about the performances of the national team may be justified. But there is one player who has to be excluded from that critique, because he never failed and was always reliable and very often showed sublime performances: Toni Schumacher.

### **Jean-Marie Pfaff [Foreign Player]**

The idea is forcing itself on us when we browse over the list of high quality foreign players in the Bundesliga: what would it look like if a selection of the best German Bundesliga players would face a selection of the best foreign Bundesliga players? The team: Pfaff - Krauss, Pezzey, Herlovsen, Okudera - Keser, Sigurvinsson, Lerby - Cha, Nilsson, Corneliussen. They wouldn't be fighting a lost cause against any German team. Beating this team wouldn't be easy! First and foremost, the player with the no. 1 on his back would have to be beaten. And in this respect, Jean-Marie Pfaff, the only foreign player of 'world class' level, will be very adamant. He almost was even better than in the first half of the year 1983 and won a lot of fans with his sympathetic appearance. The greatest compliment: one can hardly imagine the Bundesliga without him anymore!

**July 1984**

## **World Class**

### **Harald Schumacher [Goalkeeper]**

If only we had so few problems in other positions as we have with goalkeepers! We then wouldn't even have to waste one sentence about the demise of German football! One rated as 'world class', four (including the Belgian Pfaff) in 'international class', five (including the Swede Hellström) in 'broad circle' and far and wide no underachiever!

A record that proves that the men with the number one on their back not only wear this number due to numerical reasons. Let's have a more detailed look: Harald Schumacher, who everyone calls Toni, has defended his no. 1 position and his rating as 'world class' with his very own kind of ambition. For his club Köln he so often had to be the pillar on which weaker clubmates had to lean against. That was his homework. Yet his goalkeeper-diploma came when he played for the national team. A graduate which took a real man to pass. Especially the friendly game against France in Strasburg and the three games in the European Championship toughened his senses. The boos and whistling of the vengeful French crowd must have felt like arrows. On the outside, he endured this like a stoic and answered back in his own way: with performances that silenced all doubters about his world class. Everybody understood this language. Toni's statement after the knock-out against Spain was directed at his teammates: "Looks like I will have to train even more in the future to be able to catch balls like that as well". His comment about Maceda's goal, who was allowed total freedom in the German box for his header.

### **Asgeir Sigurvinsson [Foreign Player]**

This has never happened before in the Bundesliga's 21-year history: the best outfield player of the league hails from a little island republic just south of the polar zone. It is Asgeir Sigurvinsson of Iceland who became an international star in Belgium, couldn't get past Paul Breitner in Munich and now reached the summit in his second year in Stuttgart. The midfielder of Germany's new champion Stuttgart is next to Toni Schumacher the only Bundesliga player who we saw fit to be rated 'world class' during the last six months. In these parts, Sigurvinsson is one of the few prototypes of the midfield playmaker. Equipped with an almost perfect technique, a brilliant overview of the game and an imposing personality, he impressed in the decisive weeks of the championship also as a scorer of important goals. For sure, the international performance test Sigurvinsson will have to face in the European Cup next season. But Sigurvinsson was such a defining power in this season that we saw it justified to rank him on the same level as Schumacher.

## **December 1984**

### **World Class**

#### **Introduction**

Foundation of this ranking are the performances in the first and second division since the start of the season as well as Cup games, the European Cup and games of the national team. Performances have to be sustained over a longer period of time. One hit wonders won't be considered. The record of the last few years proves: German football has become poorer with regards to real top players. Karl-Heinz Rummenigge and Hans-Peter Briegel joined Italian clubs. We could not assess them anymore, because Germans abroad can only be assessed after a World Cup or a European Championship because then we can compare their performances with that of other players. What is true for Rummenigge and Briegel is also true for Hansi Müller, Bernd Schuster and Uli Stielike. Hence there is only one player left who deserves the accolade of being 'world class': Toni Schumacher! The goalkeeper of Köln and the national team confirmed his extra class playing for a fickle Köln side. One weaker performance in the 1-5 vs. Borussia Mönchengladbach does not carry weight. Six months ago there was a second top player. It was the time when Stuttgart had become champions - with the world class playmaker Asgeir Sigurvinsson. His example shows how fast in football light changes into shadow. The Icelandic did not play a single good game in the first half of the season. Too little to be even considered in our ranking.

### **Harald Schumacher [Goalkeeper]**

A lot has changed in the last six months. Slowly but surely we notice a changing of the guards in the highest categories. Young men like Ehrmann and Aumann as well as goalkeepers who had stood in the shadow of others for a long time (Sude) are now edging forward, leaving many established goalkeepers behind. About the two highest positions however there is no discussion whatsoever. Toni Schumacher remains in the category of 'world class' also in the second part of this year - our editorial staff had a quick decision about that. "The Footballer of the Year" saved his club Köln and the national team in precarious situations oftentimes.

Whenever it matters, the 30-year-old Schumacher shows up and proves his absolute reliability. It was little short of a miracle that Schumacher's nerves only failed him once (in the 1-5 debacle against Mönchengladbach) despite the tantalizing contract negotiations with his club. But bad games like that we can count on one hand when it comes to the super professional Schumacher.

**July 1985**

## **World Class**

### **Introduction**

... Naturally the main interest is reserved for the top positions of our ranking. It is pleasant that we can rate Rudi Völler, Pierre Littbarski and Klaus Allofs in the category of 'world class'. Even more pleasant is that they are three forwards! This not only proves the general upward trend but also the positive development in this difficult position. Because for a long period it looked 'poor' with regards to our forwards. The last one who we rated as 'world class' in that position was Karl-Heinz Rummenigge at the end of 1982. Last winter we only had a goalkeeper ranked in the highest category in Toni Schumacher. The Köln keeper, who was rated 'world class' eight times in the last ten rankings slipped one position down. Schumacher had an almost permanent place in the category of 'world class' since 1980, even in those years when German football was going down, the Köln player was a firm, striking presence. His international reputation is still big but in this new ranking he slipped out of the world class category. Toni did not show his usual level of brilliance and reliability that we have become used from him in recent years. Surely, it is not only his fault that Köln conceded so many goals this year (only the relegated sides Karlsruhe and Braunschweig conceded more as well as Kaiserslautern). Toni however is being too convenient when he solely blames his defenders for that misery. No, quite a few of the goals were due to mistakes by Schumacher and he also was not unfallible playing for the national team (see the 0-1 in Hamburg vs. Hungary). These facts induced us to demote Schumacher from 'world class' to 'international class'.

### **Rudolf Völler [Central Forward]**

Lucky is Franz Beckenbauer! Even two players in our ranking are rated as 'world class' and unbelievably only one of them can claim to be a sure starter for the national team. The number one of course is Rudi Völler. The goalgetter of Werder Bremen is the prime example of a modern central forward. Not a tank - but very adept header. Not a model athlete - but unbelievably robust. And his stamina astounds time and again. The 25-year old does not only wait for getting the ball served on a platter but tries to get on the ball by his own initiative, moves out to the wings, drops back and serves his teammates with good passes. Since Völler has become persistent in his performances, he has established himself in the 'world class' category. Of course these qualities have already been noticed abroad and when the Italians open their borders again a chase will start that will be won by that club that spends the most money on him. Karl-Heinz Rummenigge had lost his leading position among Germany's best forwards already for several years to Rudi Völler and who knows, maybe "Ruuudi" will establish a new transfer record deal someday?

### **Klaus Allofs [Central Forward]**

On to number two: together with Pierre Littbarski, Klaus Allofs forms the highest-quality attacking duo in the country. In the national team however Allofs still fights for a starting place: while he belongs to the roster he still has not prevailed, which was also caused by bad luck with injuries.

### **Pierre Littbarski [Winger]**

Our football welcomes back wingers! In the last and second to last ranking we only had one player ranked in 'international class', given to a player that today is rated among the central forwards (Klaus Allofs). But now they are bubbling up again which is a blessing for the game and to the benefit of the spectators. Because wing play makes football more enjoyable - and more promising. There were times when it was believed it was pure luxury to deal with wingers.

The decision was made in the center anyway and didn't our most successful club practise the "wingless" game? It took a long time to reflect on that and change opinions. At the front of this movement is Pierre Littbarski. His withdrawal to the midfield was paying off insofar as people grasped that this was not the right move for his talents in the same way as one grasped that being captain of his team was not matching his nature. But now again he is tricking his opponents, thank god! A blessed player has found himself again and his way of playing. He blossoms again, shows an abundance of ideas, conjures, shoots and scores. For Köln and also for the national team, like recently against Malta, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Mexico - as long as his power engine is not empty. His goal against Werder Bremen was the talk of the town. A sorry looking player has again become a leading player!

**July 1986**

## **World Class**

### **Harald Schumacher [Goalkeeper]**

Back to world class: after his impressive display during the World Cup in Mexico no doubts remained among our writers that Harald Schumacher had ascended his throne again. Despite his mistake which led to the 1-0 to Argentina in the World Cup final. Strengths of nerves under stress, qualities of a leader and intelligent play as a goalkeeper distinguish the 32-year old keeper of Köln. If he had his way, with his incomparable ambition, it would remain that way for years to come.

### **Karlheinz Förster [Defender]**

It has long been a good tradition that defense was one of the strengths of German football. But, of all times, right ahead of the World Cup in Mexico our national team reveal defensive weaknesses. The constant change in the libero position was as characteristic for this as were the problems with the so-called 'man markers' (a year ago we accounted for the progress in modern football by merging the positions of the full back and the stopper). Even a man like Karlheinz Förster, almost a decade a staple as a marker, was not as reliable anymore as we were used to. The strains of his career had left traces, physical resilience and mental crispness had suffered which led to an obvious form crisis. Thus already in the last ranking Förster was toppled by Munich's 'late bloomer' Norbert Eder als Germany's no. 1 defender. In the test games before the World Cup Förster's starting place became in doubt. Some critics promptly exaggerated and demanded from 'Teamchef' Beckenbauer to drop Förster completely. In Mexico Karlheinz Förster has taught all his critics better. Hardly anyone did prepare as painstakingly for the great aim as he did and of all things an offer from France restored his cracked self-esteem. Directly before the take-off to Mexico Olympique Marseille made Förster a 'dream offer', remedy for his ill-treated soul. In Mexico Karlheinz Förster again became the scare of the opposing strikers and came up trumps like in the old days. Nobody surpassed him in terms of physical duels during the World Cup, in terms of relentlessness and team discipline. The 'kicker' too voted him in the 'All-Star Tea' of the '86 World Cup and of course he has regained his position as our no. 1 defender as well as re-entering the 'world class' category. Still, Förster wants to resign his duties in the national team after his move to France. Franz Beckenbauer would be well-advised to fight for this world class defender, who would not even be 30 years old in 1988 for the Euros!

### **Lothar Matthäus [Offensive Midfielder]**

He is among the winners of the World Cup, his strong performances in Mexico are the reason why we categorized him as 'world class': Lothar Matthäus. The harsh critique that was unleashed on him after his fatal bad pass in the game against Uruguay didn't harm his confidence. By showing an admirable morale, irrepressible will and his great fighting spirit, Matthäus managed to cancel out that blunder. Against Morocco he delivered the German team with his 'golden goal' shortly before the 90th minute, in the final he almost left no room for the ingenious Maradona to unfold. And that despite a broken hand! Lothar Matthäus like we have known him for years: strongwilled, great acceleration, hard-running and competitive. A man who does not think himself above defensive work and at the same time finds enough time to dedicate to the offense. Additionally he is also a goal-threat: ten goals scored in the last Bundesliga season prove it.

Also because of his offensive prowess did we categorize the 25-year old in the category of 'offensive midfielders'. We could've just as well classified him as a defensive midfielder. Another thing that speaks for him. Lothar Matthäus - a player that finally managed the international breakthrough in Mexico. A pillar in the team that has to be built by Franz Beckenbauer for the future. A trump card for Franz Beckenbauer.

### **Soren Lerby [Foreign Player]**

Two players in the category 'world class', this should actually be reason to point with pride to the strength of the Bundesliga. If, yes if it wasn't the category of 'foreign players'! While these players can enhance the prestige of the Bundesliga they cannot enhance the prestige of German football as a whole. And if, yes if our no. 1 wouldn't say goodbye after this season! Sören Lerby will have to prove his calibre next season under the critical observation of our French colleagues. The chapter 'Bundesliga' is over for him. The last chapter in his three year stay in the Bundesliga certainly ranks among Lerby's finest and most beautiful moments as a footballer. The blond midfield conductor was a significant influence in the high-flying of his team Bayern in the last weeks of the Bundesliga. Always when things weren't going well it was Lerby that would pull up the sleeves to sound the attack. Not least thanks to him Bayern could celebrated winning the precious 'double'. Lerby did expect a little bit more to achieve during the World Cup though, where he did not play as good as usual. But the good overall picture could not be marred by his Mexico performances. Compared to our ranking of December last year he climbed from no. 3 to no. 1.

### **Jean-Marie Pfaff [Foreign Player]**

Closely following Lerby is his teammate Jean-Marie Pfaff, who climbed two places from international class to world class. For Pfaff similar attributes can be observed as for Lerby. Always dedicated, always ready to give his all. In the first half of the season he was set back by injuries, he even lost his starting place for Bayern and had to dread being left out from the Belgium squad going to Mexico. But with his iron-will, he worked on his comeback and convinced all his premature critics. In contrast to Lerby, Pfaff had reasons to celebrate a triumphant World Cup, for who would have predicted Belgium to advance to the semi finals? Pfaff has been instrumental in the triumph of his national team and of his club.

## **December 1988**

### **World Class**

#### **Rune Bratseth [Libero]**

Bremen made up for the loss of Gunnar Sauer brilliantly with Rune Bratseth taking over that role after Sauer's initial replacement Michael Kutzop was also injured. The Norwegian, who is already in a class of his own as marker, showcased impressively that he also knows how to interpret the role of libero in a brilliant way. The 1,93 meters tall defender, who Otto Rehhagel bought two years ago for 300,000 Marks from the Norwegian champion Rosenborg Trondheim, convinces with his versatility. In defense, he is almost insurmountable due to his pace, heading prowess and overview and as a libero, he also makes use of his freedom to roam forward stupendously. Bratseth's constantly above average performances, especially in the European Cup, tipped the balance to rate him as 'world class'. The brave 'Viking' would certainly play an outstanding role in any other European league, too. It also speaks for the deeply religious Bratseth that he does not intend to move southwards ("I feel well in Bremen, money is not everything").

#### **Jürgen Kohler [Defender]**

18 months ago the Bundesliga bosses laughed at the Köln management for paying 2 million Marks for Jürgen Kohler, a defender. Today it is certain: Jürgen Kohler, the 23-year old defender from Lambsheim, is the undisputed number one defender, which today are mostly called man-markers. Today it is Kohler who is laughing the most, because in our new Rangliste, Kohler has moved one step up into the highest category of 'world class'. By now everyone has recognized what a man of Kohler's class is made of, not only in Köln.

No forward in the Bundesliga could get past him and also in the European Cup and in the national team Kohler was an insurmountable obstacle for the opponent. Jürgen Kohler, a man beyond reproach. "Kohler remains the King" was our headline in the summer Rangliste. That summer, his opponent Marco van Basten was ahead of him in decisive moments in the Euro semi final against the Netherlands, which spoiled his ascent to the highest category. After this season Köln will be left without its best defender, since it is almost 99.9 % safe that Kohler will transfer to Bayern München next summer. Even the expected transfer fee of over 3 million Marks will be of no solace for Köln, because today one knows how valuable a player like Kohler really is.

### **Thomas Hässler [Offensive Midfielder]**

The last players we ranked as 'world class' in the category of offensive midfielders were Paul Breitner and Felix Magath, which was five years ago [*note: this is false as the last player was actually Lothar Matthäus in the summer of 1986*]. At that time, the two were at the peak of their powers. Currently we see something developing in the Bundesliga which reminds us of the beginnings of the Beckenbauer/Netzer/Overath era. The young guns have taken over the scepter. This is as baffling as it is encouraging. None of the other six positional categories is as strong as the offensive midfielders, both in terms of quantity and quality. Once 'world class', six times 'international class', five times 'broad circle' and fourteen times players were considered. The midfield pivot is the best piece! .... Without any doubt is the highest position reserved for the Berliner in Köln, Thomas Hässler. Last summer only Lothar Matthäus was ranked ahead of him, who is now playing for Inter in Italy. Already that summer Hässler was ahead of his many other competitors like Olaf Thon, Hans Dorfner or Pierre Littbarski. Thus already last season he had managed the breakthrough. This last half year he thoroughly confirmed his class. Praise from all sides: be it managers, pundits, teammates and players - the chap is being carried by a broad foundation of approval and trust. He is an artist and fighter at the same, he can pull off anything and he knows how to enforce it. And he is also not someone who needs 'workers' around him.

### **Jürgen Klinsmann [Forward]**

It reads like an anachronism: all of football Germany moans about the lack of goals and attacking spirit yet we rank a forward as 'world class'! Paradoxical? No, maybe at first sight. After a long and thorough discussion we decided that Klinsmann had to be ranked as 'world class'. The reasons are manifold, "Klinsi" made the most of a position which is arguably the hardest to play in. He regularly scored and assisted goals. Additionally he decided games on the international stage, like recently in the UEFA Cup against Zagreb and Groningen. He is being hunted by all great clubs in Europe, he distinguishes himself with his consistency, endurance and commitment. All this were reasons to rank him as 'world class'.

## **July 1989**

### **World Class**

### **Jürgen Kohler [Defender]**

Do you know the difference between Jürgen Kohler and Guido Buchwald? Hardly a question that would divide the many football fans. But after the fateful 87th minute of our national team's game in Rotterdam against the Netherlands many fans arguably commented suspectfully: "this wouldn't have happened with Kohler on the pitch."

It was the equalizer by Marco van Basten. Ronald Koeman, Holland's enormously hard-shooting libero had aimed at the German goal from 18 meters. Hard, but not precise. Van Basten was standing at the right spot, touched the ball quick-wittedly, technically perfect and deflected it decisively. Buchwald the onlooker, Illgner unable to parry. And millions of fans in front of the tv set bickered about the fate that Kohler had to leave the pitch in the middle of the second half. And indeed the ex-Köln player almost gave van Basten no room to breathe while he was on the pitch. Whereas Buchwald, who took over Kohler's task, did not go on about his task in that fateful minute in a comparably aggressive manner. Of course that one weak moment is not the be-all and end-all regarding Buchwald's performance.

Particularly since we will never know whether we would have managed to keep that 1-0 scoreline with Kohler on the pitch until the final whistle.

Nevertheless our staff ties itself down that especially the Holland game showed that there is a difference between our two best 'man markers'. Kohler neutralized the arguably greatest forward in the world, Buchwald didn't. 'World class' - Jürgen Kohler is the only player we ranked this high. For the second time in a row. Buchwald stayed where we already ranked him last December: 'international class'. Buchwald was not able to topple Kohler from his throne.

Still, the 23-year old discovery of Klaus Schlappner will look back at the last half year with mixed feelings. Only ten days after his injury in Rotterdam Kohler was already playing again - too early. Substituted after 17 minutes in Bremen. Afterwards he worked on his comeback feverishly. On May 25th he wanted to climb the pinnacle of the Bundesliga when Köln faced Bayern München in a showdown. When it looked as if he didn't manage to become fit again in time, Kohler, the incarnation of performing his duty, was suddenly posed dubious questions whether he didn't want to face his future employer in such a crucial game. For the model professional who was only used to positive headlines, this was like a brutal knock-out directly to the nose. Of course Kohler did not wimp out of that game. Merciless towards his own health, he faced the challenge and played against Bayern - again too early, lost. But at least he had managed to wipe out the negative assumptions of the tabloids. The tabloids thankfully did not doubt that Kohler in normal form does not allow any forward to pass him. If the 'man of world class' (Bayern manager Jupp Heynckes) has any weaknesses at all, then it is his offensive game. But: destroying *and* working magic - which player is capable of that anyway?