

MIROSLAV KLOSE

A meteoric rise

The most shocking result on the first big night of World Cup 2002 warmups was Germany's 7-1 win over Israel in Kaiserslautern.

Germany's problems in World Cup qualifying were linked to its inability to mount an effective attack, but it struck for seven goals in the space of 28 minutes in the second half against the Israelis, who had taken the lead on an own goal.

The hero was 23-year-old Kaiserslautern striker Miroslav Klose, who netted a hat trick in his first start for the national team.

Klose — who had Germany's first two goals, two minutes apart — was unfazed by the excitement before his home team's fans.

"I'll just have to sleep in," he said afterwards, "and think about it tomorrow."

Klose was born in Poland and moved to Germany when he was 9. His father was a star for French club Auxerre, and his mother was a member of Poland's women's handball team.

Klose was a late bloomer. He was selected for the national team within six months of graduating from Kaiserslautern's amateur team last season at 21.

Klose had winning goals off the bench for Germany in back-to-back qualifiers last spring against Albania and Greece, but an injury sidelined him for the stretch drive of qualifying.

The top 10 list of all-time World Cup scor-

ers includes five Germans — No. 1 Gerd Mueller (14 goals), No. 4 Juergen Klinsmann (11), No. 6 Helmut Rahn (10), and Uwe Seeler and Karl-Heinz Rummenigge, tied for 10th (9 goals) — but Germany has lacked a dynamic striker since the retirement of Klinsmann, the player to whom Klose has most often been compared, after the 1998 World Cup.

German national team coach Rudi Voeller (tied for 19th all-time with eight goals) likes Klose's attitude but cautions that the second-year pro must become more aggressive.

"Klose has all the necessary tools to become a first-class striker," Voeller said, "but I think he is too kind on the field."

Klose spurned an overture from the Polish national team before committing to Germany. He figured his chance won't come until the 2006 World Cup, which Germany will host. Now he's a leading candidate for a starting job on the 2002 World Cup team, which faces the United States March 27 in Rostock.

Everything is moving quickly for Klose, who already has equaled last year's output of nine goals for Kaiserslautern.

Klose's contract with the Red Devils doesn't expire until 2005, but he has an escape clause that will allow him to leave after next season.

Bayer Leverkusen and Bayern Munich are more than willing to call Kaiserslautern on that clause.

Klose's valuation on the transfer market is approaching \$10 million. Not bad for a player who was an amateur less than two years ago. ■

Miroslav Klose celebrates after scoring one of his three goals against Israel.



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