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Soccerissue Interview With: Dr. Karsten Schumann

Bayern Munich's head of research: "It's important that the club is not owned by one man"

by **Ouriel Daskal**

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„I organize performance!“

Matthias Sammer



Since 2006, **Matthias Sammer**, Bayern Munich's sporting director, refuses to work without Dr. Karsten Schumann on his side. Sammer met Schumann a few weeks before he signed his first contract with the DFB – Deutscher Fußball-Bund.

Sammer was offered the DFB's sporting director position. He went to seek advice from his mentor and former coach, Heinz Werner. Werner, who had a rich career as a football coach in East Germany (German Democratic Republic) told Sammer he shouldn't take the job without someone who specializes in sports science on his side. "You don't know what to do" Werner warned Sammer. "You did a short course but you are not ready for this job. You need someone next to you, a man of science, someone who will help you make the right decisions". He told him to pick up the phone and call Dr. Karsten Schumann, who graduated from the famous Faculty of Sport Science in The Universität Leipzig.

Sammer and Schumann clicked and in the DFB built the "railways" on which the German national team rode all the way to the World Cup win. In 2012 Bayern Munich came in knocking and Sammer told the Bavarian hierarchy that he won't come without Schumann. Today Dr. Schumann is Bayern "head of research" or "head of science development". He's basically, Sammer's assistant.

I had a chance to speak to Schumann about his work with Sammer at Bayern and the first question was about the job it self.

What are you doing at Bayern Herr Dr. Schumann?

"I am head of science development. Sammer is the sporting director. He is responsible for the club's sporting vision, the quality of its personnel, the passion and so on. He is responsible for the sporting content at the club, for the sporting structure and for the people working in the sporting department. He makes the decisions and I am helping him. I'm helping his decisions regarding the intimidate future and for the long term future of the club.

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I'm using scientific research and tools to help him and the club".

What does it mean?

"The training methods change all the time. They always evolve and develop. Fitness issues, health issues, nutrition issues – the development is not stopping and you need someone who is always up to date with everything. You need to be prepared for these changes. We are planning, we are analyzing, we try to control our development. And we also do arrangements – for winter and summer camps, for example".



From Schumann PowerPoint presentation

Do other clubs have someone like you?

"No. Other clubs work with universities. I work with universities as well by the way".

"We are what we are"

Paul Breitner said that Pep Guardiola's most important mission at Bayern is to create a definitive style for the club. How can one go about that? How important is it for the long term to have a clear playing style?

"We at Bayern had a strong philosophy before Pep came. We say **Mia San Mia** - we are who we are and we'll do what we do the best way possible. We always wanted to be the best, to win titles but also enjoy the game and do it well. Our players need a will to win, tactical abilities, technique under pressure, all round fitness and he needs to enjoy the game".

"Defensive coaches – we know who they are – don't fit our style and ambitions. Pep? He brings a lot to the club. His methods are innovative. His sessions are short and intensive and the ball is always on the move. The players need to come to his sessions ready. They need to be ready for his sessions like they are ready for games. He always looks for tactical solutions for all sorts of problems. His methods reach every team in the club. He takes a lot of youngsters from the under-19s to train with his squad and the only coaches who are allowed to attend all his sessions are the Under 19s and Under 17 coaches".

One of Dr. Karsten Schumann main missions is structuring Bayern's scouting system.

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What guides Bayern's decisions in the transfer market?

"Our methods for scouting are derived from the club's philosophy. We believe that "good" is not good enough. A Bayern player needs to have quality, technical quality but he also needs to be a quality person. He needs to understand the complexity of modern football. He needs tactical understanding, while being technical under pressure and have good size and great fitness. What is most important for us is that he will have personal responsibility to train hard and be professional, accept criticism and work to improve. We want our footballers to think that they love football and that this is what they want to do with their lives. Play football".

Communication is the key**Individual responsibility**

"Because every day,
I do what I love to do:
Playing soccer."

**What kind of footballers are you looking for?**

"We are only looking for players with potential to be great. We are looking for growth potential. That's our emphasis, that's what we are asking our scouts to look for. We are less interested in complete, well-known players. We follow our potential players for at least a season and a half. We look at every aspect of him as a player and a human. His behavior on the pitch and off it. We check out his fitness, his health and his mental health. We ask our scouts to find us new information on potential players. That's their job".

What kind of statistics are you looking for?

"I can't say that. What's important for you to know is that we look at players, all the players in Germany and Europe. We always have a 'shadow squad'. If someone from our squad is injured or sold, then we have a ready-made replacement. Someone who we know well and we want him to come to our club. We do the same with youth players and head coaches. We have a shortlist of 2-3 coaches who we are looking at and checking out – to see if they can replace our current coach. We also have a shortlist for youth team coaches. For us it's important that our youth team coaches will be German and Bavarian."

How important is it that footballers start playing football at an early age. Most top players started playing football at a very early age.

"It's important. It's very important. However, it's also important that a player will have a diverse upbringing as an athlete. A player needs to grow up swimming, cycling and participating in other sports. Kids can't just play football all day long".



Pep? Ja!

Pep Guardiola insists he will see out the remaining year of his Bayern Munich contract next season. Who are his potential replacements? Schumann wouldn't say but names such as Lucien Favre and even Marc Van Bommel are monitored.

Back in 2013, when CEO Karl-Heinz Rummenigge and former President Uli Hoeneß asked Sammer and Schumann if Pep fits the club their answer was an enthusiastic "Ja!".

How important is it that Bayern is not owned by Roman Abramovich or a Qatari Sheikh?

"We have plenty of owners. Our owners are club members who love the club and that guides them. The supporters don't have a direct influence over sporting decisions but they give the club's hierarchy the mandate to choose the right professionals. This structure is very important for us. We are not going to bend and change because of one man's caprice. Football is a team sports. You need good teamwork on the pitch and in the club's offices. You need someone who is a CEO, someone who is responsible for the sporting management, someone who is responsible for the marketing aspect and so on. Our structure is healthier than other clubs. We are not dependent on one person. Our profits go straight back to the club. It's much better to work in a club like that. I am not sure we would have been able to work well with a different ownership structure".

As someone who is always looking to the future, what do you think are football's main challenges in the future?

"I think that football is complex. The modern game is full of complexities. It's a lot faster and the players are stronger and more athlete. A player needs to be a specialist in his job but also to be diverse in his abilities. A player needs to be a good athlete, to be able to operate in small spaces and to make the right decisions in split seconds. A player needs to be healthy – in body and mind. We need to protect the players. That's mainly the coach's job. The coach needs to be a tactical mastermind but also a psychologist. We don't have a psychologist in Bayern. If the coach is not a psychologist then he is not a coach".

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