

The rascal that became a professional: The making of Timm Klose

Posted on November 20, 2018

Norwich City's Timm Klose is not your average footballer. Actually, it comes as some surprise he's a footballer at all, if you ask those that have known him longest.

According to Klose, the likes of Xherdan Shaqiri, Granit Xhaka and Yann Sommer never thought he'd have ended up venturing into the professional game. Yet there he was, playing alongside the three of them, as Switzerland qualified for the finals of the UEFA Nations League thanks to a stunning comeback against Belgium. It marked his 17th cap for his country in a career that has seen him play in the Bundesliga, Premier League, Europa League and Champions League.

However, he did so nearly take a different path, but that's just one chapter in a story filled with trials, tribulations and triumphs.

Leading by example

Since joining the Canaries, Klose has become something of a cult figure among Norwich fans, owed to Instagram antics, last minute equalisers against Ipswich and things like this.

Klose told Paddy Davitt back in 2016 that he's just being himself. He's not the typical footballer but that's him, it's how he is and how he lives his life. "Football players have a really good life but sometimes you can give something back," explained Klose. "It might be funny, it might be stupid. If they like it and appreciate that then fine. If we can give a little of our life then they see how a footballer lives away from the pitch. Most of the time I try to take funny pictures or what I am doing to show them I am a professional. I am not really into this, 'I am better than you or I should be three Lamborghinis to show you how much money I have'. That is not me and that is not how I was raised by my parents."

Klose comes from a "pretty wealthy family". His German father, Norbert, has shared his insight into real estate while his Swiss mother, Daniela, is a fashion entrepreneur, running a boutique in her hometown of Basel and niece of legendary courtier, Fred Spillmann.

Klose said his parents had always led by example and ensured he and his siblings never got above their station. He enjoys talking to people and learning what's going on in their lives. Klose also really values his family and friends. He credited his grandfather with fostering close family ties and has said he goes out and plays for them – the money is a bonus.

And it's with his family – and a friend – that the Timm Klose story begins.

Friends on a mission

It was the summer of 1993 when Timm Klose arrived in Basel from Germany and would become friends with Eren Derdiyok – now of Galatasaray.

Klose's mother said that the two boys would routinely shun homework in favour of time on the football field. They also weren't adverse to a spot of mischief, according to his father. But football was the goal. The pair dreamt of lining up for Switzerland together one day. Klose even had a poster above his bed that would remind him of the grand goal.

It read, "I want to become a professional footballer".

Derdiyok and Klose started playing for BSC Old Boys and rose through the various junior teams, impressing as they went. They were both attackers – Derdiyok, a striker, while Klose played both in midfield and up front – and together, they forged a real understanding. Derdiyok, speaking in 2011, reflected on one particular game that was finely poised at 0-0. Klose and Derdiyok were subbed on. The latter scored twice. The former assisted both. Final score, 2-0. Job done.

It would soon become a case of job well done for Klose in 2003. FC Basel had come calling.

You have to want it

Yet no sooner had Klose arrived at FC Basel, he was on his way back to Old Boys after just a season.

He told Norwich's official YouTube channel that he'd returned to Old Boys as he wanted a break from football. Despite what the poster hung over his bed had said, Klose was at odds with his childhood dreams.

He also has admitted that he had not always been the most professional back then. Despite living just five minutes from the Old Boys' training ground, he was often late. He'd drink a glass here and there. He liked an easy going sort of lifestyle. Even at FC Basel, while a great experience, Klose wasn't sure he wanted more.

Outside of football, he had made sure to finish school. The business school graduate even ended up working part-time in an architectural office for a spell. The idea of doing something "sensible" was more than on the table.

But it was around a table – a dinner table, to be precise – that Klose would be steered back on course. The man across from him was Peter Knäbel, who has served as FC Basel's Technical Director and Head of Youth, that assured him he did have the qualities to make it as a footballer.

He just had to want it. Klose, having swapped earlier attacking ambitions for centre-back, said that he'd try.

Waiting for the call

After that, "things went very fast" said Klose, as Massimo Ceccaroni handed him a chance in the Old Boys first-team.

A chance that he took with both hands. Klose would impress. He would impress so much so that come 2007, he was on his way back to FC Basel to join their U21s.

In this successful side, Klose became a regular. He made 47 appearances over two seasons, scoring three goals, and played with the likes of Xherdan Shaqiri and Granit Xhaka.

While both Shaqiri and Xhaka would play for the FC Basel first-team, Klose was left waiting. Derdiyok had also made the step-up to the FC Basel first-team, Klose was still waiting. Neither Christian Gross nor his replacement, Thorsten Fink, would give the centre-back the call. With his heart “half red-blue”, Klose described it as akin to his world collapsing. They were “his” team and he wasn’t going to get the chance to play for them.

Instead, Klose was told to “Go to Thun” where “Muri will help you.”

An important teacher

Muri was Murat Yakin, a former FC Basel hero and centre-back who had just taken over at FC Thun in the Swiss Challenge League (second-tier).

When joining Thun, Klose was handed his first professional contract aged 21 and became a first-team regular as Yakin led them to promotion. They leapfrogged FC Lugano on the final day of the season having trailed their promotion rivals by four points with two games left.

Klose continued to blossom the following season, making his debut for Switzerland’s U21s in August, before going on to be key part of a Thun defence that boasted the second-best defensive record in Switzerland’s top tier that season. They finished 5th and beat FC Basel at St. Jakob Park for the first time, defeating the eventual champions 3-1 on their own patch. Klose ended the season at the U21 European Championships, becoming a fixture in the Swiss team that went all the way to the final without conceding a goal, only to fall short against Spain.

Nonetheless, there was little doubt that Klose had made up for lost time. Much was owed to Yakin’s mentoring. Klose has worn the #15 donned by Yakin at Basel on multiple occasions since, including Norwich, and has said playing under him was “worth gold” for his defensive game.

He described going to play for Yakin as one of the most important steps of his career. His coach worked with him after training, showing him how to “broadcast personality” on the field and keep calm as a defender.

The rascal becomes a professional

Klose had the chance to return to FC Basel in the summer of 2011 but opted to take a risk instead when he joined FC Nürnberg in the Bundesliga.

Klose continued to rise, starting his career in the Bundesliga well as well as making his full international debut away in Liechtenstein in a 2-1 win. He had now joined an old friend in the senior set-up. Eren Derdiyok, now at Bayer Leverkusen, said Klose had proven he could cut it in the Bundesliga.

Klose, meanwhile, said Derdiyok had shown him how a “rascal becomes a professional” but the rascal-turned-professional was about to be tested.

First came his competitive debut for Switzerland. With hopes of qualifying for Euro 2012 fast fading away, the Swiss headed for Wales where Klose gave away a penalty in a 2-0 defeat. He was harshly criticised by the media in the aftermath. Then came a crushing mistake for Nürnberg in a key clash

against Freiburg. With the game 1-1 in injury time, Klose's mistake would hand the visitors a last-gasp penalty. They would score. They had the three points Nürnberg had been dragged into a relegation fight.

The defender was in tears come full-time before the TV cameras, struggling to keep it together, apologising to fans for a mistake he'd label "unforgivable".

Some praised Klose's reaction. Others less so. The man himself explained he was just a human who shows his feelings – both positive and negative. He had tried to pull himself together but simply couldn't. He had never made such a mistake before.

"In life," reflected Klose, "You need such hard moments to get ahead."

The ups and downs of football

After one more appearance, and 13 league games in total, Klose found himself out of the first-team for the rest of the season.

It was during his time at Nürnberg that he would start working with a sports psychologist. Klose spoke on how the ups and downs of football were not always easy to deal with. One day, you're the hero. A few days later, you're anything but. He had felt like everything had been going against him at Nürnberg. But these were things he didn't feel like talking about with his girlfriend or his family. He didn't, for example, feel he could go and ask his mother why he was sitting on the bench.

He began working with Dr. Christian Marcolli, who has also worked with a certain Roger Federer, in a bid to help his situation. With Marcolli's help, Klose said he was able to build ways out of tricky situations and bounce back from mistakes he'd previously taken so hard.

It laid the foundations for a transformation in 2012/13.

The comeback kid

Klose was able to call himself an Olympian when selected to go away with Switzerland for London 2012 but while a special experience, the bread and butter was back in Nürnberg.

Klose was eager to show that he'd learned from his debut season in the Bundesliga. He would do just that.

The Swiss defender became a tower at the back for his side and was voted by the fans as the club's "player of the first round" – their best player for the first-half of the season. His Nürnberg coach, Dieter Hecking, would leave for Wolfsburg in December 2012, but praised Klose's teamwork, his character and his will to learn. His character was certainly a growing part of things as noted by NordBayern who said that, despite the rough patches, Klose had remained the friendly, open-minded, witty young man that had arrived in 2011.

The accolades kept coming. Klose would soon prove himself to be better than Lionel Messi of Barcelona. Or, at least on a dribbling course. Klose would beat, or rather smash, Messi's previous record of 5.125 seconds. Klose completed it in 4.976.

Even with Hecking's departure, Klose continued to go from strength to strength, highlighting the talents that had convinced Nürnberg to snap him up from Thun back in 2011. He was now proving he was more than at home in the top tier of German football.

And it had not gone unnoticed.

On the sidelines

In the Summer, Klose would follow Hecking to Wolfsburg for €6m to continue his rise and seek to earn a place at the 2014 World Cup with Switzerland.

Nürnberg Sporting Director, Martin Bader, paid tribute to the departing defender. He'd played 45 times, scored twice and made six appearances for Switzerland during his time at the club. Bader said it was a pity to lose Klose on both a sporting and a human level. Dieter Hecking, meanwhile, hailed Klose's development upon his Wolfsburg arrival and assuring he was bringing "everything" a centre-back needs with him.

But if luck is part of that "everything", Klose didn't have it.

He picked up an injury in an early training session before he was red carded on his debut. It set the tone for his first season at Wolfsburg (and much of his second) with youngster, Robin Knoche taking his chance as a replacement. Knoche struck up a centre-back partnership with Naldo and that left Klose watching from the sidelines. He wouldn't make another start until February. He made just 10 league appearances in total. Only 4 of them were starts.

It also left him watching the World Cup at home.

Biding his time

For large parts of the 2014/15 season, Klose was left on the bench.

However, it would all change after Wolfsburg were crushed 4-1 in the Europa League by Napoli.

The following Bundesliga game, home to Schalke, Klose was handed a chance stake his claim. He was in no mood to miss his chance. Klose would finish the season as a Bundesliga regular. He'd score in Europe in the return leg to Napoli, a 2-2 draw. But most special of all would be the run in the DFB-Pokal. Wolfsburg became champions, toppling Borussia Dortmund 3-1 in the final.

Klose had faced the difficult times. He'd had to wait a long time. He had faced doubts. But now, he said, holding the trophy, he was even happier.

It all looked set for Klose to now cement his place in the Wolfsburg side going into 2015/16. Once more he had overcome the hard times and come back swinging. He picked up where he left off come the new season, beginning as a start, before an impressive performance against Schalke saw him score in a 3-0 win.

But it was never going to be quite that simple.

Along came Norwich

In March 2015, Klose had been clear that he did not want to spend more time on the bench. He knew there would be options come the summer. It could be the Bundesliga. It could be FC Basel. It could even be England.

Obviously, though, Klose had got himself back in the team and played well. But on deadline day of the August transfer window, Wolfsburg signed Dante from Bayern Munich, much to Klose's frustration.

Klose later said that whether you admit or not, you don't sign a player from Bayern Munich to sit on your bench.

He knew what was coming.

He was the man to make way and once more left with a watching brief.

The long periods without a minute of game time had been stressful and increasingly gruelling. But they were about to come to an end when in January 2016, Norwich City of the Premier League made a move for the Swiss international.

Playing in the Premier League was fulfilling a dream, for Klose. It was just a case of ensuring a relegation-threatened Norwich would stay there and, despite his best efforts, it wasn't to be. Klose got a season-ending injury away at Crystal Palace and was left to watch his teammates try and save City.

But instead, it was Championship football. Two and a bit years on, it's still Championship football.

Leading the Canary comeback

Klose has remained a Canary since relegation with Norwich the first club he's cleared 100 appearances with as a professional – that game coming at home to Aston Villa.

He has emerged as one of the star performers under Daniel Farke and overcome troubles during his first season in England's second-tier to show he can more than handle the rough and tumble of the Championship. It did so nearly come to an end this past summer with Hannover striving to bring Klose back to the Bundesliga. According to the man himself, he was "pretty close" to leaving. It was only the intervention of Farke that saw him stay.

I spoke to the gaffer and he convinced me that I have to stay, I have to help the young lads and that this season could be something big and we could achieve something. But it's a great feeling for me. It gives me a lot of confidence when you have someone on the sideline who pushes you all the time; who even if I have a bad game, is always behind me and gives me that safety net to go out and play my game. So then you try to give something back and at the moment it is working out.

It certainly is working out.

A return home

The question that will be posed by Norwich fans, what does Klose's future hold?

He is out of contract at the end of the season and any extended stay in Norfolk is likely to depend on what division the Canaries find themselves in for 2019/20. But the fairytale return to FC Basel is ultimately likely to be where Klose writes his final chapters as a professional.

Like the masses that converge on Carrow Road week after week, Klose did likewise at Joggeli (FC Basel's homeground) when he was younger. Basel is his home. "It's a magical place," he said back in 2015. "I just like being there". But he wants to make sure when he does return, he has done enough for himself. Then, he can fulfil a dream of winning a title with his team.

A return to Basel will also see him step up work with Club de Bâle. In 2016, mother, Daniela, began to step back from her boutique business to spend more time with her family and focus on the project of which she is a co-owner. Club de Bâle "provides a platform for Basel's well-known personalities of

culture, sports and business". It's a place, sat on the Rhine, that offers a place to exchange ideas, do business and establish new contacts. Klose has joined the board in recent years and is likely to get more involved when returning to Basel.

Enjoying the moment

For now, however, it's all about enjoying the moment for Klose.

After a late start to professional life, the years have flown and he is determined to make the most of every minute that he's on the pitch.

He is also totally driven to give something back to the Canaries for the trust they have shown in him. Back in July, Klose looked ahead to the season to come and being a leader in a young side. He said, "If we work for each other, and we know there will be some obstacles, but if we stick together we can jump over them and push them aside."

Klose has had his obstacles. He's jumped over them. He's pushed them aside. Now in the coming months with Norwich, regardless of what the future brings, he may very well be able to add another high to his journey.

Published by Cory Varney