



Das Reboot: How German Football Reinvented Itself and Conquered the World

Raphael Honigstein

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‘Football is a simple game; 22 men chase a ball for 90 minutes and at the end, the Germans always win’
–Gary Lineker

13 July 2014, World Cup Final, the last ten minutes of extra time: Germany forward Mario Götze, receiving a floated pass from his international teammate André Schürrle, jumps slightly to meet the ball and cushion it with his chest. Landing on his left foot, he takes a step with his right, swivels, and in one fluid motion, without the ball touching the ground, volleys it past the onrushing Argentine goalkeeper into the far corner of the net. The goal wins Germany the World Cup for the first time in almost twenty-five years. In the aftermath, Götze looks dazed, unable to comprehend what he has done.

In *Das Reboot*, journalist and television pundit Raphael Honigstein charts the return of German football from the international wilderness of the late 1990s to Götze’s moment of genius and asks how did this come about? How did German football transform itself from its efficient, but unappealing and defensively minded traditions to the free-flowing, attacking football that was on display in 2014? The answer takes him from California to Stuttgart, from Munich to the Maracaná, via Dortmund and Durban. Packed with exclusive interviews with the key protagonists, Honigstein’s book lifts the lid on the secrets of German football’s success.

Das Reboot: How German Football Reinvented Itself and Conquered the World Details

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Jordon Welle says

In the light of the failure of the US Men's National Team to qualify for the 2018 World Cup, I heard this book mentioned as a reference by no fewer than 3 or 4 media members to a similar crisis in Germany. This one is really interesting, but I struggled to really get into it due to the almost staccato nature of the chapters (chapters alternate back and forth between how Germany tore their program down and rebuilt it after the 2004 Euros and game logs from the 2014 Cup). The information provided is spot on, almost to the point of overload, but it is at times difficult to follow and maintain a rhythm.

An additional note for anyone else reading this as a postmortem for the US: although written prior to Klinsmann's downfall, it's not too hard to see how his system failed in the US after reading this book.

Martin Mulcahey says

In depth and entertaining view of how Germany rebuilt its football system with insight from superstars to unheralded coaches who were ahead of their time. Two guest written chapters by national players who did not win world cup was intriguing as well, and gives a good sense of how fine a line there is between runner-up frustration and world glory at the highest level. Was never aware of the hurdles and old guard politics that needed to be overcome, which Honigstein chronicles exceptionally well. Some of the work on the periphery of the team, like software developers, psychiatrists, or advance location and opponent scouts show the extent of German preparedness and thoroughness that can win games before the opening kick. Also shows how much football can come to symbolize the German nation, and how this team now represents the multicultural place Germany is. Goes beyond X's and O's with cultural insight and some German words and phrases that I believed were beyond translation ha ha.

Shawn says

I enjoy Rapha's work online and on podcasts, plus I'm a supporter of *Nationalmannschaft*, so I'm about as primed a reader as one could be for *Das Reboot*. Given the book's title, I was expecting a chronicle of the team starting after it finished 7th at the 1998 World Cup. Frame of reference is important because though that was a disappointing result for Germany, many countries would be thrilled. Further, Germany is one of a handful of countries to even qualify for every World Cup (1950 excepted due to a FIFA ban). So, some perspective is in order. Honigstein does frequently mention the expectations of supporters and how high they are.

As the book advertises, he also reports on the "rebuilding" effort from 1998 onward while mixing in some post-war highs and lows. He does this mainly by going deep on the 2006 and 2014 World Cups, the former was when Germany played host, the latter when Germany one. Good stuff.

However, the book has three major problems.

The first and biggest problem is that for some inexplicable reason the book is published out of chronology. I'm at a loss as to why Honigstein jumps back and forth between 2006 and 2014. The players may be different, but Joachim Low was the assistant manager in 2006 and the head coach in 2014, so when he is

mentioned the reader must reconfigure where he's at in time. That isn't always clear. In this vein, Honigstein deploys the usual journalistic practice of referring to players by their last name. That's fine. But when a player hasn't been mentioned for 30 pages and we've moved in time at least twice, it's not plain why this player's opinion matters or what his context is in the larger story. This isn't really an issue if you read the book in one sitting, but most people won't do that. I'm somewhere between a casual fan and a face-painting, season ticket-holding lunatic and I had trouble keeping track. An index or short glossary page would have been helpful. I probably could have read *Das Reboot* had it had one.

Secondly, Honigstein writes about what certain media outlets had to say about this off-the-field crisis or that particular match. No one cares what the media thought. Seriously.

Finally, the change to Jurgen Klinsmann in advance of the 2006 World Cup is pivotal to the team's renaissance. His tactics were a break from the previous generations and he was (and is) a controversial figure. We get a lot about the internal politics--the chance for some to settle scores was too much to resist apparently--and some about the tactics. I was looking for more tactics. What was Klinsmann doing on the practice pitch that made a difference? That made players adapt? I was hoping for more of this. A missed opportunity but still better than a sanitized player or coach memoir of the turnaround.

Amar Pai says

The Germans have a training machine, the *Footbonaut*, that resembles four batting machines positioned in the middle of every side of a small field. With one second warning, balls are emitted from the machines, and players have to kick them into random quadrants of the field that light up green. The sole goal that decided the 2014 World Cup final came in overtime, from 22 year old Mario Götze. It was a *Footbonaut* goal.

Mahlon says

In *Das Reboot* Honigstein meticulously chronicles Germany's 10 year rebuild of its soccer program culminating in their World Cup win in 2014. The best parts of this book are the sections dealing with the games themselves and the behind-the-scenes stuff dealing with the atmosphere surrounding the players. However the reason why this book will probably remain relevant for many years to come is the in-depth interviews with Germany's Youth coaches, and the deep discussion of Germany's Soccer philosophy and how it had to change in order for them to win again. The entire blueprint is here if you take the time to decipher it. I'm sure International coaches will be studying Germany's plan for years to come.

Tim says

This book was too much in depth for me. While I certainly enjoyed some chapters, others were not that much interesting for my taste. The book mainly talks about the development of German Youth system and about the people involved in it, while also it takes a look at the Germany's 2014 world cup winning campaign. The world cup victory at Brazil was not a single tournament miracle. It had started way back in 2000 after a disastrous exit at the Euros and at the world cup of 1998. It also took a sneak peek at the Germany's progress in 2006 world cup which many people called it as a "Miracle". Germany's progress to the top has really not surprised me and this book gave just too much details which I did not expect to find and that certainly made book boring for me.

Juliette says

"You can go through the whole squad and find that almost everybody was struggling with something in Brazil. . . . **Individually, there were a million reasons why we wouldn't succeed. But, collectively, we pulled together and helped each other out.**"

Here's the thing: I don't watch the Bundesliga, and I'm new to rest-of-the-world football. I hoped that this book would have helped me understand the league.

The story of German football is inspiring: players from different leagues and rival teams banded together for the sake of their nation. German football, indeed, reinvented itself for the benefit of the nation. The national team took advantage of cultural changes in order to benefit the nation. (Immigrants, we get the job done.) The coaches worked with the educators to ensure that the players received the best of both athletics and education without slighting either.

I had frequent fantasies about holidays in Munich.

And Honigstein jabbed Cristiano Ronaldo whenever he got the chance.

For all that I remember that stunning 2014 World Cup, I still didn't understand enough about German football to glean much from what Honigstein offered. I had trouble with the shifts in time from chapter-to-chapter. One chapter was about the 2014 World Cup, the next chapter was about the 2012 Euros, and the next chapter was about a coach I had no prior knowledge about whatsoever (and I still am unable to name him). I found myself dozing off when I was confused.

But maybe I'll surmount FOX's terrible layout and watch some Bundesliga matches now.

Kirsten says

Not sure I loved the structure of this book, especially at the end -- it flips back and forth between tournaments, and even within tournaments, for no discernable reason. The ending is rather weak and almost makes it seem like Honigstein, one of the most respected writers on German football, wants to remind us that he's in with the big names of fussball -- which also seems to be what he's doing when he lets a player write a brief chapter.

But overall the pace is good, the anecdotes interesting and, most importantly, it's got plenty of relevant details outlining the decade Germany spent reinventing itself to find their path to the World Cup trophy.

Paul Carr says

Thoroughly enjoyed going behind the scenes of Germany's decade-long soccer revival. As an American, I see the German dedication with a mix of jealousy and pride. The German commitment and creativity is impressive and enviable, and the book's superb access puts you right there along Germany's ascension, for

big-picture thinking and detail-oriented planning. Jurgen Klinsmann's role in the rebuilding is particularly fascinating and insightful, since he's currently coaching the U.S. Highly recommended to soccer fans.

Kerissa Ward says

In the days leading up to the 2014 World Cup I made a bold prediction: Germany was going to win. Friends – friends who knew way more than me about international soccer – scoffed. There was no way Germany was going to win. The World Cup was in Brazil, where soccer is bigger than Jesus, and Argentina had the soccer messiah, Lionel Messi. The Cup, they told me, was going back to South America.

A month later, I was too shocked at being right to bother gloating. Especially since I knew nothing about the German team, coach, players, or tactics. All I knew was that they had come very close to the final in 2006 and 2010. I thought that it was their turn – that the football gods were going to be on their side. After reading Raphael Honigstein's *Das Reboot*, though, it becomes apparent that divine intervention had nothing to do with it -- the German win in Brazil was a man-made football revolution.

Honigstein, primarily a writer for the *Guardian* and *ESPN*, weaves a fascinating tale. At the heart of this short book is the 2014 German national team's path to glory in Brazil. Surrounding that team's story is the saga of German football in the last 20 years.

Beginning with the team's pre-Brazil training, the author breaks the story into two parts: the 2014 World Cup campaign and the who, what, when, where, why of how everything changed. The World Cup story is told chronologically with each game having its own chapter. The backstory, told out of order, introduces the men who implemented the changes.

Honigstein uses his reporting skills to keep both storylines as focused as possible, making the book a relatively quick read. Previous knowledge of Bundesliga and German soccer isn't needed either. He creates brief, vivid portraits of each main player, making them easy to track, while he provides just the right amount of backstory about the German national team, certain Bundesliga clubs, and the German youth development system so outsiders can understand the impact the changes made.

It's impossible to spoil the World Cup chapters; everyone knows that Germany won. However, they provide a peek behind the curtain to show how difficult the team's journey was. It's refreshing to learn how players truly felt during and after each match – instead of the lip service usually given in post match interviews – and it's interesting to about the plays and tactics connected to the team's success.

The backstory, however, is where a reader will find more suspense since it wasn't easy for the German system to change. And anyone who follows either the US Men's National Team or the New York Red Bulls will want to pay special attention to these chapters. Despite the success of West Germany/Germany from 1974 to 1990, German coaching and tactical manuals went unchanged. As relayed in the chapter on Ralf Rangnick and Helmut Gross, the architects of the German high press, many saw their study of tactics and emphasis on training as too intellectual:

That was not the German (football) way. Its heroes were doers, not thinkers; men who could take leave of their critical faculties to run, shoot and score as if on autopilot, plugged into one big determination to succeed that existed independently of themselves.

One of the people who makes the struggle between old and new tactical thinking so familiar is Jurgen Klinsman. Everything about his short tenure as the German national team manager is familiar to those who follow the USMNT: the emphasis on player fitness, playing players out of position, punishing players by removing them from rosters, flying in from California just before matches and then leaving for California as soon as the match is over. Honigstein never makes an overt judgment about Klinsman or his time as Germany's manager; he wisely allows the reader to come to their own conclusions about him. But what the book does illustrate is that Klinsman was less an architect of system change, and more of a foreman who oversaw part of the construction. The similarities of his time managing both teams leads the reader to wonder if he can make a difference time with the US program or if other leaders are needed to make substantial changes.

Das Reboot is strongest when Honigstein goes into detail about those other leaders for the German system. He devotes whole chapters to Rangnick and Gross developing the high press, Dietrich Weise creating the blueprint for the new German youth development, and the technology being used to develop player response time, study gameplay, and improve player connections. A personal favorite of the tech being used is the Footbonaut. Invented by Christian Guttler, it's a real-life FIFA training exercise that, if it's not being used by MLS clubs and academies, needs to be used immediately since Mario Gotze's game-winning goal in the World Cup final was a result of his training in the Footbonaut.

For the American football fan the book creates several questions: Can we make similar youth development changes so more US children can receive the right kind of development? Where should the development focus – academies or high schools/colleges? How long will we need to wait for a new development system? And how long will it take for the players from that system to produce national team results?

Hopefully an American sequel can be written in ten or fifteen years and it'll have its own World Cup happy ending.

James says

This was an illuminating analysis of how Germany won the 2014 World Cup, looking at the matches themselves in detail interspersed with a brief history of the reforms in German football since 1998, and how they translated onto the pitch, managing to shed new light on matches I'd watched and also reveal what happened behind the scenes.

Although Honigstein is German, this is almost a detached analysis of the national team, but with a true reflection of how various figures were viewed in Germany, such as Klopp being revered for his tournament analysis and the effect of Mertesacker's post-Algeria rallying call. The timeline is broadly 1998 onwards, although it is Klinsmann's reign that has the first serious discussion, and despite his poor tenure at Bayern, Honigstein attributes a lot of praise to Löw's predecessor. Both managers and infrastructure received praise, such as the need for top clubs to have academies - but with the foresight from the German FA to recognise that a central centre (like in France and now England) was not aligned to club requirements for long-term success. Touches such as these created the sense that this was Germany making their own luck.

Because Honigstein did admit that some luck was needed. This was especially true in the final against Argentina, where many opposition chances were spurned, and you do wonder whether this book would even have been produced had Higuain been more clinical that day. As a counter it was suggested though that the 2014 side had a bit more nous, with the surprising revelation that Germany had not practiced set pieces to a

significant degree in previous tournaments, but scoring some crucial goals this way en route to winning the trophy.

Some aspects were not quite as revelatory, in particular a discussion of a new breed of coaches. Klopp was an obvious example to profile, however Ralf Ragnick seemed to struggle at big clubs and have to prove himself with smaller clubs, which didn't seem relevant to German success, other than to use Hoffenheim vs Bayern as the best match German football had produced. The *Footbonaut* was notable as a machine but its actual influence is questionable.

That aside, the book rarely dragged and managed to capture the characters involved without overlooking the structural changes, and had personality without being about the author at any point. This was a lot more polished than his other work on English football.

Lee Penney says

Reading the synopsis, what I was expecting was a chronological run-through of the steps that led to the Germans winning the World Cup in 2014.

The steps are probably covered, but the book's format means it's hard to pick them out. We jump around the timeline so often I had difficulty keeping track of where we were. Added to that is a lack of detail about much of what was done.

This is intermingled with quotes of criticism from former football greats and newspapers that, while giving context and showing what the agents of change were up against, don't really add anything.

Large swathes of the book are taken up with blow-by-blow accounts of various matches. Football isn't enthralling in the form of the written word. I get the impression these were added to help bulk the book up, though some lessons are pulled out of particular plays.

There are some great quotes from the players who took part in the tournaments discussed, which offer some insights about how they felt and how various decisions impacted them, though with little tactical detail.

From what I gleaned:

- It started many years prior with a push to get more professional coaches at grassroots level. This enabled them to find a larger pool of talent to feed into the clubs and to develop players in the provinces.

- The German FA encouraged the clubs to overhaul their youth policy and build academies, while setting rules on the number of international players within them. This helped develop a young talent pool that had been trained the same way.

- They focused on the detail, whether it was improving fitness, set pieces, tactics, hotels, mental conditioning — anything that they thought could give them an edge, nothing was too small.

Technology was used to help review performance and prepare players, as well as engaging them in tactics.

- Removing the dogma around the importance of 'great players' and instead focusing on a great team. Team spirit also came up several times. Not that key players and personalities didn't prove important.

- Dropping old ideas like sweepers and a defense-first mentality, as well as being flexible about striking options.

- Luck — personnel changes, often enforced, and last-minute tactical decisions proved successful but could have destroyed them.

There may have been others, certainly there was some interesting technology mentioned that I hadn't seen or heard of before, but which gets only a few paragraphs. It was hard to pull much else out though.

This book needs a good edit to re-order it. Starting with either the appointment of Klinsmann — who seems to have spearheaded some of the changes — or perhaps the win in Brazil, before returning to the years when unsung heroes lobbied the German FA for more grassroots coaching.

Charlie Anson does a good job narrating, even if the pronunciation of some names is a little odd to my (English) ears.

Not a bad book, but chaotically organised.

Tara deCamp says

Germany went from a declining power in football to a World Cup winner in 16 years. This book shows how that happened. This was an absolute joy to read, but that's coming from a huge DFB fan who has followed them all those years; it was nostalgic and fun to remember all the moments Honigstein refers to as he details the reinvention of German football.

Martyn says

Brilliantly researched and written account of the ten year path to Germany's 2014 World Cup win. Easily the best football related book I've read.

Pete says

Is this book a thunderbastard? That's the question you want answered when reading football books. Des Reboot (2015) by Raphael Honigstein looks at the rejuvenation of the German National team following poor performances in 1998 through to 2004. Honigstein is football journalist who writes for The Guardian and appears on the Football Weekly podcast and provides expertise on the Bundesliga and the German National team.

The book interleaves the rejuvenation of the German National team and the German training system with the tale of Germany's 2014 World Cup win. The technique is like that of a Michael Lewis book where a narrative of a person is worked in with a description of the events around them. It works well.

After the German World Cup win of 1990 the future looked bright for German football, as well as winning the World Cup the incorporation of East Germany meant that the pool of players would be even bigger and German teams even stronger. But it wasn't to be. Despite winning the 1996 Euro's the German National team was aging and falling behind other countries like France that had a better academy system.

The development of the youth system by Dietrich Weise in the early 1980s and the updating of the system

after France 1998 is described. The arrival of Jürgen Klinsmann and the way that he and his team including Joachim Löw greatly improved the professionalism of the national team by importing techniques from the US and from other sports is really well described.

As well as the story of the World Cup in 2014 the way that the 2006 World Cup and the 2010 World Cup went is also described with interviews with Per Mertesacker and Arne Friedrichs. The reflections on these tournaments provides insight into how the new German team has been formed and what changes were made for 2014.

The descriptions of each game of the 2014 World Cup are very well done with tactical and personnel changes and their impacts carefully outlined. The description of the semi-final is perhaps a slight dip for the book while the final's description is a highlight.

The book is a thunderbastard of a read. It's worth reading for anyone looking for a description of how national systems can change and improve football and for anyone who wants to understand how Germany went from a declining power to a World Cup winner in 16 years.
