



PHOTO: Heiko Bäckler/Pressepicture

No offside for health

Be it a cold, a nutrition issue or the Zika virus: The team physicians care about the health of their Under-21 football players. The Eurolyser Cube by Sysmex facilitates their daily routine

TEXT *Susanne Schmidt*



It's about **more** than pulled muscles or injured knees: when it comes to health, the team doctor is the player's first contact during lengthy Under-21 football tournaments



“For me personally, it does not make a difference whether I am treating a football player or a regular patient in my practise”

LARS LIPPELT, M.D.

With their participation in the European championship semi-finals 2015, the team directly qualified for the Olympic Games in Brazil. On top of that they won every single qualifying match.

Lars Lippelt, M.D., is never far when the German national Under-21 football team battles for victory on the pitch. As team doctor he travels with the German junior team, where Bastian Schweinsteiger, Lukas Podolski and Manuel Neuer celebrated their first successes at international level. In this interview Mr. Lippelt tells us about his duties as the team physician, his personal relationship with football and the upcoming Olympic Games in Brazil.

What is the situation for the Under-21 team’s physicians and what are your tasks as team doctor?

The medical staff consists of two people. I am the team’s internist and my colleague is an orthopaedist. He is responsible for everything concerning the locomotor system, while I take care about all medical issues that are not primarily caused by injuries. Furthermore, I manage sport nutrition- and anti-doping issues.

How did you end up working in professional football?

Football has always been a passion of mine. I never had any professional ambitions but I’ve always enjoyed playing it. After studying medicine I specialised in sports medicine at the “Institut für Sportmedizin” in Saarbrücken. Back in the day Professor Wilfried Kindermann, who was the medical supervisor of the

German national football team at the time, also was the director of the institute. That is how I ended up at my current position as team physician. In my free time, I play in an alumni association football team.

What are your duties besides supervising the Under-21 football team?

In my day job I run a joint practise with two colleagues where I work as an internist and family doctor. Supervising the Under-21 team may be a part-time job of mine, but it still is very time-consuming. I am supervising between five and six international matches per year on average, mostly back-to-back. Such an occupation usually takes about ten days, including two international matches. If the team qualifies for a tournament, it adds a considerable amount of working days. For the last two years I’ve shared this task with a colleague who takes over when I am needed in my practise or am on vacation.

Are you the “twelfth man on the pitch”?

No, I would not say that. Being on the road with the team for fifty days a year you do get to know each

other pretty well, but it still is a normal doctor-patient relationship. For me personally it does not make a difference if I am treating a football player or a regular patient in my practise.

What is the difference between the Under-21 and the German national team?

There is a certain year of birth which must not be exceeded. In football, players are divided in age brackets: Under-15, Under-16, Under-17 and Under-21 – and there is a national team for every one of them. Theoretically, even a 17-year-old could play for the German national team, but obviously the level in the top tier is very high. That is why there are junior national teams to give younger players the opportunity to play internationally.

How busy is a player of the Under-21 team?

It is a full time job! Most Under-21 players are earning their money exclusively by playing football. Every player's schedule is different, depending on their club. Usually the players are training on a daily basis and compete in a match twice a week. Also, physical therapies and public relations play a crucial part in the life of a national league professional.

Is a professional football player fitter than a recreational athlete, for example by having a better immune system?

He is fitter than an amateur because of the daily exercise. The German association for sports- and preventive medicine recommends a regular medical check-up for everyone who engages in physical activity. This is valid for hobby runners as well as for professional athletes. I recommend this check-up for every patient who shows up in my practise and goes running three days a week or to the gym twice a week. Periodical check-ups are important to prevent yourself from putting your health in danger through sports.

How do you rate the chances for the German Under-21 team at the Olympic Games in Brazil?

Usually I like to not concern myself with that sort of question, as my primary goal is to prevent players

from dropping out because of health issues. This can be a challenge, because especially in Brazil there are many diseases which do not exist in Germany – for example the Zika virus.

How is your portable practise set up?

I am responsible for medication. We have a huge travel first-aid kit. Amongst other things it contains bandaging material and basic equipment to splint fractured bones for example. Furthermore we have an emergency kit including a defibrillator to treat life-threatening emergencies on the spot. In addition to that we have been using the Eurolyser Cube by Sysmex for two years, allowing us to check the infection status of a player with just a single drop of blood in a very short amount of time. This is extremely valuable, especially in countries that do not offer the possibility to conveniently drive to the nearest hospital for blood sample collection. In addition, the small dimensions of the Cube allow it to perfectly fit in a travel bag. ■



LARS LIPPELT, M.D.

41 years old, Bielefeld, Deutschland

Mr. Lippelt is resident internist as well as general physician and supervises the German Under-21 national football team since 2009.



Just about the size of a regular football: The Eurolyser Cube consists of a mini-tablet linked to an analysis unit for on the spot point-of-care diagnosis. Only a small whole blood sample is needed to determine the required parameter quickly and easily.