

Making a winner of women's football: German national player Melanie Leupolz

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#WomenWinning

We are excited to be starting our campaign on women in sport as the Women's World Cup kicks off in France! Twenty four teams are playing this year, in the eighth series of FIFA's competition. We spoke to midfielder and Bayern Munich player Melanie Leupolz about her career to date, the upcoming competition and how to grow international interest in women's football.

Melanie is a midfielder playing for Bayern Munich and the German national team. Having played for Germany's under 17 team in the 2010 U-17 World Cup she made her senior debut in 2013, before going on to be a member of the gold medal winning German team in the 2016 Summer Olympics.

Looking back over the past six years, Melanie picks out some particular highlights in her professional experience: *'For me, the European Championship in 2013 and the 2016 Olympics stand out. And winning two German champion titles with Bayern Munich. One major challenge was my knee injury in 2017, but that's part of the sport. So I am all the happier to be fit at the moment.'*

Anticipating the team's first game on 8th June, in which Germany plays China, Melanie sounds confident and positive: *'We have a great, strong team and a new coach with a new philosophy. I hope we will play a successful tournament.'* The team's new coach is the renowned Martina Voss-Tecklenburg, who has also managed 2001 Duisburg, USV Jena and the Swiss national team.

With her experience of the football industry, Melanie has a good perspective on the efforts that the German Football Association and leading clubs have been taking to advance women's football squads: *'Women's football has made huge strides forward in recent years. Nevertheless, one has to be careful to keep up the pace with other nations, which are currently making rapid progress.'*

There is the potential for a much bigger audience for women's games, in Melanie's view, if the right level of support and enthusiasm can be brought to bear across the industry. This year has seen some very exciting sponsorship deals being struck in support of women's teams – in England Barclays became the Women's Super League's first title sponsor in a three-year deal thought to be worth more than £10m, Visa announced a *'marketing investment equal to our support of the Men's FIFA World Cup in Russia'*, and Boots agreed a multi-million sponsorship with the UK's home teams.

Melanie welcomes this gathering momentum, and focuses in particular on maintaining its growth through building on the volume and enthusiasm of spectators: *'The goal must be to attract more fans, in terms of both live audiences in the stadiums and people watching games on TV. For this to happen, structural changes and greater professionalism are required at the clubs and the league as such.'*

Melanie is optimistic that clubs will be able to come together to create a supportive environment for female players, and foresees a successful future for women's teams and games: *'First of all, we've got to improve the infrastructure and conditions at grassroots level in order to make women's football a more interesting proposition for fans to watch.'* Following the recent growth of sponsorship deals amongst male teams, Melanie suggests: *'If these ground-level steps are taken, then it will lead to bigger audiences, and they will attract potential sponsors and corporations – just the kind of virtuous cycle we need.'*

We are certain that Melanie will go on to even greater success in her career at club and national level, and in the process will help women's football increase its appeal and following. We look forward to watching her play at the World Cup!


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Authors

Luca Ferrari

PARTNER | MILAN

Corporate


 +39 02 8821 4208


 luca.ferrari@withersworldwide.com

Libby Payne

SENIOR ASSOCIATE | LONDON

Employment

 +44 20 7597 6608

 libby.payne@withersworldwide.com