



27/06/2018 BY MEDIA

Five reasons Germany crashed out of the 2018 Russia World Cup

One of the biggest shocks in football history has come to pass and Germany – reigning world champions and 2017 FIFA Confederations Cup winners – have crashed out of the 2018 FIFA World Cup Russia at the group stages (an elimination at the first hurdle for the first time since 1938), finishing bottom of an enthralling Group F.

Here, **bundesliga.com** explores some of the reasons for the early departure of Joachim Löw's troupe.

1) Hunger sated?

First and foremost, it should be noted how hard it is

to keep winning. Prior to Russia, Germany had been triumphant at the 2014 World Cup, the [UEFA Under-21 European Championship 2017](#) and the [Confederations Cup 2017](#), as well as reaching the semi-final of every major tournament since 2006.

The past decade has been an unprecedented period of success for German sides on the global stage, but perhaps inertia had taken hold. Indeed, the squad was replete with serial winners at club level – 13 of 23 came from either domestic champions ([Bayern Munich](#), Juventus, Barcelona, Paris Saint-Germain, Manchester City) or the European champions (Real Madrid) – yet their competitive juices had run dry after such consistent success across the board.

This was something Joachim Löw referred to in his post-match interviews, saying: “I had the feeling that there was a certain arrogance before the Mexico game, the feeling that we could just turn it on at the flick of a switch.” [Julian Draxler](#) also alluded to a lack of hunger, saying: “My personal impression was that the same fire wasn’t there as in 2014.”

On top of that, sustained excellence is the hardest thing to achieve in sport, particularly at international level when players see each other less and are therefore less familiar with one another, even for a group as experienced as this one. International dominance tends to come in two- to four-year cycles (and this early exit will cast the semi-final defeats at UEFA Euro 2012 and 2016 as even bigger missed

opportunities), one reason that no nation has defended the World Cup since Brazil did so in 1962. Perhaps Löw's major success amid the wreckage is that he has kept this side at the top for so long.

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2) Curious squad selections

Even with that in mind, Löw's squad selection did not help matters in Russia: while [Julian Brandt's impressive cameos more than justified his inclusion ahead of Leroy Sane](#), other exclusions were more questionable.

Even pre-tournament, leaving out [Bayern Munich's Sandro Wagner](#), the self-proclaimed "best striker in Germany", and retaining [Mario Gomez](#), who missed straightforward headed chances – supposedly his bread and butter – in all three games, looked bizarre, particularly after Wagner's impressive half-season with his boyhood club.

It is also hardly being wise after the event to suggest that the out-of-hand dismissal of [Augsburg left-back Philipp Max](#), whose 12 assists were more than any other player in the top flight last season apart from [Thomas Müller](#) (14), was premature. That [Hertha Berlin's Marvin Plattenhardt](#) struggled to make an attacking impact in the first game against Mexico when [Jonas Hector](#) was absent through illness cast

that decision in even harsher light.

Watch: *Wagner is the self-proclaimed “best German striker”*

Then, when in Russia, there were further odd selections: [Bayern-bound Leon Goretzka](#) – who so impressed in finishing as joint-top scorer (three goals) at last summer’s Confederations Cup – was only given a starting berth in the must-win final game against South Korea, and out of position on the right wing at that.

[RB Leipzig’s Timo Werner](#) was shunted between the left flank and centre-forward in almost every game, while the revolving attacking midfield door of Müller and [Mesut Özil](#) – who was coming in and who was going out? – was symptomatic of Löw not knowing his best team. If not knowing his preferred starting XI was the symptom, then the disease was a curious squad selection in the first place.

Leon Goretzka, Thomas Müller and Mario Gomez trudge off the field in Kazan. © gettyimages / Saeed Khan

3) A divided group

While vociferously denied by all in the camp, the rumours that there was a divide between the Confederations Cup winners in 2017 and the World Cup winners in 2014 persisted, hard as the DFB press team tried to make it disappear. Nine of the 23-

man ensemble in Russia had been victorious in Brazil four years prior, while 13 had tasted success in Russia, with only Matthias Ginter and Draxler in both squads.

Perhaps Löw's toughest task was maintaining a healthy atmosphere in a squad containing a core of World Cup winners, all of whom felt they had earned the right to defend their title, and Confederations Cup winners, all of whom felt the previous summer's efforts deserved greater reward.



Germany captain Manuel Neuer and centre-back Mats Hummels – team-mates at Bayern Munich – were both on the winning side in 2014. © gettyimages / Benjamin Cremel

Symbolic of this perceived divide were perhaps [Marc-Andre ter Stegen](#)'s pre-tournament comments that it was “disappointing” to be back-up to Neuer, a World Cup winner. Another Confederations Cup winner, Brandt, while refuting suggestions that there was a rift in the camp, [still admitted that he spent most of his time with Goretzka, Plattenhardt and Werner – all of whom were in Russia last summer.](#)



Hanging out in Sochi: Marvin Plattenhardt, Julian Brandt and Timo Werner. © gettyimages / Alexander Hassenstein

4) The weight of history

While the vagaries of fate are by no means a valid excuse for failure, Germany are not the first holders to crash out at the group stage of a World Cup.

[Marco Reus had said pre-tournament that Germany were the “hunted”](#); first they were caught by Mexico, then briefly escaped the predator’s jaws against Sweden, before being chewed up and swallowed by South Korea.

Even if it is scant consolation at present, Germany are in good company: a viral statistic on social media it may now be, but no European nation defending the World Cup has escaped the group stages in the last two decades, France failing in 2002, Italy in 2010, Spain in 2014 and now Germany in 2018.

While the causes are multifarious and distinct in each case, a sense of drift and lethargy at being the hunted was evident in each of those campaigns.

After all, what better way of laying down a marker as being a team to watch than by dethroning the kings of the world? For Mexico in 2018, read Senegal in 2002 against France, or the Netherlands in 2014 against Spain.

5) The spread of German knowledge

There is a theory that as football becomes more interconnected – and knowledge is disseminated around the world faster – the traditionally smaller nations (think of Iceland's recent success) will catch up with the powerhouses. That theory was nowhere more in practice than in World Cup Group F, where Sweden and South Korea antagonised the German aristocrats to the point of elimination. As [Mats Hummels](#) pointed out after the defeat to South Korea, "all of the favourites have had problems because the smaller teams have been doing well defensively".

As globalisation takes hold in football, the spread of players results in knowledge being moving farther and faster from its traditional western European hubs: is it any surprise that [Carlos Salcedo](#), who plays his club football with [Eintracht Frankfurt](#) in the Bundesliga, was outstanding in Mexico's 1-0 win against Germany? Or that [Werder Bremen's](#) Ludwig Augustinsson and [RB Leipzig's](#) [Emil Forsberg](#) impressed in Sweden's narrow defeat in Sochi? That a former Bundesliga star, [Heung-Min Son](#),

hammered the final goal into Germany's coffin
seemed apt. What the Bundesliga has taught this
disparate selection of players from three different
continents, they took on board and then used to get
the better of Germany.