

## Schaaf's higher calling

Cover Story by **Massimo Gonella & Michael Harrold** from **Nyon**

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Werder Bremen coach Thomas Schaaf was in talkative mood when he sat down with uefa.com at the start of the season to discuss his side's hopes in the UEFA Champions League. After negotiating a difficult third-qualifying round tie against NK Dinamo Zagreb he had reason to look ahead with optimism, a feeling that will not have been diminished by a 2-1 loss to Real Madrid CF on Matchday 1.

### 'Great'

Bremen might have left the Santiago Bernabeu with a point, and a battling performance has raised spirits ahead of the visit of Olympiacos CFP on Wednesday. For Schaaf, who led Bremen to the German double in 2004, it is all part of the grand plan. "It's a great thing we've succeeded in qualifying for the group phase for the fourth successive time," he told uefa.com. "Over the years, we've either been very close to, or have managed to come through the group phase, and that remains our goal. Because we haven't been able to achieve this objective year in, year out, I don't think we belong among the truly major clubs. But I think we've set down standards that are astonishing for our means. It's nice to be able to measure ourselves against the best teams."



Thomas Schaaf has taken Bremen into the UEFA Champions League for a fourth successive year (© Getty Images)

### 'Respect'

Schaaf is a one-club man, having spent his entire playing career at the Weserstadion before moving into coaching at Bremen. Under Schaaf Bremen have emerged as one of the biggest powers in the Bundesliga and the 46-year-old faces the difficult task of managing the expectations success has brought. "It's nice to be valued, to receive so many compliments and to have our performances recognised. We've received respect, and the team has certainly deserved this."

### Rising standards

"We've also noticed that within the team, demands are also rising in terms of standards and the levels the players are setting themselves, how they approach duels on the pitch, the tempo they play at. On the other hand, we mustn't forget the demands that are placed on us as a result. In Germany, we're regarded as a team that always has to be at the top and contesting the title. These demands are then also transferred to the Champions League, or in international competitions? It's assumed we can go for wins and experience success."

### Injuries

Schaaf's plans this season have been hampered by a raft of injuries. The loss of Torsten Frings, Clemens Fritz, Tim Borowski, Pierre Wome and Carlos Alberto have hit hard, not to mention watching Miroslav Klose banging in the goals game after game for FC Bayern Munchen following his summer move from Bremen. "Our aim is to be challenging up at the top ... At the moment, we have too many injured players, so we haven't been able to call upon our full squad. But we've nevertheless got a points tally that makes a lot of things possible at the moment."

### 'Good test'

A 4-1 win against VfB Stuttgart has been the highlight of a stuttering start in the Bundesliga, but doubts remain as to whether Bremen have the firepower necessary to replace Klose in the long term. In the meantime, some of the squad's younger players will get the chance to shine with striker Martin Harnik and defender Sebastian Boenisch making their first steps in the side. "It's a really good test to see how each player can develop," Schaaf said. "The demands placed

on them in the competition are extremely important for their development. We've also seen that [the UEFA Champions League] gives a terrific boost to some players ? that they can perhaps do things that were not expected of them. On the other hand, we've seen players' limitations. But we have had considerably more positive experiences as far as player development is concerned as a result of taking part in the UEFA Champions League."

**Expectations**

After being drawn alongside Chelsea FC and FC Barcelona last season, Bremen could have been forgiven for hoping for an easier ride this time round. An away tie with Madrid in their opening game put paid to that, but with home matches against Olympiacos and S.S. Lazio to come, Schaaf will be expecting his side to be challenging at the top of the section soon. "Once again, we're in an interesting group, although I think you get this every year, with every group. The interesting thing in this group is we're playing against opponents we haven't played against in the competition. In our group, Real Madrid stand out, but Lazio and Olympiacos are also significant teams, and it will be difficult to play against them. We've learned a lot about ourselves in the past few years, and our expectations are such that we would like to come through the group phase. This has to be our objective. Whether we succeed, we'll have to see."

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