



SUPER FRAUEN

Steffi Jones

The first female German
soccer superstar.

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Podcast Transcript

- [00:33] A ball flies towards Steffi's head. "Ow!" she yells as it hits her — it feels tough and grubby. It's the fifth time today. Steffi's face hurts. And her stomach. And her shoulders. It hurts wherever the football has hit her, and Steffi is slowly starting to get fed up with it. She takes the ball from the grass, places it in front of her foot and kicks it back as hard as she can. "Hey!" call the young boys. The ball barely missed their heads as it flew by, they are totally surprised. "You're not allowed to shoot, you're the goal!" The boys' plan was a rather silly one. They are playing in a field, so there are no goals. But one of the boys has brought along his little sister: Steffi. And she is supposed to be a substitute for the goal. Initially it works — until Steffi starts to shoot back. As it turns out, the boys find that it is much more fun to play soccer with the little girl instead of using her as a goal.
- [01:42] None of the boys expect that Steffi will one day become the most famous female soccer player in Germany. And that she will win more tournaments than the country's best male players. With her team, she will win so many trophies that she will hardly be able to keep count. She will become the first soccer superstar in Germany, who is not a man. Even if getting there was not easy.
- [02:16] **Steffi Jones is one of the most famous German soccer players. Her path to get there, however, was not always easy. What do you think were some of the difficulties and problems that Steffi faced on her way to becoming a football star?**
- [02:28] Because Steffi's life could have looked much different. In the part of town that she grew up in, there were not a lot of fun things to do as a kid. The houses in Frankfurt-Bonames were tall and gray, many people were not doing well there. They had no work, very little money. If kids had a different skin colour, like Steffi, they would often hear bad words, people were not very nice to each other.
- [02:58] Steffi and her brother lived here with their mother. Her father, an African-American soldier, had long since left the family and returned to the United States. In order to earn enough money for her kids, her mother worked three jobs — during the day, she worked in a bank and in the evenings in a call centre for taxis. On the weekend, she worked as a cleaner. She had plenty of love for her children, but not enough time.
- [03:28] However, as long as Steffi could play with a ball, her life was whole. At four years old she joined a soccer club — she was the only girl amongst the boys. Her mum did not know what to think about it all. "Wouldn't you prefer to play tennis?" she asked. "No," Steffi replied. "For once, please put a skirt on, you're always wearing pants." "No!" "Or you can let your hair grow out. It looks pretty like that." "No!" Steffi's answer remains, because it didn't matter to Steffi, what made other girls happy. She only wanted to play soccer. Preferably from the morning until the streetlights turn on in the evening.



[04:20] Why do you believe that so many people used to think that soccer was only a men's sport?

[04:30] Eventually, Steffi's brother decided that he no longer wanted to play soccer. He still looked after his little sister — but not himself. What happened to him happened to many other kids there: out of boredom he started stealing things from shops. Because of him, the police started coming to their mother's door more and more often. At some point, he tried taking drugs — and could no longer stop. For years. Even after years of playing in the first division of the Bundesliga and earning her own money, Steffi gave her brother so much of her own money, that she could hardly pay her own rent. The most important thing was that he survived, had something to eat and was clothed. But at some point, she realised: this cannot go on any longer. He is not getting his life together. She broke off all contact with him.

[05:22] As a teenager, Steffi could not have imagined that she would one day earn money as a woman by playing soccer. At that time, the world was only interested in the male German soccer players. They belonged to the best teams around the world. They were stars and idols and would win world championships, earning millions because of it. It appeared to not be a sport for women. When the women's team won the European Championship in 1989, back before Steffi had joined them, it was the first time that television cameras were at one of their games. And instead of money, every player received a set of coffee cups and cake plates. With red, yellow and blue flowers on them.

[06:10] Steffi's path to joining that national women's team had already begun. When she turned 12 years old, she learned: "I am not the only girl in the world who can play soccer!" She played in an all-girls team for the first time. At training she received fewer bruises. In return there was more talk, much more discussion about everything.

[06:36] In 1990, she started playing for a team in the first division of the Bundesliga — where only the best teams in Germany play. In 1993, she received a spot on the national team and in the following years with them, she won one world championship, three European championships and became a two-time Olympic bronze medalist. The women's team excited audiences in Germany. Because as the women were celebrating one victory after the other, the once-successful men's national team was not in its best shape, they hardly won any trophies.

[07:17] During this time, Steffi's mother was at every single match. She no longer wished for her daughter to play tennis or wear skirts — she was very proud of her. "But sometimes she reminds me that I should walk properly, not like a soccer player," said Steffi.



[07:37] Steffi retired from playing in 2007. Thirty years of playing soccer had taken its toll on her body. But she didn't give up on soccer entirely: she learned how to coach soccer teams. In 2016 she became the coach of the national women's team. There were high expectations for Steffi. There was also pressure: can she make the team as good as it was when she was a player? Every time her team lost, the journalists wrote: "Look, she can't do it." Her team had little chance to rest. Criticism came from every side, even when there were small victories. When you love something for years — and then it only starts bringing you stress, then you have to stop, says Steffi.

[08:33] She needed a break: take a breath before the next chapter of her life. Today she coaches a women's team in the fifth division. Without pressure, with plenty of fun. She isn't paid for this — for her it's important that soccer remains a part of her world. After all, women's football in Germany would not be where it is today without Steffi Jones. She holds many talks and is engaged with several social issues, such as tackling racism. She is also a champion for kids who have had to fight hard for a fair chance in life — just like Steffi had to. She has been married to her wife, Nicole, since 2014. And she is now in contact again with her brother — he has finally managed to beat his addiction. He has started his own family. Steffi is proud of him. She is also proud of something else: "That I managed to become a professional soccer player, without having to bend myself to anyone else."

[09:45] Steffi Jones is the superwoman of German football. Even as a kid she loved spending her days on the soccer field and today, she is still active as a coach, bringing plenty of passion and dedication to her role. Are you also passionate about a hobby, interest or talent like Steffi? And could you imagine later making a living out of it?

PODCAST EPISODE

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