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Success stories are helped along by people, both allies and opponents

Perfection is a mix of ability, opportunity and knowing oneself. It's a quest that when it's successful will help every person reach their full potential.

I remember kicking a ball right from when I was a little boy. I can't remember when I first realised I was rather good at this. I guess it was when I was six or seven years old and was scoring more goals than my older friends, some who were 11-12 years old! This trend continued right till I played for youth teams. I made each youth team well before I was in the expected age bracket and each step made me more confident of my abilities.

My big break came in 1979 when I made it to a fourth division team and the next one year was one of great importance for me. I moved to Bundesliga within a few months and was chosen to play for West Germany in 1980. From a small town boy to holding the European Championship trophy in less than 18 months was a heady upward ascent. In mountaineering, the higher you go the more rarified the air is. I knew at every level I would need prove myself as worthy of that level. You need to push yourself to perfection but equally you need to know yourself.

Fresh from the euphoria of the Euro, I was approached by Napoli with a contract to play there. A certain Diego Maradona had seen me and recommended to the club that I be signed up.

Napoli FC was one of the top clubs then but I decided not to go to Italy. It was a big decision but was convinced that I was not mature enough to make the move. This is where I thank the Lord that I was aware of my limitations and stuck to what my better sense told me.

The 1980s was an intense time for the German team with two finals in 1982 and 1986. We lost two finals, the 1986 final was particularly tough because we lost narrowly to Maradona's Argentina. However, in retrospect it was because we were a team that was pulling in different directions with some players having discipline issues.

The same finalists made it to 1990 finals where got past Argentina to win the cup. It was a more united team and many of us had learnt our lessons from the two earlier losses. We were focused, we players on the bench were motivated and we played as a team. This is one of the big lessons of sport. If you want to achieve greatness, 99 per cent is not enough. You need to give it your all.

The two finals brought me face to face with Diego Maradona who was the greatest player of our generation. We had some amazing clashes over the years, and he brought out the best in me, just as I hope I did in him. Our teams were fiercely competitive but there was also great respect. And as we drew to the end of our career, we became friends and even attended each other's farewell games.

That is what a success story is, it has people who help you along the way as allies and even as opponents. Each day, week, month and year brings challenges, and getting past those is what makes perfection so special.