

Minnesota ODP Germany Tour: Feb. 28–March 10, 2019

Journal by Joe Manser (2004)

Day 1:

I woke up at a normal time for school except this time I was excited to wake up. The night before I couldn't sleep. I have been looking forward to this trip for around two months now and having it finally begin is absolutely thrilling. The first plane ride to Dallas wasn't all that fun since I sat in the middle seat next to an over talkative businessman and an '02 who turned out to have had the middle seat ticket and me having the window seat ticket. So, he was sitting in my window seat. When we arrived in Dallas me and Victor went and got pretzels at this Texan pretzel place. They kind of tasted like cardboard but the cheese sauce definitely helped with that.

The plane ride to Germany was very fun as I met an '02 named Lane who was very nice. I also sat with one of my new friends Victor who I had met at the Saturday night training sessions at Augsburg. We took some cool pictures since we were right next to the wing. I got lots of sleep on that flight and was woken up to us landing in Frankfurt. I remember walking off the plane and talking to some of my teammates, saying things like, "I just can't believe that we are here."

We were all sharing the exact same blown away feeling that we had arrived in Germany. We got our bags and scrambled through a very modern Frankfurt airport with an insanely modern McDonalds and some chairs that looked like spaceships. I sat next to Victor on the bus ride there. I don't remember much of that two hours as I was asleep the whole time. We had a training session and toured the complex. The rooms were very modern, and I started to get this feeling that Germany was much more architecturally advanced than America. Our whole building was this huge hexagon with every room looking the exact same.

Day 2:

I went to sleep the night before at 8 pm only to wake up at 4 am. Jet lag sucks. I remember eating a hearty breakfast with three bowls of cereal and discovering the best thing at the complex, Cherry yogurt.

We had another training session which I didn't do too good in. I was way too tired to be playing soccer. We then went to our first Bundesliga game, Leverkusen vs. Freiburg.

In this first game I slowly started to realize the compassion and culture around soccer here in Germany. The atmosphere of Leverkusen's standing section was indescribable. I've been to around three MLS games and none of them compare to this in the slightest. I remember naming I think number 7 on Leverkusen Mbappe and watching soccer. The team thought it was pretty funny. I bought a Leverkusen scarf at halftime since I was so excited to join the crowd of ecstatic supporters.

We came back to the complex at around 7 pm and ate. We had our first team meeting after dinner which really opened my eyes up to the level of coaching I was exposed to at ODP. My coaches Jorry and John were saying things that I had never heard of. A new level of soccer lingo. After the meeting getting a various amount of new strategies I was feeling more confident than ever for our game the next day. I was in Victor's room for a while since he was my next-door neighbor.

Day 3:

Today was game day. I was bouncing with energy. My family friend was going to come as well that I hadn't seen in ages. I ate breakfast then brought my new cleats down to the locker room. With my beats in, probably listening to some Meek Mill, and my teammates suiting up, I got so thankful that I was here almost living my

dream for a week. It was a hard-fought game with us scoring a goal, but it was offsides. I was very happy to be the starting striker. I had never played striker before this game. I was normally a center back. I thought I played pretty well with Jorey and Johns playing styles.

I then went out to lunch with my friend which was crazy since I haven't seen her in years. When I got back we went to the Schalke 04 stadium. That was an insane experience since I had seen that stadium so many times on TV in the U.S. Walking through the iconic coal tunnel was so, so cool. Unfortunately, Schalke isn't doing too well right now, so pray for them when they play Manchester City in the champions league on the 11th. I also bought a Schalke scarf. We came back and had a meeting about the game and some things we could work on. What a day.

Day 4:

I actually slept decent that night, probably since I was so tired from the amount of center back chasing I did the day before during our game. It was very windy and rainy that day, so our training session was across the street in probably the coolest futsal court I have ever seen. It had a blue floor made out of some weird almost bouncy surface. That practice I shot a ball straight into someone's gut and they were out all practice. I did that to the same person the day before. I think Jorry was kind of mad. Whoops.

After that practice we went into a big modern mall in Düsseldorf. On the bus ride there I started to appreciate some of the people that I was on this trip with. For example, Julius. Our coordinator, organizer and translator. He is such an inspirational and knowledgeable person. He went to North Carolina State where he played D1 soccer and was the captain of his team. He now plays in Bundesliga's fourth division but next year he's going to the third, since his team is in second right now. We were talking about how many different divisions the Bundesliga has.

What I was really shocked about was how a D12 team who practices once a week and is equivalent to a Sunday league team, could technically make their way up the ladder to D1 and play teams like Bayern Munich. I find that insane.

At the mall I bought a long sleeve black Borussia Dortmund Christian Pulisic jersey for some insane price of 40 euros instead of 93. I also got a piece of pizza that Jorry was chowing down. We were there until around 6 pm then came back and ate dinner.

Day 5:

Today is Tuesday. We went to downtown Koln. My highlight there was definitely the church that we saw. It was one of the only things standing in Koln during World War II. The only reason it was still there is the top of the church is shaped like a giant cross. When the U.S. went on bombing runs they would use this cross as a landmark on where they need to bomb say a factory; so, like three miles north of the cross. That knowledge was taught to me by the one and only Edina High School professor, Jorey.

One of my teammates bought 38 euros worth of gummy bears at Koln for a research project that we were going to present Thursday to John and Jorry. We went back to the complex and had lunch. By the way we are getting to all these places on these really nice coach buses with our team and coaches. I still think it's crazy how much of a professional player I felt like going everywhere on a bus with my team.

We then drove to Wuppertaler for our second game. The field we played on was one of the nicest fields I've seen. In the first half I pulled a penalty kick. I hit it top right. My first goal as a starting striker on the trip. On the PK I tore up my knees, so our amazing trainer Kelly put some weird yellow stuff on the turf burns. The second half went pretty well as we got another great goal from my teammate with a screamer from the 18. I was kind of upset since I had a free kick and I skied it. The final score was 2-2. I was very proud of my boys as this team's record was something like 23-0 before this game.

We had dinner there. It was an amazing dinner with some of the best chicken I had ever had. I think I had three whole chicken legs, nine of these filled bread things with sauerkraut on top and at least two servings of rice with sauerkraut of course. We got back very late, almost 11:30 pm but totally worth it for the night I had.

Day 6:

We had a later breakfast around 8 am since we were up late the night before. We then hopped on the bus and headed to Dortmund to see Borussia Dortmund practice. I was very scared since I heard Pulisic was going to give autographs. So, I brought my jersey that I bought on Monday just in case. I ended up getting around 20 different player signatures including Marco Ruess, Axel Witsel, Jordan Sancho and of course Christian Pulisic.

Chato one of my favorite coaches on my trip, was nice enough to also take some pictures of me with them. Hearing Christian speak was so, so inspiring. I had no idea that he came to Germany when he was 15. I am still wondering if his family moved with him when he came to Germany though. The most inspiring thing he said was "when things get tough, you must keep pushing." It's simple and kind of cliché but coming from someone like him I find it very inspiring.

We then came back to the complex and recreated Dortmund's practice that we had just watched. It was very cool to see that we can do the exact same things that they can do, it's just they do it with no mistakes and much, much quicker. Julius also decided to tag along for this practice.

Day 7:

I think by Thursday I had finally gotten over my jet lag. I slept great that night. We ate breakfast and left first thing to watch Fortuna Düsseldorf practice. It wasn't all that fun since it was cold and windy out, but we found a few soccer balls and played some pickup games with the MNUFC kids and that was pretty entertaining.

We got back to the complex where we had a team meeting and presented our research project. My group's project was on the history of Haribo in Germany. This is why my teammate spent all that money on gummy bears. We handed out the gummy bears and the project went smoother than I expected.

The complex was in Duisburg and they have a Bundesliga Division 2 team just down the street. It was open, so we walked down to the stadium and bought some jerseys. We had our last game a few hours later. That's when tragedy struck. I went downstairs to unlock the locker room and my teammates started piling in looking too sick to even stand. It was the gummy bears. Everyone had eaten so many gummy bears that their systems were all clogged up. I was one of the only players to not feel sick at all. I felt awful since it was my group who handed out the gummy bears. As you can imagine the game didn't turn out to well since most of the team could barely even run. My bad.

Day 8:

This was our last day at the complex. We had a big fun group training with all three ODP teams. We played a tournament on four different playing fields, a volleyball court, a small field, a bigger field and a caged field. My team got like 6th place. I was in my element in the soccer volleyball game.

We then showered in the locker rooms, got on the busses, and headed off to Frankfurt. It was a long 2-hour bus ride. We got to our hotel in Frankfurt which was very, very nice. It had this sauna room with a superb view of downtown Frankfurt. After dinner my team hit up the sauna. It was kind of weird since in Europe being completely naked in a public sauna is completely normal. Us Americans were not a custom to that. It was very funny seeing tons of ODP kids walking into the sauna area and having a man repeatedly get mad at them for having their clothes on.

Day 9:

We had breakfast at around 8 am. It was the best breakfast of the trip; eggs, bacon, sausage, yogurt, fruit, crepes and maple syrup.

We then departed to downtown Frankfurt to go shopping. There was this very unique mall with a hole going through the side of it. We went to an open market and got some very tasty Brats. After that we went back to the hotel to have some lunch and a quick team sauna.

Following that we went to another Bundesliga game at the Opel Arena. It was Mainz 05 vs. Monchengladbach. The environment there was even more crazy than the one at the Leverkusen game. It was almost like the two fan sections were challenging each other to a cheer off. Me and Victor thought they were singing yellow submarine, but Julius quickly corrected us. The game was very even but Gladbach ended up winning 1–0. I bought a Mainz windbreaker. We transferred back to our hotel where I tried to stay up as late as possible since we had our flight the next morning.

Day 10:

I woke up at around 6 am and at 6:15 am. Julius made me give back an ODP scarf I “borrowed” for the game the night before and then we left to go to the Frankfurt Airport. We said a very sad goodbye to Julius. I checked a bag for Chato then got on the plane. On the

plane I couldn't do homework, so I wrote this whole journal and watched I think a rerun of Arsenal vs. Manchester United. I love watching players like Mason Greenwood on Manchester. He's a 17-year-old who still goes to high school but after school he comes and plays vs. Arsenal. Crazy.

Chato bought me and some of the other boys who helped him with his bags some pretzels then we sat in the airport for five hours waiting for our flight. The flight from Dallas to Minneapolis felt like half an hour, I was asleep the whole time. We landed and completed our journey at around 10:30 pm Sunday night.

Reflection:

Overall, I think what made the trip were the people. I met so many new friends and coaches. Thank you, John Curtis, Jorey Julius and Chato. These guys made the trip so amazing. Also, my teammates and some of the '02s. Also, a huge thank you to ODP and MZ Talent Agency for making this trip an option for people like me.

I think this trip has really opened my eyes and others to how much more cultured places in Europe like Germany are to soccer. There are so many more opportunities, competition and funding for soccer teams and academies than there are in Minnesota or anywhere else in the U.S.