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PEP

GUARDIOLA
THE EVOLUTION

THE ASTONISHING SEQUEL TO THE BESTSELLING
PEP CONFIDENTIAL

MARTÍ PERARNAU

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THE EVOLUTION

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Put your work twenty times upon the anvil,
polish it ceaselessly, and polish it again.

Nicolas Boileau

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Sitting on a ball, Pep watches Thiago and Müller practising free kicks. The training session finished a while ago but a few players have stayed back for some extra practice. They play Juventus in a few days and are keen to practise shooting. As always Guardiola will be the last one to leave the training pitch. *Loles Vives*

Guardiola talks the author through his game plan for Bayern's game against Juventus. It will be a sensational Champions League match, full of drama, emotion and superb football. *Isaac Lluch*

Thursday, 19 May 2016: Guardiola's last training session at Bayern. It's raining, as it was on his first day here and Pep decides to clear away the balls himself. This is his *adiós* to Säbener Strasse. *Loles Vives*

Bayern have just beaten Juventus in the Champions League after an agonising extra time. Estiarte, Guardiola, Planchart and Torrent show their delight as they go up in the coach's private lift in the Allianz Arena. This is where Pep has shared many of his most private thoughts over the last three years. *Martí Perarnau*

When the players returned from holiday in July 2015, they were met with the season's objective painted on the dressing room walls: the conquest of their fourth consecutive Bundesliga trophy. *Martí Perarnau*

All the walls at Säbener Strasse were adorned with motifs relating to the main objective of 2015-2016: to win the league for a fourth time, making Bayern the first champions to achieve this in the history of German football. 'Jeder Für's Team' (Every Man for the Team) was the dressing room's motto that season. *Martí Perarnau*

Guardiola wrote this good luck message for his successor at Säbener Strasse: 'The very best of luck Carlo, with all good wishes!' Ancelotti was delighted when he read it. *Martí Perarnau*

Pep is doused in beer by David Alaba as Bayern celebrate their 2016 Bundesliga title. *Getty Images*

Pep receives his Manchester City training kit from Director of Football, Txiki Begiristain, 3 July 2016, shortly after his unveiling to the fans. During this first appearance as City's new manager, he made his priorities clear: 'The first objective is to play well. After that we need to win the next game and then the next and then the one after that . . .' *Getty Images*

Pep, draped in a City scarf, is pictured at the club's training complex after his first press conference. *Getty Images*

Coming back to Munich: on 21 July 2016 Pep was back training his men in Säbener Strasse, although this time it was with Manchester City, not Bayern. He was given a warm, affectionate welcome by his former players (pictured, Xabi Alonso and Thiago with Domènec Torrent and Carles Planchart) and the fans. *Martí Perarnau*

Pep focused on the fundamental parts of his game from his first training session at Manchester City: bringing out the ball, sticking to positions, looking for free men . . . The midfielders (Fernandinho and Fernando pictured) are a key part of his playing style. *Getty Images*

Nolito is one of the five new players Guardiola brought to City in summer 2016. Wingers are essential to Pep's game. *Getty Images*

Guardiola has expanded the technical team who will help him achieve his objectives at Manchester City. Pictured, Pep with Domènec Torrent, assistant coach; Mikel Arteta, co-assistant coach; and Lorenzo Buenaventura, fitness coach. *Getty Images*

PREFACE

Pep Guardiola didn't read *Pep Confidential: Pep Guardiola's First Season at Bayern Munich*, which was published in 2014. Nor has he read this book. He chose not to review what had been said about him before *Pep Guardiola: The Evolution* was published nor was he tempted to read it afterwards. Not even out of sheer curiosity. Back in Munich one of his friends asked him why. 'I don't want to read it,' Guardiola explained. 'At least not yet. Maybe in fifteen, twenty years I'll sit down with it and enjoy reliving my days at Bayern. But not now.'

He is an unusual man. A man who allows a writer into the intimacy of the dressing room and gives him no-holds barred access around one of the world's biggest football clubs and to the inner workings of his mind, yet shows no interest in what is being written about him.

This attitude surely explains more about his character than a thousand words ever could.

Like a teenager leaving home for the first time, Pep's experiences in Germany changed him and this book is a detailed description of that metamorphosis. It is a new, improved Pep Guardiola who takes over in Manchester, the toughest challenge of his managerial career and his third phase as a coach.

His first job as coach, his '*Azulgrana* Period', was marked by Guardiola's unique philosophy and unrelenting pursuit of excellence at Barcelona. His 'Red Period' in Munich showed us his ability to adapt to a different football culture, a process to which he brought his own challenging and, for some, disturbingly creative ideas. Now at the start of Guardiola's 'Blue Period', a blank canvas lies before City's new coach. This is a very different man from the one we watched in Barcelona and then in Munich, although he has lost nothing of his essence in the process.

I first mentioned this book to Pep in June 2016 when he had said his farewells to Bayern and had started his summer holidays immediately prior

to his presentation in Manchester. As usual, he wasn't sure about my proposition.

'When I move on I like to make a clean break of it,' he said. 'I've been very happy in Munich, I've had great relationships with everyone at the club but that's all in the past now. I don't think it's worth your while to write about the last two years.'

At that point I had to tell him the truth: 'Actually Pep . . . I've already written it. I've been working on it, on and off, for the last two years.'

'Oh well, in that case, maybe all that work shouldn't go to waste . . .'

And that's how this book came to be published. I had no particular plan, the protagonist has had no interest in reading it and I wrote it without really knowing if it would ever be published.

Pep Guardiola: The Evolution is presented in fourteen chapters including fifty anecdotes and notes from my personal experience which develop and explain the themes I discuss.

All the chapters (except the last one) end with coverage of particular matches as well as details of tactics and other related topics. I have called these the Backstages. Readers can choose to read these as they go along or dip in to them as they see fit.

THE CHAMELEON

It is ideas, not machines, which drive the world.

Victor Hugo

WOODY ALLEN SMILED his iconic dry grin as he greeted Guardiola. ‘Great to meet you, Pep, but you may find us boring company tonight. None of us are particularly interested in football . . .’

‘No problem, Woody, I love cinema. And aren’t you a basketball fan? Maybe we could talk about the Knicks instead.’

The next couple of hours flew by as the conversation and wine flowed and the New York Knicks’ uphill struggles were debated back and forth. Pep, a devoted fan of Gregg Popovich, was in his element. The Catalan has a reputation for being intense, dogmatic and stubborn. In fact he’s quite the reverse. A natural chameleon, Pep knows instinctively how to adapt to every situation. And this natural ability proved vital to his success in Germany where he quickly realised that, in order to impose his vision and ideas, he would have to adapt. To the club, to the players, to their opponents . . . After all, it is not the strongest or the smartest who triumph in the end but those who are willing to adapt.

In Barcelona we admired Pep’s passion, ambition, talent and tenacious self-belief. Then in Germany we saw a new side to the obdurate, inflexible, relentless Spaniard as Pep’s innate eclecticism and natural adaptability came to the fore.

In hindsight it’s clear that only by going through this evolution could Pep remain true to himself.

‘When I first arrived in Munich I thought I could more or less transfer Barça’s game to Bayern but what I actually did was marry the two,’

reflected Guardiola when conversation at last turned to football. ‘I brought the Barça philosophy and adapted it to Bayern and the players there. And the result was fucking brilliant! It was a learning curve, though. I had to learn to adapt and there’s no doubt I’m a better coach for it. It’s something I am taking to my next club.’

Arguably, this versatility makes Pep more of a disciple to the principles of the late, great Johan Cruyff than ever before given that such adaptability is one of the central tenets of Dutch ‘total football’. He came to Germany to play Cruyff’s football at Beckenbauer’s club and in the end produced a potent mix of both philosophies.

After Cruyff’s death in March 2016 Pep was asked what tribute the world should make to the great man. ‘Pay attention to what he taught us,’ he replied. Bayern captain, Philipp Lahm, his own loyal disciple and Pep’s direct representative on the pitch confirmed this. ‘Cruyff’s philosophy was to play football. Nothing more, nothing less. His game was not about controlling the opposition but controlling the ball and your own game. And that’s what we did under Pep.’ Domènec Torrent, Pep’s assistant, added, ‘The Pep we see today has synthesised all that he was taught by Cruyff at Barça with everything he learned at Beckenbauer’s club.’

And this potent mix of football ideas has produced a unique kind of powerful, fluid, *total football*. West Ham coach Slaven Bilić predicts that ‘the next revolution will be the death of the system’, and Guardiola certainly appears to be in the vanguard of this revolution. ‘Systems don’t matter, it’s ideas that count.’

Guardiola today is undoubtedly a better coach despite the fact that he was unable to lead Bayern to another treble or victory in the Champions League. Indeed, under Guardiola Bayern failed even to make it to a Champions League final. He did however win seven trophies with the Munich club, smashing all German records by conquering three successive league competitions and doing so by playing dominant, stylish and multifaceted football. He may not have left Germany the all-conquering hero fans may have wished for and, if your measure of success is limited to trophies alone, then he certainly fell short of the expectations of many. Guardiola didn’t win everything in Germany. But, boy, did he transform their game. German broadcaster Uli Köhler puts it like this, ‘He left us something very special – the memory of a unique brand of football. A

football that Bayern will never play again and the fans will never see again.'

'I'VE BEEN VERY HAPPY HERE'

Doha, 5 January 2016

Guardiola has just announced that he's leaving and Bayern receives this message from fan, Marco Thielsch.

'It's desperately sad news that you're leaving although I accept that you made no promises and always said that you would only ever be a small part of the history of our club. I've been a Bayern fan for more than thirty years and can tell you that I have never enjoyed my team's football as much as I have in the last two and a half years. Stylish and entertaining. I couldn't even begin to recount all the amazing moments you and the players have given us. It's been a joy to watch my team play such exceptional football and I've been moved to tears on numerous occasions. You've said that many will consider your job half done because you didn't win the Champions League, but I can tell you that many of us see things very differently. I want to win everything. Of course I do. But I want to win playing your way. Enthralling, beautiful football. I can't really express how much I love your football. And no matter what we win, your legacy will live on in our hearts and in the memories of the wonderful times you have brought us.

'You are an absolute inspiration and I thank you from the bottom of my heart. Let's all make the most of the last six months.'

Pep was visibly moved by the message.

'This is what it's all about. If my work here has affected even one fan as much as this, then it's definitely all been worth it.'

Pep's 'unfinished symphony' in Munich has echoes in one of the biggest disappointments of Cruyff's career – his defeat at the hands of

Beckenbauer's Germany in the 1974 World Cup Final. Holland lost the game that day in Munich but, in one of the strange ironies of football, emerged the victors in terms of the universal admiration they received for the way they played. Germany got the trophy but in the eyes of the world the 'Clockwork Orange' won the day.

Only time will tell whether Guardiola, Cruyff's natural heir, will see his 'unfinished symphony' become a permanent legacy, his failures transformed into lasting triumphs. Nobody can say with certainty just how far Pep's influence will impact the future evolution of German football but one thing is for sure, he has already become a significant part of Bundesliga history.

Domènec Torrent is certain that Pep has had a permanent impact on German football. 'Pep's legacy is a combination of his unique ideas about football, his talent and his versatility. Karl-Heinz Rummenigge was right when he said that as time goes on, we'll come to appreciate just how much of an impact he's made. I've lost count of the number of German coaches who've contacted us over the last few months to say just that. Pep has left a wealth of football knowledge and ideas in Germany.'

For German analyst Tobias Escher it's mostly about positional play. 'Before Guardiola arrived nobody in Germany knew anything about positional play.'

He may have won less silverware in Munich than he did in Barcelona (fourteen out of a possible nineteen at Barça, seven out of a possible fourteen at Bayern) but Guardiola believes himself to be a better coach than he was in 2012 when he left Barça for Bayern.

'I'm a better coach now because at Barça it was all about the team getting the ball to Messi so that he could score. At Bayern I had to come up with a variety of options; this player had to move into that zone, that one needed to move up behind him . . . I really had to roll up my sleeves and work out lots of alternatives and I learned a huge amount in the process.'

At Bayern, Pep had to adapt to complex and at times hostile situations. He faced endless setbacks and the kinds of difficulties he had never encountered before. Fortunately, his innate talent and natural versatility allowed him to develop and flourish and the Bundesliga wrought permanent changes in him. Fitness coach Lorenzo Buenaventura spotted it early on, just a few months into Pep's reign, 'Pep's changing Bayern but Germany's changing Pep too.'

The man who arrived in England in July 2016 was different from the guy who went to Germany in 2013. His enthusiasm and ambition remain as strong as ever but he appears more human, more flesh and blood. Manchester receives not the idealised quasi-deity of three years ago but a real human being with flaws and imperfections. His time in Germany may have exposed those flaws to the world but he is all the better for it.

You only have to compare the press photos of his arrival at Bayern in June 2013 with those taken in July 2016 in Manchester. In Munich he's wearing an impeccable grey suit, a grey tie, Italian shirt and a smart waistcoat. His shoes are shined to perfection and he's sporting a brilliant white handkerchief in his top pocket. This is style-conscious Pep, surrounded by the Bayern management team and looking for all the world like the new CEO of some massive multinational corporation. He has dressed for a photo shoot and the look is elegance, refinement, glamour, perfection.

Fast forward three years and it's a very different image Pep offers the cameras. He's dressed casually. A short-sleeved grey shirt, jeans, trainers and a sports jacket which he quickly strips off. This is a man of action. A modern man who's relaxed and comfortable in his own skin. Ready for hard work. This image is all about energy, decisiveness and focus but it also says, 'I'm a normal guy, just like you.' The fans can be reassured that he's one of them. A new era has begun.

THANKS PEP
Munich, 22 May 2016

Bayern's players are gathered on the balcony of the Munich town hall, celebrating another double. Not only have they won their fourth Bundesliga title in a row but yesterday they won the Cup in Berlin. It was Guardiola's last match in charge. Nobody's got much sleep. Pep's wearing a white t-shirt and tracksuit trousers. The word 'Double' is emblazoned on the t-shirt. He's obviously not shaved this morning and, in the land famed for the quality of its beer, is clutching a celebratory glass of white wine. He's surrounded by staff and players, just one of the lads. This is

a truly united team. He's clearly emotional, full of gratitude to and affection for the people around him. Just a normal guy. In Marienplatz, where they're celebrating the double, a senior member of a Bayern supporters' club (Club Nr. 12) has taken his shirt off so that everyone can see what's written on his chest. 'Danke Pep' (Thanks, Pep).

Guardiola showed enormous ingenuity and resilience in his three-year tenure at Bayern. Having to cope with seemingly interminable setbacks and problems gave him a toughness that he perhaps lacked on his arrival. Managing the stress effectively was crucial and by treating each new obstacle as a learning opportunity he avoided the mental and physical exhaustion he had experienced in the past. Obviously adored by the players, club staff, the directors and fans, Guardiola left Munich relaxed and happy. As Benjamin Zander says, if you judge success by the number of tears shed at your departure then Bayern's players clearly believed their departing coach had been a major triumph and there were many, long, emotional goodbyes in the privacy of the Säbener Strasse dressing room.

On a personal level, Pep learned a great deal from his time at Munich. His new approach – *learn from your mistakes and move on* – prevented the burn-out of his fourth and final year at Barcelona as did his decision to leave Bayern after three seasons. Saying 'no' has always been difficult for Pep but this time he knew he should trust his instincts. He was then able to take on the City job without any need for a sabbatical year. A quick visit to New York with his family to see the NBA final and then straight to Manchester, refreshed and ready to go. If Pep still had much to learn when he arrived in Germany, then his time there certainly taught him some tough lessons about the realities of life at the top and helped him mature and grow as a coach.

Bayern's announcement of Pep's departure was immediately met by an outpouring of vitriol against the coach. One day the press were furious that Lewandowski wasn't playing, the next it was Müller's absence that riled them, then Götze's. Suddenly Guardiola could do nothing right and his decision to leave had turned him into the German media's whipping boy. If he would just give one media outlet a personal exclusive Pep was told, he would be protected and the critics would be silenced . . .

Of course towards the end of his time at Bayern Pep was most harshly criticised for his failure to win the Champions League. The sensationalist press were the most vociferous as was anyone who had watched Bayern's football for three years without truly 'seeing' it. To be fair, it isn't easy to grasp the complexities of the modern game. It requires a sharp, open mind and a certain amount of humility to understand exactly what's happening on the pitch whether it's the aggressive, high-tempo football of Ranieri at Leicester or Guardiola at Bayern. Otherwise, you end up with superficial impressions and sloppy analysis.

Creativity is a vital part of football. And I'm not talking just about what happens on the pitch. A modern coach has to be just as innovative and creative as any player. British educationalist Ken Robinson says, 'Creativity isn't about producing one extravagant work of art after another. Creativity is the highest form of intellectual expression.'

Some would say that football has nothing to do with the intellectual. It's about athletic prowess and technical know-how. I beg to differ. Football is all this and more. It's about ideas. New ideas from players and coaches have always been the motor that drives football and ensures its evolution.

Several months ago I read an interesting quote from Dutch fitness coach Raymond Verheijen, a man I rarely agree with but who on this occasion seemed to be talking sense. 'In football, most people prefer the status quo because they fear making a mistake. It's like a primitive sub-culture where criticism is not tolerated and people protect and defend established ideas. People in the game dislike anyone who questions them because it makes them uncomfortable and nobody enjoys being uncomfortable. In football there are many, many things we could do much better, more intelligently.'

Football can only move forward if we are prepared to embrace new ideas. As Ken Robinson says, 'Every scientific development starts with an idea. An original, creative idea born of critical understanding.'

Sadly, however, creativity remains a dirty word for many in football. People cling to obsolete ideas and attitudes, determined to stay anchored to the comfort and security of the past. The world of football has an atavistic aversion to concepts like innovation and change.

And now, with his 'unfinished symphony' behind him, Guardiola takes on the greatest challenge of his career. He has come to the birthplace of football to impose his own ideas on English football. Perhaps some see him as a kind of preaching evangelist. His right-hand man, Domènec Torrent,

insists that nothing could be further from the truth. ‘Let’s be clear. Pep hasn’t come to Manchester to revolutionise English football, nor to teach people how the game should be played. He brings his own ideas, his own approach to the game but these will develop and enhance what’s already here. It’s not about changing everything or teaching people how things should be done. There are a thousand different ways to play football. Pep’s approach is just one way. Some people like it, some don’t. It has been successful of course but nobody is claiming that this is the only way to play football. Let me say it again so that no-one’s left in any doubt. Pep’s not the Messiah or some kind of evangelist on a mission to change football. He’s here to offer his vision of the game, learn from those who have other ideas and then create effective, entertaining football.’

It’s going to be a tough job. Pep has inherited a team without any well-defined style, which seems to lack the ambition and drive he could count on at Barcelona and Bayern. He understands that he has been hired to improve how the team plays and performs, at a time when the squad needs a huge regeneration in terms of new players (half of the previous season’s players were over thirty) knowing that he must compete with outstanding coaches like Antonio Conte, José Mourinho and Jürgen Klopp as well as world-class players like Henrikh Mkhitaryan, Granit Xhaka and Zlatan Ibrahimovic.

And all of this in an idiosyncratic football environment radically different to the ones Guardiola is familiar with. It will be a greater challenge than at Barcelona in 2008, when he lacked experience but had returned to his boyhood club. Different too from Bayern in 2013 when, with an impressive track record behind him, he had expectations of a second treble to contend with. Manchester City will be a totally new experience. A club without its own developed football philosophy or brand of football. Quality of preparation and planning will be absolutely vital. As he himself puts it, ‘This is the most difficult job I have ever faced.’

BACKSTAGE 1

TOOTH AND NAIL Munich, 10 September 2014

Last night Spain played France in the quarter-final of the Basketball World Cup in Madrid. The major shock is that France won 65-52. Just a week previously, the Spanish team had trounced France 88-64 as well as seeing off Senegal, Brazil and Serbia (who ended as defeated World Cup finalists). Spain reached the quarter final with six straight wins so being hammered by France was shattering. Having reflected long and hard on the defeat, Manel Estiarte, the most successful athlete in water polo history (an Olympic and world champion) and now Pep Guardiola's personal assistant at Bayern Munich, concludes, 'For a long time a worrying theme has been gnawing away at me when I analyse the patterns of elite sport. When you look at the top teams, it seems to me that their own greatness can actually become an Achilles heel. Not everyone will agree but I reckon that, having achieved so much, they can no longer even *conceive* of being beaten. I'm not saying it applies to every single great team, nor will it happen all the time, but if you look at any sport – basketball, football, handball – elite teams can become so unused to defeat that if the opposition goes ahead unexpectedly, they can be so taken aback that they fail to react. As if the idea of losing is a completely alien concept. Whether it happens because they are a little short of sharpness, because the rival's bang on their game or because the referee has had a bad night – whatever.

'Let's take football as an example. There was the Bernabéu Clásico in 2009 which Pep's team won 6-2 and then Barça beat Madrid 5-0 at the Camp Nou a year later. José Mourinho was in

charge of Madrid by then and he had an outstanding team. Remember Jürgen Klopp's Borussia Dortmund beating Jupp Heynckes' Bayern in the German Cup? They won 5-2 and made Bayern look absolutely helpless. Then Heynckes' lads thrashed Barça 7-0. Messi, Xavi, Iniesta & co were completely overwhelmed. Or last year when Carlo Ancelotti's Madrid hammered us in Munich (4-0), or Germany stuffing Brazil 7-1 in their own backyard during the World Cup . . . You see it more and more often. Two elite teams go head to head, one of them scores and the other one inexplicably starts to fall apart until they lose it altogether.' In the weeks following Estiarte's comments, there were a couple of new examples when Bayern beat Roma 7-1 in Rome and Spurs whipped Mourinho's Chelsea 5-3 at White Hart Lane.

'This is my theory,' continued Estiarte. 'Successful teams are so used to winning that it becomes a habit. They go out expecting a victory and don't even consider the prospect of defeat. They don't necessarily expect an easy game – no way. But normally, if their opponent goes 1-0 up, they're confident they can turn the game around quickly. Then one day you're in the middle of a game against another strong rival and the other side takes the lead. It feels particularly bad if an apparently tight game is suddenly altered by a fluke goal or because you've screwed up or perhaps because the referee's having a bad day and influences things unfairly. All you know is they've caught you unawares and are now ahead. Subconsciously the team which has taken a "hit" finds that they're suddenly suffering from a glass jaw. Then the opposition put a second goal away and suddenly you're 2-0 down. This is a game you "should be winning". You're a "better team", results state that you're on much better form than them and you've planned this contest to the last detail.

'But here you are, on the back foot and struggling to impose yourselves. Perhaps you even deserve to be leading! But they've produced a one-two pair of blows and you're on the canvas with no idea how to get off it.

‘Smaller teams are used to losing matches. They go into games mentally prepared to be battered and are used to trying to cope with that. Elite players on the other hand, never, ever expect to lose. They respect big rivals but never consider the idea that they might be dealt a knockout blow by them.

‘As Joe Louis said, “Everyone’s got a plan until you get punched in the mouth.”*

‘Suddenly you’re one- or two-nil down, unexpectedly, possibly unjustly, and on the canvas without knowing why or how.

‘So, instead of just hanging on to the rival, grabbing them round the neck and not letting go until you can breathe again and regain your composure, like boxers do, you carry on playing as you’d do normally and that’s when they really hammer you.

‘I know it’s a generalisation and there are thousands of exceptions, but I believe that we’ve lost some of the warrior spirit of the past. I’m thinking here of the great Balkan teams, from the old Yugoslavia and around that region, I played against who, despite being technically weaker, would fight tooth and nail until the final whistle, and sometimes beyond.

‘You’re superior and you’re leading but they cling on and won’t let go – not while they’ve got a breath left in their lungs. Or in football, the Italian teams who, once they’re a goal ahead, close down the match so that it’s impossible to get past them. Or the great German sides who’d know that so long as there were two or three minutes left in a game they could draw or win no matter what the scoreboard told them. In athletics the English middle-distance runners have always shown that kind of grit and determination too. A metre or two left in the race and they could still grind their way home ahead of the leader.

‘Football has to do something about this. The great teams need to work on this, to regain their toughness. Look what happened to us last season against Madrid in the Champions League. A lot was going wrong for us at the time and we were struggling with injuries and 1-0 in the first leg at the Bernabéu was not a disaster by any means. We’d played well and deserved

a draw at least. We left Madrid with the feeling of having passed up a golden opportunity.

‘Let me tell you, if I’m in the seventieth minute of a Champions League semi-final second leg and my team only needs to score once to force extra time I’d not be thinking that this was a terrible situation to be in.

‘But, being Bayern, that wasn’t good enough. We’re an elite team. We demand nothing less than glory and we wanted to get after Madrid in the second leg. Which is when they sucker-punched us from a corner which we shouldn’t have conceded. Madrid score.

‘Now at 2-0 things look a little more complicated. Then they win a free kick which, again, we shouldn’t have conceded. They score again. Another huge sucker punch. And we fall apart. A team like ours isn’t accustomed to taking hits like we were suddenly receiving. In fact a side like Bayern is more used to dealing out those sucker punches. Suddenly it feels like a disaster of unheard of proportions and we’re powerless to respond. So the blows become a knockout.

‘I think there’s a pattern through all the previous football examples and the France–Spain basketball shock. Spain came into the quarter final quite reasonably thinking that they could and would win but they were suddenly flat out on the canvas and couldn’t claw their way back.

‘I’m not saying that any of this is the fault of players, or coaches, or their tactics. It’s just that teams nowadays have reached such an elite level that they cannot countenance failure. Great football teams these days are probably the best of all time, that’s why there have been so many league records set in Europe in recent years. Records of unbeaten matches, points at the end of a season, goals scored, and fewest goals conceded . . . But the “greater” our football teams get, the less able to imagine or deal with a shock setback they become. So that when things do go wrong, they don’t always have the resources to claw and fight their way back into a contest.

‘Maybe I’m wrong but I really believe that we need to recuperate some of that Balkan fighting spirit. We need to plan

for those times when everything seems to have gone horribly wrong and you're completely overwhelmed. You take a punch to the mouth, but you hold on. You swallow the blood, clear your head, stop thinking about how things "should be" or the pre-match plans, about whether there's been an injustice or whether the deficit is merited or not. No thinking "but we're the favorites here!" You hold on, you buy time, you keep it to 1-0 instead of letting go. Then, just maybe, you reach the last fifteen minutes and you're still in the match – and anything can happen then. If you don't get overwhelmed then just maybe you'll get a break – a bit of luck. Or perhaps they'll switch off. So then if you suddenly put one away, it's the rival who's shocked and thrown off course – and then you can go on and win a contest where you felt either on the ropes or actually on the canvas.

'Some will recognise these themes, some won't. But I think there's a central truth in all of this and that "great" coaches and players need to review differently and prepare more effectively. So that one day when a rival has us on the ropes and all the pre-match plans are in tatters we'll be able to dig deep and bring out "inner Balkan".'

** the quote is often mistakenly attributed to Mike Tyson*