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International Homeland Soccer – Those Who Teach, Learn Themselves

“Soccer is the only truly international language. It transcends boundaries, attracts people and unites them.” This is the view of Horst Kriete, and it is shared by Bernd Storck and Michael Krüger. The three German soccer coaches have worked abroad: Kriete in South Africa, Storck in Hungary, Krüger in Sudan. One of the fascinating aspects of their work, they say, is being with people who have a different cultural background and mentality.

“It promotes tolerance,” says Horst Kriete. “It’s not just a question of passing on what you know, you also learn things yourself.” For example, the coaches have learned the importance of striking the right tone with players and officials. “You have to approach them. You have to engage them. You have to be firm. But you also have to be able to overlook certain shortcomings.” Then, they will be happy and you’ll also feel comfortable in this community, he says.

They have learned to be more relaxed. A sentence Horst Kriete has heard time and time again during his many years in Africa is: “You have the watch. But we have the time.” They have learned not to view and judge everything from the perspective of rich European nations. During their postings in Africa, Kriete and Krüger often met people “who are happier and enjoy life more than some who come from wealthy western countries.”

The three coaches are proud of their achievements. Some players trained by Kriete now occupy key positions in the South African Football Association. Storck has done so much to change the face of Hungarian soccer that players are again keen to play in the national squad. As for Krüger, although he’s since stopped working in Sudan, many there still hope he will one day return and coach the national squad.