

## ZADRAZIL LOOKS BACK ON AUSTRIA'S HISTORIC RUN THROUGH THE EUROS

by JJ Duke | Aug 16, 2017 | Interviews |



***“We went into the tournament with such low expectations, and when we made it into the semifinals, it was just amazing. It was always a dream for myself and for everyone on the team to be part of such an event, and then to make it to the semifinal was just a dream come true.”***

A couple of short weeks after Austria's historic run concluded at the 2017 UEFA Women's Championship, Sarah Zadrazil fondly remembers all the moments that she and her teammates experienced in the Netherlands. Whether it was the stunning draw against France, winning the group stage, or advancing past Spain on penalty kicks, their trek through the competition felt like a dream that just never wanted to end.



Even when that dream of lifting the trophy at the tournament's end was dashed in a penalty shootout loss to Denmark in the semifinals, the takeaways were only positive ones.

"I only have positive thoughts when I think about the tournament and I already miss my teammates, the whole group, the Netherlands, it was just great," said Zadrazil.

## STAYING UNDER THE RADAR

Embed from Getty Images



(Top Row L-R) Viktoria Schnaderbeck of Austria women, Carina Wenninger of Austri... [see more](#)

gettyimages®

Getty Images Sport | VI-Images

Leading up to their EUROs debut, Austria was the third lowest ranked team in the competition, with their FIFA ranking of 24 placing them above only Russia and Portugal. The odds makers had them as one of the long shots at the event and outside of hoping to put together a couple of respectable performances, the goals the team set for the event were to improve from game-to-game and to see what they get from the event.

To make matters less favourable, Austria suffered 3-0 defeats to both England and the Netherlands in pre-tournament friendlies. Though while they did pick up a 4-2 victory against Denmark less than two weeks prior to their first group match. Zadrazil said that the team was fine with assuming the underdog role.

“The media at home didn’t have many expectations either because we tried to tell them that we were the underdogs so that we didn’t have any pressure on us before the tournament.

“But throughout the tournament, we noticed that people were talking about us, especially in our home country, and that the attention grew a lot.”

She noted that there wasn’t much of a following for women’s football in Austria before the tournament started. As her and her teammates kept getting results, more and more people were tuning in and were keeping an eye on their progress. But the team didn’t really know how much their performance made an impact on their fellow countrymen until they landed back home after the tournament.

“To be fair, we tried to stay in our bubble throughout the tournament. Our staff did a good job in keeping the interviews we did to a minimum and we spent a lot of our time in our hotels and off our phones.

“I think that was a good thing because we were able to stay focused on the games and we only realised when we landed in Vienna how big of a deal it was. We had all these people come out to celebrate with us after the tournament ended, but yeah, it was really good that we didn’t know much until after it was over.”

## PLAYING FOR EACH OTHER AND STAYING TRUE TO THEMSELVES

Embed from Getty Images



It was apparent through Austria's run in the Netherlands that they were one of the tightest knit groups both on and off the field. It has been a group that has been together for quite some time now, as the majority of the team came up together through the Under-17 and Under-19 ranks. In fact, 19 of the 23 players on the team are 26-years old or younger and having spent plenty of time together both on and off the field, they have become a very close unit.

"We have such a good unity amongst the team, we are all very close friends, even outside of the national team. And I feel that you can see that on the pitch, we just have fun playing together and I feel that helps our game a lot."

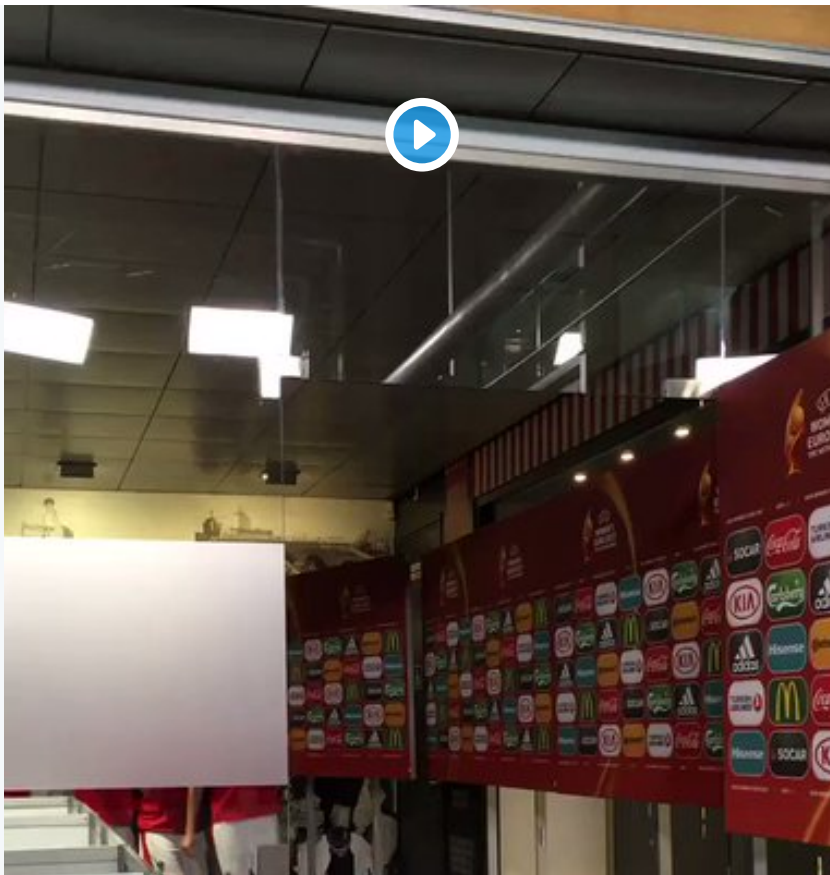
That was one of the main reasons why the group was able to fight for each other, even in times of adversity.

They lost a pair of key players, Lisa Makas and Nicole Billa, to injury during the tournament, but with their strong resolve for each other, the next player that was called in wanted to perform well for their fallen teammates.

Even for Zadrazil, who suffered a ruptured ligament in her ankle from a tackle at the end of their first match against Switzerland, all she wanted to do was to get back onto the field to help her team. So after extensive rehabilitation work with the training staff, she was able to get back onto the field after missing just one match, and despite experiencing a little bit of pain through the rest of the event, she was able to contribute with a goal against Iceland.

The other prominent factor of Austria's success was their personality as a unit. While it was noticeable on the field how close the group was, the team became an instant hit for their off-the-field antics.





**S.Lawson**  
@lawson\_sv



Austria are deservedly in party mood #WEuro2017

9:15 PM - Jul 26, 2017

♡ 365 💬 118 people are talking about this

Whether it was conga-line dancing through the media zone after their win against Iceland to clinch top honours in Group C, or their hilariously unique Crossbar Challenge skit they performed on the EUROS social media account, people started to gravitate towards them.

“Our sports psychologist said before coming to the tournament, just be exactly the way you are. Don’t change yourselves because it is a major tournament, or because you get more attention.

“So we wanted to stay authentic, we have a lot of fun, and that’s what we did.”

And they did exactly that. Unbeknown to them at the time, their post-match celebrations got the attention of Austrian DJ Lorenz Büffel, as it was his hit song “Jonny Däpp” that they danced to after each match. And after Austria’s run through the EUROS, he re-wrote the song especially for the team, which, what Zadrazil thought, was a “really cool gesture.”



## CARRYING THE MOMENTUM

Embed from Getty Images



With their EUROs experience now in the rear-view mirror, it is a unique time right now for Austria as they have a real opportunity to continue the progression of the women's game heading into Women's World Cup qualifying.

Most countries will experience some degree of a bump after a major tournament. Some cases it would be higher attendances at league matches and other cases would see more monetary investment into the program.

But there has been progression in some areas over the last couple of years. One of those resources is the development of sport-school academies where young players have the opportunity to train on a daily basis with their club teams, along with going to school together.

Another way that the country's profile has improved is seeing a multitude of players ply their trade in the German Frauen-Bundesliga, which is one of the most competitive leagues in the world. Of Austria's roster, 14 players play professionally in Germany and take full use of the resources over there.

And lastly, something that hasn't been much of a possibility until recently, is Austrian players being recruited to play college soccer in the United States. Zadrazil was one of the first players to make her way over to the states, as she was spotted by East Tennessee State's Head Coach Adam Sayers while playing at the youth National Team level, and was offered a chance to play for his team. While playing college soccer wasn't at the forefront for Zadrazil, it definitely opened some new doors for her.

"I didn't know much [about college soccer]. I just knew women's soccer is different in America and it is huge there. When I was young, I said that I wanted to play in America one day but didn't really know how it would happen. I didn't plan on going to college here but I'm glad that it did happen that way."



She went on to win a pair of conference Player of the Year awards during her college campaign and trialled with both the Washington Spirit and Portland Thorns before signing a two-year deal in Germany with Turbine Potsdam. But playing college soccer opened up another development route for young Austrian players, as National Team teammate Sophie Maierhofer went that route and plays at the University of Kansas.

With these resources in hand and possibly more to follow, there is a real chance that Austria could make a run a qualifying for the Women's World Cup in 2019. They are grouped with Spain, Finland, Serbia and Israel and while Spain will be a tough team to overcome in trying to win the group, you can be sure that Austria will be up for the challenge after their performance in the Netherlands.

#### RECENT POSTS

FEATURE: Chelsea's Mjelde hoping its third time lucky in a club final

COLUMN: HEATHER O'REILLY – BACK TO WEMBLEY

PODCAST: Women's Soccer Zone – Episode 65

INTERVIEW: Karen Carney: "Chelsea made my career longer"

CAMPAIGN: ENGLAND DEFENDER BASSETT HELPS LAUNCH GIRLS' FOOTBALL WEEK

#### ARCHIVES



May 2018  
April 2018  
March 2018  
February 2018  
January 2018  
December 2017  
November 2017  
October 2017  
September 2017  
August 2017  
July 2017  
June 2017  
May 2017  
April 2017  
March 2017  
February 2017  
January 2017

[Home](#) [Euro 2017](#) [Interviews](#) [Features](#) [Podcasts](#) [About Us](#) [Contact](#)



Designed by **SM**