

BORA MILUTINOVIC

Velibor ‘Bora’ Milutinovic comes from a football family: him and his two brothers Milos and Milorad played together for FC Partizan from Serbia. He coached eight national football teams in his career. He was also a coach in five consecutive World Cups for five different teams: Mexico (1986), Costa Rica (1990), USA (1994), Nigeria (1998), and China (2002). He was the first manager to take four teams beyond the first round of competition. All that earned him a nickname: the Miracle Worker.

His contribution to development of football around the world is outstanding and for the past 15 years Bora has been living between Qatar, Mexico, and Serbia. While we anticipate the FIFA World Cup in Qatar, we decided to interview Bora and ask him how he got to the top. Smiling, typically for him, he said “Nothing was planned, it just happened.”

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

WORLD CUP NATIONAL TEAMS:

- 2000-02 China
- 1997-98 Nigeria
- 1991-95 United States
- 1990 Costa Rica
- 1983-86 Mexico

OTHER NATIONAL TEAMS:

- 2009 Iraq
- 2006-07 Jamaica
- 2003-04 Honduras

CLUBS:

- 2004-05 Al Sadd
- 1998-99 MetroStars
- 1988-89 Tecos UAG
- 1988 Veracruz
- 1987 Udinese
- 1987 San Lorenzo
- 1977-83 UNAM

Bora, what does football mean to you?

Football is everything to me; my life, my passion, my love! Football made it possible for me to see the world, to have so many friends, and to always be surrounded by football players and people involved in this sport.

As a coach you managed to qualify 5 different countries for the World Cup; can you describe the euphoria that occurred in those countries after such a remarkable achievement?

My first World Cup experience was with the national team of Mexico, in 1986 when they were also the host country. Mexico is a



country of 120 million people where everyone is a football fanatic. Their national team did not have much success for the 12 years prior to the 1986 World Cup; two times they didn't qualify and once they ended up last (in the World Cup). Because of that, and to the big surprise of many of the fans who doubted the decision, their football federation had decided to appoint a "foreigner" as their coach. Soon after our first victory against Belgium and qualification for the final stage of the tournament, I immediately became a hero of the nation. It was impossible for me to even walk in the street without many fans gathering around me. Some of them went as far as suggesting that I should be the next

president of the country! That is a good illustration what the phenomenon of football is.

My experience from China when I was coaching their team during the qualification for the World Cup was also very interesting. We managed to qualify for the World Cup, for the first time in China's history, and the whole country became euphoric! More than one million people gathered spontaneously on Tiananmen Square to celebrate our success, without a prior approval from the Chinese government. That was only the third time in the history of modern China that people gathered spontaneously. Suddenly, in a country of 1.5 billion people, I became a celebrity!



You were one of 5 members of Qatar's delegation in Zurich, presenting the country's bid for hosting the FIFA World Cup in 2022. Many experts agree that it was one of the best presentations in the history of FIFA; from the marketing viewpoint, that presentation was outstanding. How did you feel at the moment when the president announced that Qatar had won?

I felt like I was in heaven! I couldn't believe that we had succeeded. I knew that our presentation was good, but there were many large countries, such as the USA, in the game too. We desired to win so much, and I was so happy that our dream became a reality.

At that time in Zurich, were you able to imagine how Qatar would look like today, just a few months before the World Cup?

That was beyond my imagination. I trusted that people from the organising committee would do all that they had promised. If they promised to land on the moon, they would have done that, because they were so motivated. Qatar delivered a brand new airport, a metro system, many hotels, highways, bridges, beautiful stadiums, and new cities! I was not able to imagine all that, to be honest—an unbelievable achievement!

With the World Cup around the corner, what would be your final message for the organising committee and the management of the Qatar National Team?

My message to the organising committee would be to keep the positive spirit, and to stay calm when facing smaller roadblocks. All major competitions experience some problems, but there is always a solution.



Image top left: Bora Milutinovic and Alexi Lalas celebrating USA victory against Columbia, June 1994.

Image bottom left: A practices session of the Chinese national football team for the 2002 World Cup qualifications, February 2001.

Image right: Bora Milutinovic with Hugo Sanchez following their victory in the FIFA World Cup match between Belgium and Mexico. Mexico City, June 1986.

Image below: Fans with a life-size sculpture of Bora "Milu" Milutinovic. Shenyang, China.



To the national team, both management and players, my message would be: "Believe in yourself. You've invested a lot of time and effort." They are in a difficult group, but I wish them great results.

Which personal qualities had helped you to become so successful coach?

I will highlight three qualities: (1) my upbringing, (2) my passion for football, and (3) striving to be better each day. During my entire life I've enjoyed what I was doing so the hard work and stress wasn't any problem to me.

Your brother Milos Milutinovic was by many considered the best Yugoslavian football player of all times.

I am always very happy to hear that! But let us not forget that he was also a great coach. I learnt a lot from him.

An interesting fact is that you and Vahid Halihodzic (coach of Morocco), between the two of you, have qualified 9 countries for the World Cup but neither of you have ever coached the team of the country you were born in. What do you and Vahid have in common, apart from the fact that you were both born in Yugoslavia?

My brother Milos had trained us both, so it must be something that he had taught us.

In your opinion, what will the future of football look like?

I think that today's football is too "computerised", with too much emphasis on passing and not enough on shooting to score. They are also trying to eliminate any sort of improvisation. Therefore,





we are losing the thrill and unpredictability of the game. They are suppressing any form of individuality; individuality was that essence of football making it such a special game.

What would be your message to those starting their football career?

There is too much philosophy in today's football. We should remember that it is a rather simple game. If you enjoy the game and enjoy your training, you will face little problems. But the passion for the game must not be lost. There is also too much business in football nowadays; we forget how beautiful this sport actually is.

What are your thoughts on women's football and its development?

I am very happy to see that women's football is constantly improving and that more and more people enjoy watching it.

*Prof Nebojsa Popovic MD, PhD
Editor-in-Chief*

Image above: Bora posing next to the mural portrait of his brother Milos in Belgrade, Serbia.

Image below: FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 Final Draw at Doha Exhibition Center on April 1, 2022 in Doha, Qatar.

