



## Mimi's Block Dissolved

Wingwave and the amygdala: why the head is so crucial in handball for success on the court.

By KARIN M. ERDTMANN, February 4, 2007, 7:51 PM

Kürten/**Cologne** - It happened right after the semifinals in the Köln Arena (Cologne arena). In a dramatic game, Germany had just fought its way into the finals of the Handball World Championship when German national player "Mimi" Kraus embraced a spectator in the press area and exclaimed, "He removed my block!" His enthusiasm was directed at Gunter Klein, a 57-year-old lecturer at the German Sport University Cologne, ex-national league coach and current instructor for the 'A' license.

At that moment, something that only a handful of people had known about previously suddenly became public.

According to Klein, a short time before the start of the World Championship tournament, national coach Heiner Brand, who had been plagued by a series of injury problems, called him and asked for his assistance. Klein was asked to work with several of the team's players to help them with certain mental aspects of their game. Apparently, he carried out the task both discreetly and successfully: prior to his hiring hardly anyone believed that the German team would manage to reach the finals.

Klein doesn't like to talk about who he has coached so far. The body language exhibited on the court by several of the German team's players, however, certainly spoke volumes. On the way into the locker room 6'7" defender Oliver Roggisch gave Klein a hug so strong that it almost took the breath out of the six-foot coach. And the fact that goalkeeping legend Henning Fritz also didn't want to let go of the man from Kürten would lead one to suspect that the star between the goal posts also owes part of his recovered top form to Klein's coaching.

Klein, meanwhile, carries on in his usual humble manner. Of course he immediately made himself available when Brand called him, he said. He was able to work with individual players over three days during preparations for the tournament. When asked to what extent he had acted, Klein used the term "head" coach. He is a "coach for the head," he explained, who tries to reduce fears and remove blocks by using kinesiology and the "wingwave" method. Competitive athletes are not his only clients; Klein also advises many students suffering from test anxiety.

Apparently, the Wingwave method also gave "wings" to the German national players, and gave Klein, watching in the stands, a few "hormonal surges in the brain." "I got teary-eyed at the final whistle," he freely admitted. It is an incredible feeling, he added, to be in a hall among 19,000 frenetically cheering spectators. "They can transfer such energy, it makes anything possible."

But whether it be competitive sports or regular life, for Gunter Klein it is having the courage to make mistakes that makes success possible. "Mistakes are a form developmental aid that helps us grow," he said. Klein is certainly overjoyed that he could contribute "a small fraction" to the handball players'



success. "As a coach, I am a mountain guide standing behind the team." While others are basking in spotlight, he is inwardly already looking forward to new challenges, which he approaches with his usual optimism. "As long as there are more solutions than problems, there are no difficulties."

## The Wingwave Method

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**wingwave** is the name of the coaching method utilized by Gunter Klein. It is based on the assumption that the brain cannot distinguish between physical and mental injuries. This has been shown by examinations using magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scans. Whereas physical wounds heal, mental injuries entrench themselves in the brain. They have a lifelong effect, particularly on the amygdala, which, according to Klein, acts like a traffic light between the right and left cerebral hemisphere. "If it recognizes a situation which the particular person has not been able to cope with in the past, it switches to red," and a block is created.

To remove this block, Klein achieves during the client's awakened state what the subconscious accomplishes while dreaming at night. Through focused eye movements that rapidly alternate between right and left (the exercise that gave the wingwave method its name), exchange between the client's cerebral hemispheres is stimulated, and mental images from the past are confronted with current events. (kme)

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