

## **He flew high, fell deep, and landed on his feet**

Karl Müller has had his share of ups and downs, both professionally and in his private life. Müller is now back on the road to success, with kybun acquiring the naming rights for the FC St. Gallen stadium.

kybun Tower in Roggwil is a striking figure, visible from a long distance. Automatic sliding doors, which welcome each visitor in all of the world's languages, lead into the lobby of the company headquarters. What used to be a silo has been converted into an office tower, in which you cannot find a single chair. We therefore conduct our interview with the company founder Karl Müller while standing. A great deal has already been written about the Roggwil native, whose life has been marked by highs and lows. He was a successful entrepreneur in Korea until he began to find the business world too overwhelming. He then decided to move back to Switzerland with his wife in search of a more tranquil life. Being a self-starter, he opened a drug rehabilitation centre and invented the MBT shoe before selling his company shares and losing the money while speculating in the stock market. He now sees himself as a reformed business owner, and kybun is on the road to success under his leadership.

### **Responsible businessman**

Karl Müller spent a long time searching for the meaning of life before eventually finding his answer in the bible. He values living his everyday life in a way that exemplifies the tenets of his faith. "Each person has a purpose in life and is born with his or her own set of talents and mandates." Müller lives his life in keeping with this belief. The 63-year-old is not prone to speaking hastily and always chooses his words carefully. He believes that business owners are too often put on a pedestal and praised for their achievements, even when they owe their success to the support of an entire team behind them. This is why kybun has a horizontal management structure, and employees are not assessed based on their performance alone. Müller draws an analogy from the game of football. "It is not enough for a team to have good defenders or good strikers alone. The entire team needs to work together successfully."

### **Becoming the stadium sponsor out of passion**

The comparison to the world of football does not come out of nowhere. Müller has been an avid fan of 'his' football club, St. Gallen, since he was a teenager, when the stadium was still located in Espenmoos in the eastern part of St. Gallen. This is why Müller didn't have to think twice when someone suggested – as a joke – that kybun should become the sponsor for the new stadium. The diligent entrepreneur thought to himself, 'that's perfect!'. It is no surprise that the health product manufacturer has had a successful partnership with the long-established football club for six years now.

### **"A true fan doesn't abandon his club just because things aren't going very well."**

The football club's physiotherapists can no longer imagine having training sessions without kybun products, which allow players to recover more quickly – particularly after an injury. But kybun products can help regular people as much as they help professional athletes. Müller didn't give a second thought to issues of money or to concerns about FC St. Gallen being relegated to the second Swiss football league when he decided to sign the sponsoring contract, which is initially set to last for ten years. The plan is to eventually extend the contract indefinitely. "A true fan doesn't abandon his club just because things aren't going very well. Football is and always will be a great passion of mine," says Müller. We ask what role money plays in his life, as someone who was once able to afford anything he wanted before losing everything he had. "What people generally want from money is security. But I have found my security in God, which is why money means very little to me," Müller replies. He exudes a sense of optimism that spreads to everyone around him.

### **A company to last generations**

kybun has grown organically over the course of many years. The special shoe is available at pharmacies. kybun has done very little advertising for its products. Instead, the company primarily relies on word of mouth. But the time has come for the company to expand and increase its brand awareness in Switzerland. Even the pope owns a pair of Müller's special shoes. A member of the Swiss Guard – who is himself very impressed with kybun products – told Müller the pope's shoe size and invited him into the Vatican. Müller was then granted a private audience with the pope, to whom he presented a pair of kyBoot shoes. "We spend the last third of our lives in pain," says Müller, calling for more preventive action. Müller himself has already taken precautionary measures for the later stages of his life. Karl Müller, his son Mathias and Franz With founded the Joshua Foundation, which manages the majority of the shares of kybun. The foundation was created to ensure that the company is run according to Christian principles even after Müller's departure.

This will prevent the events that took place after Müller sold his MBT shares from happening again.

Müller regrets how he acted after he sold his shares of MBT. "But the purpose of life is to learn from your mistakes." The 63-year-old intends to leave the business in the next few years. It is not yet decided whether one of his four children or three foster children will follow in Müller's footsteps. But it is safe to assume that Karl Müller's successor will be someone who meets the conditions of the Joshua Foundation and will carry on running the company according to the wishes of the founder.

### **kybun – pleasant feeling**

Müller wants his products to reach a wide range of people and help them live healthy lives. 'kybun' is the Korean word for 'pleasant feeling', which is what Müller wants more people to experience when walking. The kyBoot air-cushion technology was created by further developing the MBT rollover shoe.