

## **Football, Nation and Identity: German Miracles in the Post-War Era**

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During my fieldwork stays in Portugal, I began to take an interest in football from an anthropological perspective. While elaborating on my field notes and thinking back, it struck me that I had used football as a means of establishing contact and entering into conversation with other males in cafes. There always seemed to be some football match on TV, I often found myself reading one of the two daily football newspapers, and soon I was able to display a certain minimal understanding of the ins and outs of Portuguese football. This new knowledge proved to be beneficial in every way: locals were both pleased and astonished at my newly acquired expertise in Portuguese football. On the other hand, German football was not entirely unknown in Portugal: Beckenbauer, Müller, Netzer, the 'blond angel' Bernd Schuster, who had played in Spain, were all familiar names and respected players.

But just what were we really discussing in our frequent conversations about football? It was more than just a game. We found ourselves entering into contact by presenting ourselves - implicitly - as members of various (footballing) nations. We were entering into dialogue via football, while at the same time a process of 'othering' was being set in train: two individuals having a chat in a bar are transformed into members of different nations. Conversations and thoughts about the omnipresent game run on and meander from one topic to the next; the most varying issues are assembled within a common semantic framework. At stake here are questions of victory and defeat, economics, politics and personal pride, or even, as a Portuguese football newspaper put it in headlines (surrounding disputes within the national squad), '*Guerra e Paz*' (War and Peace). In fact, the semantics of football are shared across borders, with national identities being negotiated, asserted and assigned in the specific idiom of football. In discussions between informants and anthropologists, including on football-related topics, a certain jockeying for power always tends to manifest itself. In my own case I became acutely aware of how this played out: I found myself being categorized in terms of perpetually recurring stereotypes, both in the world as a human being, and in concrete situations. Sooner or later discussions turned to Hitler and Beckenbauer, the 'Führer' and the

‘Kaiser’ (as Beckenbauer is known), the ‘world destroyer’ and the ‘world champion’ respectively. From here it is but a short ride to the so-called ‘German virtues’ such as combativeness, discipline, order/subordination, punctuality, and the will to triumph. And football, according to the well-known dictum of the English player, Gary Lineker, is ‘when 22 men play and in the end the Germans win’ (Schulze-Marmeling et al. 1999: 218).

Clearly, these are all widely held stereotypes, which are repeated time and again in conversations between anthropologist and informant. But in these discussions, I also became uncomfortably aware of the fact that I was not only a member of a ‘footballing nation’, but also a ‘nervous system’ that reacted very sensitively to the possible assertions hidden in such apparently anodyne conversations. I was astonished with myself. In what sort of a relationship do football, nation and identity stand to one another? To what extent am I as an anthropologist also susceptible to the power effects of discussions on football? By power effects, I mean the fact of being personally identified with supposed national characteristics and virtues conjured up by such footballing talk, characteristics that are thus imposed upon me whether I like it or not.

Upon returning home, I began to examine this phenomenon from the perspective of the cultural sciences using the example of my own culture, that of Germany as footballing nation. I started by organizing a seminar at the university entitled ‘Anthropology of Football’, and then a series of lectures to which I invited German academics in the field. My aim was to replace the generally ironic tone of much commentary on football in Germany by bringing in intellectuals and scholars, while at the same time analyzing football as a key hallmark of German culture with the same intellectual rigor as applied to other anthropological themes. The fact that I was personally fascinated by the subject was of course helpful, as was the fact that I possessed an astonishingly broad knowledge of football, knowledge that I had – it must be acknowledged - acquired in a particularly intellectual manner: my personal footballing background had always been of a somewhat discursive nature. As a son of the protestant bourgeoisie I had been banned as a child from playing the ‘proletarian sport’ of football – my footballing skills are thus limited to those acquired in the course of a former leisure time activity. As a resident of a province that could not lay claim to having produced a

first division club, I was unable to identify with any top local team. My team was thus the national squad, my elixir TV transmissions and, above all, the daily sport report in the newspaper - a habit which I have maintained to this very day. As a member of the first post-war generation and as someone who was socialized by the student unrest of the early 1970s, football was, as for many of my generation, practically the only opportunity I had in which to give positive vent to my sense of national identity: 'We' had either won or lost. Apart from this footballing context, we otherwise simply spoke of 'the Germans' whenever it was a question of national affairs. Understanding why and how this negative sense of identity was able to transform itself into a positive identity precisely and exclusively in relation to football was the starting point for my anthropological enquiry into football.

### *Outline*

In the present article I shall thus seek to address the relation between nation/nationalism and sport in a theoretical light, and further develop an interpretation of research on 'football cultures' (Feixa / Juris 2000). Following this, I shall present an overview of the history of German football from its origins to the imperial era, from its existence during the national-socialist period through the post-war epoch down to the present day. This history centers, in large measure, on that of the German Football Association (GFA), which, with its 6 million members, is the world's largest and richest football organization (Menzen 2000: 363).

The so-called 'Miracle of Bern' in 1954, when Germany became surprise world champions by beating Hungary in the final, marks the beginning of Germany's rebirth as a gradually more self-confident nation following the Second World War. I shall illustrate the emergence of a collective sense of 'we', of the notion that 'we're back' (*wir sind wieder wer*) attributable to the 1954 victory using a number of examples drawn from the literature and the media. In conclusion, I attempt to show, based on examples of several great 'footballing heroes', how the myths of national identity are able to be maintained via football while at the same time continually having to be adapted to new circumstances. The choice of footballing 'heroes' is always of a somewhat speculative - or subjective - nature. My personal choice included Fritz Walter, Uwe Seeler and Franz Beckenbauer, as they had all been designated as 'honorary captains' (*Ehrenspielführer*) by the GFA, and as

such were invested with great symbolic significance. In contrast to these players, I finally decided to add Stefan Effenberg to my list because, although he was not any less successful, he famously attracted the wrath of the GFA.

### **Football and Nation as Ritualized Performance**

What type of relation exists between a sport and a country's reputation in the world, between football and the self-perception of a nation?

According to Anderson (1993), nations are 'imagined communities' - in the sense that all communities that extend beyond face-to-face encounters are 'imagined'. This does not, however, imply that it is a case of 'fabrications' i.e. of false facts - even where the respective inventions have no basis in reality. Rather, nationalism is akin to an act, a practice, a creation. As such, according to Anderson, nationalism cannot be treated like other 'isms', such as fascism or liberalism, but rather in terms of categories such as 'parentage' or 'religion'.

This approach to understanding the phenomenon of 'nationalism' contains a thread leading directly to sport in general, and, in this case, to football. Sport, and in particular modern, professional sports are often portrayed and analyzed in terms of a ritual, or something similar to this, by many authors.<sup>1</sup> New theories tend to stress that rituals are not only about reinforcing a community, but also about molding and creating communities and meaning in a continually changing world. Sporting competitions, such as world championships or the Olympic Games (cf. Rudie 1998: 113), are thus seen as 'ritualized performative practices (that) embody creativity and constraint', and have 'to be thought of as simultaneous, co-present, and co-dependent, and embodied in different forms of participation' (Crain/Hughes-Freeland 1998: 2f.).

This 'embodiment' occurs through permanent repetition of myths, through the ritualization of social activities and their propagation, and the simultaneous commentary generated by media specialists such as commentators, PR representatives, officials, etc. The media thus assume a distinctive role, and in particular the modern mass media, such as radio, press and TV:

The processual approach to ritual also permits a further illuminating comparison between the unrealities of ritual and media, which helps us

to think about the ways in which we frame reality/-ies and how variable framings alter our roles, our self-images, our identities. (Crain/Hughes-Freeland 1998: 3).

The nation as an 'imagined community' is in need of such ritualized performances, such continual repetitions at the interface of constraint and creativity in order to become real, in order to become encoded in bodies, and thus to engender forth national bodies. Archetti (1997, 1999) has described this process convincingly using the example of football's significance for the hybrid identity of Argentina, and, entirely in line with Anderson's view, has depicted the veneration of Maradona in terms of a religious phenomenon. Here embodiment is expressed in the imagination of a 'Criollo style of football', in the same way that Lopes (1997) has detected a 'Carioca style' in Brazilian football. Football engenders bodily styles, gaits for negotiating the world that at the same time reflect national characteristics, from 'el pibe' in Argentina, to 'fair play' in England and 'virtue, discipline and combativeness' in Germany.

Not least of all, Anderson's definition of nationalism contains a further thread that leads directly to football. He speaks of the 'miracle' of nationalism, which is based on the capacity to transform chance occurrence into destiny. A cliché of German footballing language (and it is one of the ritualistic characteristics of football that it has created its own rhetoric, and even its own idiom) runs: 'People go to watch football matches because they don't know how the game's going to end'. And often as not, the outcome is determined by what we refer to as 'chance' or 'luck'. Such an explanation was proffered in the now-famous 1986 world cup match between England and Argentina, where the referee failed to spot Maradona's handball, thereby allowing Argentina's goal and sealing England's 'fate'. As it was, and as Maradona himself famously put it, 'the hand of God' was at work here. In the same way that the nation, not religion, is, in many countries, able to bring forth 'miracles', it is in the context of sport that these 'miracles' are enacted and experienced - whenever chance is transformed into destiny, players into heroes or saints, tactics into national virtues, and football into an identity-engendering myth.

As such, I have placed the notion of miracles at the heart of my analysis of German identity and football. The starting point for such analysis is the now proverbial

‘Miracle of Bern’, which led to Germany being crowned world champions in 1954. The miracle consisted in the fact of defeat on the battlefield and victory on the playing field, being placed in a symbolic relation after the event. It was the media – radio, TV and tabloid press – who were originally responsible for creating, supposedly ‘by chance’, a symbolic connection between football and post-war Germany, and later between football and the ‘economic miracle’ in the sixties and the ‘miracle of reunification’ of a divided Germany after 1989.

According to Anderson, nationalism has not produced any great thinkers – ‘no Hobbes, no Marx, and no Weber’ (ibid., 15). But it has produced great footballers: a Maradona, a Pelé and a Beckenbauer. Media stagecraft has engendered, propagated and modified national myths. These national football myths are, in turn, adopted by a variety of social groups, which seek to direct and to use them for their own agendas. We are here dealing with a kind of national ‘grand narratives’ (Lyotard 1984) which are hegemonic and tend to suppress other competing narratives.

The question of the relation that exists between football and a country’s reputation and self-perception is answered differently in each country, reflecting the contextual variations that exist from one place to another. The hegemonic German ‘football narrative’ is situated in the specific context of the organization and, often enough, domestication of popular sporting activities.

### **A Century of German Football**

In January 2000 the largest football association in the world, the German Football Association (GFA), celebrated its centenary. The occasion was marked by special TV broadcasts, while the GFA itself organized a large exhibition (Brüggemeier 2000), and the tabloid press, officials and politicians stressed the social significance of football as a form of ‘cultural heritage’ (*Kulturgut*) and as a bearer of Germany’s reputation abroad. The hymns sung in praise of the irrepressible triumphal march of the game, the numerous anecdotes related with regard to individual players and clubs, and the three world championship victories of the national side somehow became condensed into a single ‘grand narrative’ in which football, nation and cultural identity became seamlessly interwoven. Nevertheless, this national celebration was also marked by certain critical undertones. Indeed, critics noted the astonishing fact that, for the most part, this ‘national

discourse' covered a mere half century, beginning with a commemoration of the victory in the 1954 world championships, the 'miracle of Bern'. But what of German football in the first half of its hundred-year existence, in what sort of social context had it existed, and how had the GFA conducted itself under national socialism? The oft-evoked integrative character of football was contrasted to a 'political history' of the GFA in two book publications<sup>ii</sup> and various newspaper supplements; book titles such as 'Hitler's Forwards' (Fischer/Lindner 1999), and headlines such as 'The Führer's Players' (Dieckmann 2000) are an allusion to the more shadowy fifty years of the GFA. Indeed, GFA officials found themselves obliged, at least for formality's sake, to refer to the 'brown patches' in the GFA's history during their celebratory speeches. Yet in the same breath, the oft-evoked separation between sport and politics was then used to enact a simultaneous discursive distinction between the 'political mistakes' of the German nation and its 'healthy' core, a sportively active German youth. In the following, I shall briefly sketch the history of the GFA in terms of the continuity that organized football has permitted in imagining a national identity unscathed by two lost world wars.

#### *The GFA to 1945*

The connection between sport and politics is inextricably bound up with the history of the GFA from its very inception. Imported from England at the beginning of the last century, football first had to establish itself in competition with the widely popular gymnastics movement.<sup>iii</sup> National unity and cultural identity found themselves intimately linked in the teachings of the 'father of German gymnastics' (*Turnvater*) F. Ludwig Jahn (1778-1852), who liked to present physical exercises and his disciplined program of bodily training under the leitmotif of 'for the Fatherland.' Current-day sports club names, such as '*Germania*', '*Teutonia*' or '*Turn- und Sportverein*' (Gymnastics and Sporting Association) are a throw-back to this history. The competing football association managed to establish itself by adapting to this ideology, and footballers went to war in 1914 with the same degree of enthusiasm for the German fatherland as the gymnasts. Contrary to the myth of a 'proletarian sport' propagated by many left-wing commentators, it was primarily office employees who were gripped by football fever. Henceforth, football played its part in contributing to the 'propagation of German values around the world', with English football terminology being Germanized and, on the football pitch, the notion

of ‘war in times of peace’ being put into action. The switch from playing field to battlefield was preprogrammed at the very inception of the GFA, and defeat on the latter resulted more in sulky isolationism than in a radical rethink of the GFA’s nationalistic roots. The German program ran along the lines of ‘*Teutsch, treu und tüchtig*’ (German, faithful and virtuous), and even the rising professionalism of the game in the inter-war period was vehemently opposed: football was not motivated by money, but by the Fatherland.

When it finally occurred, the ‘*Gleichschaltung*’<sup>iv</sup> of German football to the rising tide of national socialist ideology did so, as was to be expected, in a spirit of preemptive obedience: clubs were ‘cleansed’ of Jewish players and officials; in football, German youth was expected to be shaped by the *Führer’s* will; and, at least at the level of the GFA, barely any resistance to fascism at all was displayed. Hitler himself attempted to make football an instrument of his own aims, and the German national side’s tactics were closely aligned to corresponding political ambitions in times of war. In spite of this, Hitler only attended one game involving the German side, leaving agitated after the Germans had lost 2:0 to Norway. Following total defeat in World War Two, what building blocks for a German national identity remained? How were phrases, stories, and continuities able to be shaped from an ‘imagined community’ as total nightmare, without at the same time once more appearing to be ‘guilty’?

As in numerous other areas of society, a good many officials who had backed national socialism politically ‘survived’ in the GFA. In doubtful cases this decision was often justified by reference to the oft-cited formula that they had helped to save football in ‘difficult times’, and thus defended the ‘apolitical’ ideals of the German game. Victory on the pitch in the post-war period facilitated this manner of reasoning, while making German football the perfect vehicle for establishing a sense of continuity and a new national identity in spite of losses on the battlefield.

#### *Continuity in the Post-war Period*

In the period 1945 to 1954 Germany found itself excluded from international football life. The victorious nations set out to destroy the Nazi-backed sport apparatus together with Nazi political institutions. Locally, football enthusiasts began to organize new associations in which other sports were increasingly incorporated and in which other

‘aberrant’ ideals also gained currency, and a number of fascist officials were banished. While at the local level certain reformist tendencies began to unfold (as they continue to do today), at the national level a movement to restore conservative tendencies won the day. The refounding of the GFA also meant the return of a large number of former national socialist officials, and its first president, Bauwens, is credited with the following words: ‘Considering the high ideals we represent, democracy is irrelevant’ (Heinrich 2000: 167). The ideals being referred to were those of the imperial era of *Turnvater* Jahn’s gymnastics movement, a period in which bodily training for the Fatherland was both preached and practiced.

This continuity is also evident from post-war debates surrounding the unstoppable march of professionalism in German football. The core of the GFA’s ideology continues to be that of an amateur sport movement, in spite of the fact that this ideology is clearly no longer consonant with the times and the GFA itself has assumed the position of an all-powerful arbiter within the media domain. Yet although all national team members have long since become millionaires, it is still considered not only an ‘honor’ but also an ‘obligation to the Fatherland’ to play and do battle for Germany.

In the post-war period, the GFA soon became the richest and largest sporting association in the world in terms of members, while football itself increasingly began to be seen as the national sport. Two further world championship titles in 1974 and 1990 were to follow the 1954 triumph, and Germany soon began to be seen as one of the leading footballing nations on the international stage. In official speeches on the occasion of centenary celebrations, talk of football as a form of ‘cultural heritage’, of football’s importance for youth and for Germany’s reputation in the world was much in evidence. Domestically, too, the GFA seemed to be ‘imagining’ a potent national German identity: the heart of Germany was represented as being made up of its sporting associations, which had sprung up from student associations in the imperial era, and which had been taken over by football following the tradition of the gymnastics clubs. Beyond day-to-day politics, it is in just such a social arena that sociability and ‘high ideals’ of one form or another tend to be upheld in today’s Germany. In high-minded political speeches, sports clubs continue to be depicted as an antidote to the ‘brutalization of youth’, to youth involvement in neo-nazi or leftwing groups, as well as to drug abuse and other

miscellaneous ‘threats’. A thoroughly conservative management board in the post-war period ensured, not only that game fixtures continued to be organized with a typically German degree of thoroughness, but also that these various ideals from the imperial era continue to survive in today’s world: football as a ‘national cultural commodity’, as body and mind training, and as a rampart against evil at home and abroad.

The collusion of powerful football officials with the media, TV and the tabloid press helped to bridge the ideological gap between the battlefield and post-war Germany, while simultaneously ensuring continuity via the ritualized staging and performance of the (football) nation Germany and its ideals. This ‘national narrative’, which keeps threatening to negate or to assimilate all other diverging narratives, is based on the notion of a separation between sport and politics, which, as this short sketch has indicated, was in no way present at the outset of the GFA’s existence. The discursive evocation of this separation, however, enables the chance element of football matches to be incorporated within the narrative of the ‘destiny’ and ‘essence’ of nationhood, while simultaneously maintaining a sense of continuity.

### **The Miracle of Bern**

The ‘national narrative’ is only really able to deploy its full impact where there exists a receptive audience. The oft-cited ‘Miracle of Bern’ is the subject of a short story by the author Friedrich Christian Delius entitled, ‘The Sunday I became World Champion’ (2000), in which the nature of the miracle in question is once more evoked, here in an autobiographical vein.

The background to the story is provided by an evocation of the narrator’s life as a young boy in a Hessian village, in ‘darkest’ provincial Germany in 1954, shortly after defeat in the war, and in the context of the newly developing cold war. The child’s father is a vicar, and the church bells peal out warnings of great, incomprehensible powers, as do tales of the ominous threat from the ‘East’ - barely beyond nearby hills - that dissect geography into Good and Evil. The 1950s are depicted as a mute period full of ineffable mystery for a child growing up in a world of silent war-returnees. Delius describes a typical Sunday visit to the local church and the difficulty he experiences in seeing himself as part of the long lineage of fathers and forefathers:

Stone memorial plaques for the dead soldiers of 1870/1871 hung over the heads of church visitors. *They fought for King and Fatherland*, beside which the names of those who, in 1914-1918, *fell as heroes in the battle for Germany's Honor and Survival, Never may their names be forgotten, may it remain holy to us all*. The name of my father's father was also chiseled into a stone tablet in Westphalia; I was lucky that my father had only been taken prisoner for almost three years by the French, without suffering any serious wound, thanks to *God's blessing*. (Delius 2000: 49)<sup>v</sup>

Yet the narrator's joy that his father returned alive is somewhat diminished by the fact that he remained forever unapproachable in his black frock – the vicar can here be taken as a metaphor for the silence and unapproachableness of the war-returnees, who often remained incapable of expressing their experiences in words.

The narrator's emancipation and self-discovery in these post-war days still full of memorial plaques and an unapproachable father finally occurs one Sunday afternoon in front of the wireless set in his father's holiest of studies, having been permitted to follow the transmission of the world cup final in Bern between Germany and Hungary: '*Schäfer crosses, header, defended, Rahn had to take a shot from outside the penalty area, Rahn shoots! Goal! Goal! Goal! Goal! Goal for Germany!*' The legendary radio commentary by Herbert Zimmermann is replayed in the story in such a way as to rekindle the full weight of its moving impact on many Germans right down to the present - even those who weren't even born at the time. The internal dialogue with the crackly, ecstatic voice on the wireless in this cramped provincial German backwater is a typical example of 'embodiment', of a rising sense of national identity in post-war Germany. In the very instant of the final whistle blow, the commentator anticipates the whole sense of ambivalence marked by the combination of jubilation and Germany: '*At this moment, we shouldn't forget, though, that it's a game, a game, but the most popular game in the world...*' - but the young listener contradicts: '*... it had long since ceased to be a game, because for me, as I had shamefully and secretly wished, I'd become world champion, and I didn't want that to be taken away from me by soothing words*' (ibid., 115).

'I had become world champion': the radio ushers in a world beyond the reach of that of the narrator's father, one marked by Wilhelmian ideals, by protestant bans, and by

lost wars. This identification is accompanied by a sense of confusion at the transgression of a taboo - a confusion that also comes to the fore across background noises as the trophy is being presented: the narrator listens as the national anthem is played, hearing it in two different versions at one and the same time - the banned first verse with its notorious lines of *'Deutschland, Deutschland über alles'*, and the official post-war anthem, with the third verse to the same tune, 'Unity, Law, and Freedom.' This confusion soon takes a grip of the narrator as he tries to make out the celebratory cheering of the crowd droning from the radio set - he hears 'hey!' and 'yes!', but also *'heil!'* These (phonetic) shifts are not only occurring in the narrator's post-war mind, but also quite patently within the stadium itself, and those in charge of the radio transmission make haste to put a stop to them: *'This was a joint radio broadcast by all stations of the Federal Republic of Germany ... Your reporter was Herbert Zimmermann. The broadcast has come to an end. We return you now to Germany'* (*ibid.*, 116).

### ***We're Back: Media, Stars and Football***

Back to Germany. For the GFA's centenary celebrations, the organization's president, Egidius Braun, wrote:

The game of football has always been a mirror image of trends in contemporary history. (...) In this regard I am naturally reminded of Germany's 3:2 world cup final victory over Hungary in the 1954 championships at Bern: millions of individuals in our country, filled with guilt, insecurity and self-doubt were able to gain a new sense of self-worth: 'We're back.' Fritz Walter and the others were shining examples to us all. (in Brüggemeier 2000: 5)

The football president here gives us a clear example of how a football match is transformed into an historical watershed, how chance becomes destiny, and players become heroes and bearers of national characteristics. 'We're back' – this act was never actually accomplished on the football pitch, nor in the stadium, but via a separate act of interpretation that placed a complex and contradictory reality in a novel semantic optic using the image of a miracle. The close connections between football stars, the media and powerful officials in Germany have helped to create such a potent myth that the GFA

president is not the only one to believe the latter to be a mirror image of contemporary history - while forgetting that he himself and others like him were responsible for creating the myth in the first place.

Nationalism is embedded within a cultural nexus, and in many cases its heroes are not great thinkers or theoreticians, but football players. In the myths accreted around it, national identity assumes the character of an event staged by the media, with nation as 'imagined community.' Such mythical heroes of German football include the captain of the 1954 squad, Fritz Walter, his successor Uwe Seeler, the 'Kaiser', Franz Beckenbauer, and even - although he is seen as something of a fallen hero - Stephan Effenberg.

#### *Fritz Walter and the Heroes of '54*

In a TV broadcast in January 2000 on the sportsmen of the century, the entry of the surviving players of the 1954 squad proved to be the highlight. Gaunt-looking men of my father's generation stared blankly into the TV cameras, while photos of their deceased team-mates were faded in: dead comrades were being commemorated. In this spooky sequence, the true character of the Miracle of Bern once again became apparent - the miracle consisted in the shift from the battlefield to the playing field. The men who had once marched off in order to found a thousand-year empire (*tausendjähriges Reich*), had returned home beaten, mute, embittered, and humiliated. They had not only lost their youth - their ideals, their faith, and their hopes had also been exposed as false. Germany was shattered. 'Mourning dead comrades' was only possible at a distance, in a shifted optic - outside of the playing field such mourning continued to be politicized, with false ideals and false ideologies becoming mixed up with mourning for fallen comrades who had fought for a wrong cause. The very same men, who perhaps are only able to mourn today, are those who became the victors on the football pitch immediately after the war.

A further highlight was provided by a video clip of the former captain, the now critically ill Fritz Walter, in his opening greeting. With serious mien he quoted a saying of the then national coach, Sepp Herberger: 'Men, remember what the boss always said: You're not only playing for yourselves and your team, but also for the reputation of Germany in the world.'

The deciding goal scored by Helmuth Rahn was also replayed, one of the few remaining images of this game. The sound recording from the radio broadcast, which

millions of Germans had originally heard (there were only a few thousand TVs at the time) and which has frequently been rebroadcast to latter generations, was added to the images. This special TV broadcast not only presented the myth in words and images, but implicitly its whole fabrication as a media collage, too. While the aged Fritz Walter, the hero of Bern, fulfilled, with his last ounce of energy, right to the very end, his function as a representative, hero and bearer of this myth. The TV presentation also included a whole host of his successors bearing equally serious-looking miens and an aura of heavy responsibility.

*'Uns Uwe'*

Fritz Walter's immediate successor as captain of the national side in the 1960s and beginning of the 1970s was Uwe Seeler. *'Uns Uwe'* (Us Uwe), as he was affectionately christened and thus etched in the national consciousness, is considered a paragon of the 'good German' to this day. On the pitch he embodied the image of the remorseless fighter and midfield player, and outside, as the honest employee.

While the year 1954 heralded the transition from radio to TV, the latter medium was initially confined to the mere reporting of facts. As such, footballers were almost always apprehended in their capacity as footballers, rather than as public figures on the TV screen. In consequence, the public was dependent on other sources to 'get a closer picture' of their heroes.

For me, as a youngster, 'Us Uwe' was one such hero. Radio commentaries, and later, sports news on TV were key features punctuating Saturdays between washing the car and weekly baths. It was the era of so-called 'collectors cards', which, following the example of holy images, transformed the pictures of football stars into much sought-after collectors' items, while at the same time foreshadowing the first moves towards greater commercialization of football. I also began to read avidly the newly available biographies of football stars, or football novels geared to youth such as the now proverbial 'Eleven Friends' by Sammy Drechsel (1955), a well-known sports reporter.

The book, 'Uwe Seeler - Golden Goals' (Becker 1960), is still to be found on my bookshelves this day. It contains short chapters illustrated by black and white photos that seamlessly transform the footballer's career into an exemplary life of the 'good German'. A description of his best goals and greatest successes is followed by a series of chapters

entitled 'Training is everything', 'The friend', 'Uwe in everyday life', 'Uwe's private life'. The text praises Uwe's 'tireless combative spirit', 'iron discipline', the 'good comrade-in-arms' he always was, and his willingness both to lead and to take orders. The only females who get a mention are his mother and his spouse. The function of the former is seen as ensuring that her son gets onto the field (rather than, as in the previous generation, the battlefield) in good time. His wife, too, is seen as fulfilling merely a maternal role: one picture shows her shortly after having given birth with the couple's newly-born daughter in her arms, with husband Uwe standing by her. In the corresponding text passage, she explains how she always has to cook stew for 'her Uwe' - the classic dish provided to German soldiers. Supposed quotes attributed to her state that she is 'always ready to make sacrifices.' Frau Ilka even apparently had to sacrifice her honeymoon: 'Uwe had a match to play at the time!' (Becker 1960: 96).

The portrait of Uwe Seeler in his civil life in post-war Germany credits him with martial virtues. But also with national ones: it is underlined on several occasions that 'our Uwe' has always withstood the temptation of 'big money', having turned down offers to play for Madrid or Milan. He prefers to play 'for us', and indeed (almost) for free. In his everyday life, he worked as a representative of a sportswear firm, and as a result put in extra voluntary training shifts: 'Take a leaf out of his book!' as the author unambiguously commands with an exclamation mark. 'Our Uwe' is part of a longer tradition that precedes the 'Miracle of Bern'. A tradition that goes back to the founding of the German empire with its interweaving narrative of competitive sport and love of Fatherland.

#### *'Kaiser Franz' Beckenbauer*

The following head of the national side was none other than Franz Beckenbauer. He was lucky enough to achieve something twice over that eluded 'Us Uwe': he was world champion on two separate occasions – once as a player in 1974, and then as manager in 1990. Beckenbauer became the first media star of German football, something he has remained down to the present - to the extent that satirical spirits have characterized him personally as a 'medium'. In his external image and staged role, Beckenbauer stands for the new self-confidence of Germans following the '*Wirtschaftswunder*' (economic miracle), something for which Uwe Seeler still had to toil and struggle. His style is seen as light-footed, elegant and technically well-versed. As a midfield player and sweeper he

always tended to be surrounded by so-called ‘combative players’ or ‘water carriers’ who did the ‘work’ for him – such players remained vital and embodied those apparently indispensable martial virtues.

Beckenbauer entered into a close relationship with the media from the very outset of his career, and the media were quick to get him on board. He was the first German footballer to do advertising for consumer goods on TV, while his divorce and remarriage provided good material for gossip columns. But especially his visits to the opera, ballrooms and other public festivities were avidly raked over in the tabloid press - a place in which his name was increasingly encountered owing to his often touching attempts at social climbing, from the football pitch to the cultural scene. Beckenbauer the footballer no longer embodied mere martial virtues; he rendered football acceptable in high society in a Germany where memory of the military past was gradually fading.

Even after his career had come to an end he retained a leading position within German football as an omnipresent commentator on TV and in the tabloid press, and as an official at his home club, Bayern Munich, which, as a player and then as president, he transformed into one of the most successful teams in Europe.

When, shortly before the world cup finals of 1986, German football appeared once more to be languishing in crisis, the popular press practically elected him national manager, and he promptly proceeded to lead the team to victory in the competition in 1990. The image of him wandering across the pitch in solitary contemplation amidst celebrating crowds of enthusiastic football fans was transported across the world. With typical media self-staging he seemed to be visualizing himself as someone spoilt by good fortune who appears to be floating above all and everyone. It is precisely this mixture of happenstance, skill and media stagecraft that led to his being baptized the ‘Kaiser’ at a very early date - and to some extent, quite appropriately. Kaiser Wilhelm II himself was venerated as someone capable of standing above things and factions in similar fashion; he was another early master in the use of the media, and, as Kaiser Franz, he was also not without a certain preposterousness, although he tended to make far more serious blunders.

Thus, following the 1990 victory and a year after the ‘miracle of the reunification’, Beckenbauer the speechifier announced that a unified Germany would remain unbeatable for generations to come - a phrase which was avoided at all costs on the political front in

order to spare the world the scary prospect of Germany as a reawakened great power. A footballing prognostic which in any case proved to be completely false.

Perhaps aside from Hitler, Beckenbauer is the most famous German worldwide. This suspicion also appeared to edge its way into Beckenbauer's mind when, following the FIFA decision that Germany would be allowed to host the 2006 world championships, he told the media about his experiences around the world as sports ambassador for Germany. In enthusiastic tones he explained how he had been received as a head of state in a good number of countries he had visited. In many countries he was also, he claimed, the only German whose name was known - apart from Hitler, as he noted with some confusion. But this association directed his attention back to his own task, which he saw himself, or rather German football, as needing to accomplish in the world: 'Football is still the best ambassador for Germany's reputation in the world.'

The fact that football had become a multibillion dollar business and that Beckenbauer was acting on behalf of a media and GFA consortium in a bid to secure the right for Germany to host the 2006 world cup finals was never called into question. Beckenbauer expressed his condolences to the defeated candidate, South Africa, while adding that it was precisely the elements of organizational capacity, discipline, order and security that predestined Germany to the task - virtues which South Africa would acquire in time.

#### *'Middle Finger' Stefan Effenberg*

Stefan Effenberg is known as the 'enfant terrible' of the present-day German football scene. His nickname of 'middle finger' derives from a hand gesture made during his substitution in a 1994 world cup match in the US, a gesture interpreted as obscene. In the first round match against Spain, the national side had played in a purely tactical and defensive style. Effenberg was subject to hefty abuse by those German fans present in the stadium at the time of his substitution, to which he reacted by raising his finger in a gesture of contempt - an incident which was subject to copious comment in the popular press. Leading GFA officials found themselves forced to act and sent Effenberg home during the competition as a punishment for his improper behavior. He was considered as having conducted himself in a manner unworthy of a representative of Germany abroad. His penalty can only be explained in terms of 'honor, Fatherland, propriety' - values

which, beyond the confines of football, the GFA still considers itself to be responsible for upholding.

But this was not all: Effenberg is managed by his wife, Martina. She stated in the press that she found it ludicrous that her husband had been sent home – after all it was he who had been abused and insulted by the public, and he had the right to defend himself. She then threateningly declared that German football would live to regret such a moralistic sanction and sold the story to the press. Following on from this, she arranged for her husband (who played in Italy) to join the German team Mönchengladbach, and then Bayern Munich. These clubs were interested in Effenberg's skills as a player, and Martina Effenberg negotiated the most expensive contracts for her husband which had ever been agreed upon at that time. In the press, which soon began to praise Effenberg's sporting abilities once more, Martina Effenberg instead was caricatured as a money-grubbing, vengeful, man-eating woman, and headlined her as a '*Flintenweib*' (gun-woman) - a term which had seemed to have died out in Germany and which had been used between the wars to pour scorn on Jewish and/or socialist women. In a psychoanalytical interpretation of institutionalized military practices of German soldiers, Theweleit (1977) interprets '*Flintenweib*' as a metaphor simultaneously for fear of and brutality against women. Martina Effenberg evoked these 'male fantasies' once more, when she managed to assert herself in the all-male preserve of German football, in the cliques of ageing functionaries, brokers and club-presidents, and because of this she was subjected to sexist verbal abuse by the press on behalf of public opinion.

In contrast, her husband was asked to rejoin the national side by a contrite GFA. Which he refused to do, noting that the same old men who had recently thrown him out were still holding down the same positions: it wasn't worth playing for Germany.

The 'Effenberg Affair' shows that the connection between football, national identity and German 'values' is occasionally endangered, while at the same time bringing to light the 'darker' underside of the oft-touted virtues. The aggressive campaign against Effenberg's wife is a throwback to an age many believed to have been well and truly forgotten, an age of homophobia and the ambivalent sexism manifest in a mixture of misogyny and pin-ups in army barracks as well as in football changing rooms.

Long since established as a key actor in the billion dollar football business, the GFA is currently in danger of losing its identity-building role to the footballers themselves, while assuming that of a pure business corporation. The discursive hegemony is constantly in need of refashioning, something which is proving to be increasingly difficult in an age of globalization, the shifting sands of national identity under the influence of the European Union, the close interconnection between football broadcasting rights and the introduction of private or pay TV. Yet on the other side of the ledger, leading German politicians have recently been calling for a legislative clause that ensures public sector TV channels have the right to broadcast matches involving the national side. And the securing of the right to host the 2006 world cup finals in Germany will in all likelihood mark a new chapter in the continuing saga of the relationship between nation and the rest of the world.

### **The German Miracle**

Football is a ritualized performance that is reenacted every week at the club level and whose spectacular pinnacle is assured by national team games – at least in Germany. Ever new occasions present themselves for ‘chance events’ on the pitch to be reinterpreted as national destiny. The regularity of national and international tournaments furthermore guarantees that the narratives and myths are able to be continuously rewoven. The prerequisites for converting victory on the football field into a national myth include the supervention of ‘miracles’, instances of divine intervention in the normal workings of the world, plus the availability of heroes capable of doing destiny’s bidding in an exemplary manner and a media willing to herald the miraculous ‘good news’ and to repeat it *ad infinitum*.

The example of Germany as (footballing) nation brings this cultural tendency to light in dramatic fashion: national identity and the expression of galvanizing sayings such as ‘we’re back on the march’ have been shown to be directly connected to the rhetorical and media-based treatment of the game of football. The ‘Miracle of Bern’ in 1954 marks an historical watershed, while at the same time enabling reference to be made to traditions dating to before the Second World War.

In the present article I have tried to use a variety of examples to show that football has not only played a central role in the construction of a German post-war identity, but also that its 'official' version has tended to contain conservative, if not openly reactionary traits. Yet these traits are at the same time contradictory: it may strike one as odd that players for the German national side continue to receive orders from officials to always sing along to the national anthem - most players apparently don't even know the words. The same is true of the public, which instead prefers to sing the 1950s cabaret hit entitled, 'Such a wonderful day as today' ('*So ein Tag, so wunderschön wie heute*'). Television commentators, too, (at least on public broadcasting channels) tend to make great efforts to give a non-biased presentation of the facts, even for national games, and proffer commentaries with all the panache of newscasters. Although this has changed in recent years, in comparison with many other countries the association of emotion and nation continues to be perceived as somewhat suspect in Germany and almost always encounters criticism. It is precisely this ambivalence that characterizes German football, and it is also a hallmark of nationalism that no one is ever quite sure as to whether football helps to tame or merely to conceal its destructive power.

Football is more than a game and a harmless cue for 'chitchat' or light conversation. On the contrary, it provides an inexhaustible topic of conversation; it can act as an incentive to speak which those it has 'grabbed' are barely able to resist. The conversation never reaches a terminal point because there is always a new match to comment on, but also, because football represents a discourse on (national) identity, which is itself an imagined reality.

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<sup>i</sup> For an overview of theories on 'football cultures' see Armstrong/Giulianotti (1997) and the review article by Feixa/Juris (2000), and for sports in general Dyck (2000).

<sup>ii</sup> Heinrich (2000) and Fischer/Lindner (1999).

<sup>iii</sup> For the history of German football see Heinrich (2000) and Eisenberg (1997).

<sup>iv</sup> Political term for bringing into line social, political and economic organizations

<sup>v</sup> Translations of Delius by Werner Krauss