

Review

U. Hesse-Lichtenberger. *tor ! The Story of German Football* (London: WSC When Saturday Comes Books, 2nd edition 2003). Pp.x + 304, 18 photographs, index. British Pound 9,99 (paper). ISBN 0-9540134 5 X

The European integration is fostering the interest of more and more Europeans in each other, in their nations' history and development. Books transporting the knowledge on these topics can help to understand the peculiarities of European countries, its peoples and institutions, possibly also shattering traditional beliefs and prejudices. Therefore publication of books of this sort will increase in the years to come. In the course of this process we will also see more books on sport, predominantly on football, the undisputed favourite sport of 58% of the whole European population (European Football, Hamburg/Germany 2002, p.10).

When it comes to football in Europe, two countries stand out: England because it invented the game, its rules and philosophy and Germany because of three worldcup wins and, even more important, because it organises the biggest community of active players in the world: over six million are engaged in regular leagues from late summer to late spring. How football started out in Germany and in what shape it is today (beyond the gossip about champion's league heroes) was so far untold to the British public. WSC Books Ltd. London has ceased this deficit. They hired Ulrich Hesse-Lichtenberger, a German freelance journalist and by 2002 the first edition of "tor! The Story of German Football" was published. "To set a few records straight and allow people to judge (us) on facts, not cliches" (p.9), such the author defined his frame of intentions. Did he succeed, do British readers receive serious information on the genesis and development of football in Germany, also enabling them to question their preconceptions on German football? Does this book even contribute to the understanding among Europeans?

First of all, a gap is indeed closed, English readers get an overview of the rising of football in Germany from a minor to the top sport eventually superseding gymnastics, the leading German *sport* throughout the 19th until mid 20th century. In order to open up a wider perspective to crucial events in German football history the author often has added social and political background of the time. Since the author is a friend of “legends” some colourful insights help to understand otherwise boring data.

Meritoriously Hesse-Lichtenberger dedicated the book to Walther Bensemann, a historical figure in German football who was of great significance for the spreading of many aspects of football culture, from club founding to incorporating true sportsmanship in Germany as a referee and as a commentator in his weekly “kicker”; in this respect Bensemann still is insufficiently appreciated in Germany as well as in England where he worked for several years as a college teacher.

Leaving this surface, however, and scrutinizing the author’s conception of German football leads to very different conclusions. First of all, when Hesse-Lichtenberger is talking about “German football” he is mainly focusing on the top leagues and teams of the semi-professional era of the 1920s and 30s and later the *Bundesliga* called full professionalism starting in 1963. However, German grassroots resp. amateur football does not take place in his book. Therefore he, secondly, doesn’t touch on nor even mention the unique structure of the approx. 26.000 German amateur football clubs containing some 168.000 teams. But it’s important to know that they inherited their special structural element from the German fraternity movement because many club founders (like Bensemann) have been either member of a student or a pupil fraternity (often both). Fraternities became socio-cultural models passing on many traits like naming rites (“Borussia”), choosing club colours as signs of identity, the usage of caps (in the beginning even worn during the matches) and some social habits were also derived from fraternity practices, traditions they share with the collegiate past of

English football. Thirdly, however, there is a fraternity inheritance that must be considered most important explaining the outstanding development of Germany's organised football, it's the establishment and integration of a youth organisation (since in 1891) as a structural element within a football club (see Roland Binz: *The Yearbook for Folk and Youth Games. A Neglected Source in German Sports History*, in: *The International Journal of History of Sport*, Vol. 18, No.4 (December 2001), pp.140-148). For at least two reasons this was a fundamental progress in association culture and greatly responsible for the success story of organised football in Germany. On the one hand, by establishing youth leagues football clubs ensured the next generations of active players enabling them to continue the clubs' membership in conferences thus disseminating the sporting competition philosophy. On the other hand, youth organisations as part of the clubs served as socialization institutions to pass on club traditions, social rules and the feeling of coherency; again the role model of student fraternities becomes visible where continuity of the club as a lifelong social institution used to be an attractive essential. One single figure shows the relevance of this structural peculiarity of German grassroot football clubs: more than two million youths under 18 (some 400.000 females included) are active football players according to the statistics of the German FA (DFB) by 2003. Information on this part of German football would help English readers to even better understand the great efforts of the English FA to induce a comparable development (EFCA programme).

"Analysis is not my strong point" (p.10) admits Hesse-Lichtenberger in the introduction. A rather strange attitude, even for a journalist-author pretending to deal with such a complex matter like 'The Story of German Football'. How can one, then, intend to present "facts"? Indeed the historical chapters (p.15-100) are full of errors and faults, some are due to the lack of an analytical concept, others are due to the fact, that the author is not up to date with the findings on German football history. English readers deserve better than talkative stories at the cost of historical accurateness. Thus

not being a reliable source for scientific purposes the book also fails to catch the real significance of amateur football clubs as meaningful social institutions in present day German society.

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