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The Role of the German National Soccer Team During National Socialism

agenda

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Umschlagabbildung: The German national soccer team entering the pitch at the Berlin Olympiastadion for a match against Italy on 15 November 1936 (2:2).
Photo: SZ Photo

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*Ein Regime,
das sich stützt auf Zwangsarbeit und Massenversklavung,*

*Ein Regime,
das den Krieg vorbereitet und nur durch verlogene Propaganda existiert -*

Wie soll solch ein Regime den friedlichen Sport und freiheitliche Sportler respektieren?

Heinrich Mann

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German expressions, abbreviations and their translations

<i>Aktion Heldenklau:</i>	operation hero-stealing
<i>Altreich:</i>	Germany before the annexation of Austria
<i>Amt für körperliche Erziehung (K):</i>	Office for Physical Education
<i>Angriffslust:</i>	the lust for attacking
<i>Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (DAP):</i>	German workers' party
<i>Deutscher Fußball-Bund (DFB):</i>	German Football Association (FA)
<i>Fachamt Fußball:</i>	Department of Football
<i>Führer:</i>	leader
<i>Führerauslese:</i>	selection of a <i>Führer</i>
<i>Gau:</i>	district
<i>Gauleiter:</i>	head of district
<i>Geheime Staatspolizei (Gestapo):</i>	Secret State Police
<i>Gleichschaltung:</i>	the co-ordination or unification of the Reich
<i>Großdeutsch:</i>	Pan-German

<i>Hitlergruß:</i>	Nazi salute
<i>Körperkult:</i>	body-cult
<i>Kraft durch Freude:</i>	strength through joy
<i>kumulative Radikalisierung:</i>	cumulative radicalization
<i>Leibeserziehung:</i>	physical education
<i>Leibesübungen:</i>	physical training
<i>Nationalpolitische Erziehungsanstalten (Napolas):</i>	National Political Education Institutions
<i>Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (NSDAP):</i>	National Socialist German Workers' Party
<i>Nationalsozialistischer Reichsbund für Leibesübungen (NSRL):</i>	National Socialist Sports Federation
<i>Opferrolle:</i>	role of the victim
<i>Ostmark:</i>	Austria after the German an- nexation as Gau XVII
<i>Papierene, der:</i>	the one made of paper
<i>Politische Leibeserziehung:</i>	political physical education
<i>Reichsbahn:</i>	German State Railways
<i>Reichserziehungsministerium:</i>	Reich Ministry of Education
<i>Reichssportführer:</i>	sports leader of the Reich

<i>Reichstrainer:</i>	manager of the national team
<i>Rote Jäger:</i>	Red Huntsmen
<i>Schutzmechanismus:</i>	protection mechanism
<i>Sturmabteilung (SA):</i>	Storm Troopers
<i>Turnen:</i>	a non-competitive form of gymnastics
<i>Verbrüderungsspiel:</i>	fraternization match
<i>Verdrängen:</i>	suppression
<i>Vergangenheitsbewältigung:</i>	coming to terms with the past
<i>Volksgemeinschaft:</i>	community of the people
<i>Volkstum:</i>	national character, customs and traditions
<i>Wehrhaftmachung:</i>	preparation for war
<i>Wehrmacht:</i>	German Armed Forces

Introduction

Most of the little research that has been made on the subject of German soccer during National Socialism was undertaken and published in Germany.¹ The little research on the subject of football during the Second World War that has been done in the UK is mainly anglo-centric and strongly concentrates on British football. As a logical result, the available research in the UK – as well as the available research in English language – on the topic of *German* soccer during National Socialism is rather low. Hence, to make a contribution to the subject, large parts of this study on the German national soccer team during National Socialism are going to be based on German language sources and researches.

However, even in German-speaking areas the subject had been marginalised for a long time and it was only recently that studies providing an overview of the topic of sports and particularly of soccer in National Socialism were published.² One reason for that can surely be found in the *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (coming to terms with the past) of the DFB (*Deutscher Fußball-Bund*, German Football Association (FA)) and

¹ For example: Bernett (1971, 1978, 1982, 1983), Leinemann (1997), Mikos & Nutt (1997), Fischer & Lindner (1999), Heinrich (2000), Schwarz-Pich (2000), Havemann (2005), Peiffer & Schulze-Marmeling (eds.) (2008)

² Detailed information on the current state of research on sport and National Socialism can especially be found in the commented bibliography *Sport im Nationalsozialismus. Zum aktuellen Stand der sporthistorischen Forschung. Eine kommentierte Bibliographie* by Lorenz Peiffer (2004). This excellent bibliography also provides an overview of the available literature.

its different federal associations, which has been more than poor. Documents like notes, minutes or records have been destroyed and thrown away or their location has been declared as untraceable (Fischer and Lindner, 1999: 8ff., Schwarz-Pich, 2000: 5ff., Havemann, 2005: 16ff.).

The question of how to deal with the twelve-year period from 1933 to 1945 apparently still causes a lot of problems for the DFB. As a result, the first study on soccer during this era to be undertaken on behalf of the DFB was written by Nils Havemann and only published in 2005. In the preface of his study, Havemann emphasizes that the precondition to accept the association's request was scientific independence and that at no point of the study had this been questioned by the DFB (Havemann, 2005: 7).

Until then, the only chronicle edited by the DFB had been written by Carl Koppehel, a former Nazi sports official, whose evaluation of the NS-regime was everything but critical.³ This chronicle misrepresented the German FA as merely having been in the *Opferrolle* (role of a victim). No attempts were made to answer the question of the role which the DFB *actively* played in the seizure of power through the Nazis and in the "*kumulative Radikalisierung*" (cumulative radicalization) (Momm-

³ KOPPEHEL, CARL (1954) Geschichte des Deutschen Fußballsports (= Band III der Schriftenreihe des Deutschen Fußball-Bundes). Frankfurt a.M.: Wilhelm Limpert-Verlag.

sen, in Meyers Enzyklopädisches Lexikon, 1976: 785-790, cited in Peiffer, 2004: 12) of 1933.⁴

For the most part of the last 60 years the German FA has successfully tried to avoid the confrontation with the darkest years of its history. Not even when the *Deutsche Fußball-Bund* celebrated its centenary did it make an attempt to fill this gap. Instead, it decided to continue with treating the twelve year-period from 1933-45 as if it belonged to another curriculum vitae and thus maintained its policy of *Verdrängen* (suppression) (Schwarz-Pich, 2000: 5f.). Hardy Grüne hit the nail on the head when he said: „*Fußball und Nationalsozialismus: Eine düstere Geschichte. Vor allem aber eine unbekannte*“ (‘football and National Socialism: a dark history. But most of all an unknown one’) (Grüne, 1995: 90, cited in Fischer and Lindner, 1999: 9).

Due to the policy of the DFB, for a long time no light had been shed on the considerable influence which the Nazis had taken on soccer. Important and interesting questions remained without an answer: How was the DFB structured after the *Gleichschaltung* (the co-ordination or unification of the Reich)? In which ways were German footballers exploited as role models in the Nazi-regime and how successful were these exploitations? Which functions did the Nazis ascribe to soccer as an instrument of propaganda? Which were the military effects that the Nazis expected football to have? What happened to the numerous

⁴ In this connection the expression kumulative Radikalisierung refers to the exclusion of thousands of (mainly Jewish) athletes from German sports clubs and sport associations immediately after the Nazi takeover (see Peiffer, 2004: 18).

Jewish players who were playing for German clubs? Which role did the national football team play as an instrument of propaganda and how was it used? And, most of all, why did the Nazis decide just for football as an instrument of mass propaganda? A game, after all, in which the outcome is so uncertain that it does not seem appropriate to the National Socialist propaganda concept at all – which in fact it finally proved not to be.

The list of questions could be extended without difficulty. The focus of my research, however, shall be on the national team and on the role that the team played as an instrument of reaching certain goals.

I will try to demonstrate that the Nazis considered soccer as a means of propaganda which should fulfil specific functions, i.e. 'processes which help to integrate, and thus to maintain, existing structures' (Merton, 1957, paraphrased in Waddington: 316). With soccer being the most popular German sport, the Nazis hoped for it to also transport their militant values and to play a crucial role in what was known as *Führerauslese* (selection of a *Führer* [leader]) (see Ueberhorst, 1976: 38). Soccer was regarded as a welcomed means of exhibiting German supremacy:

For Hitler's Germany, sporting success, including victory in high profile football internationals, seemed capable of presentation to domestic and external audiences as the product of a German

nation composed of gifted Aryans and led by Hitler.

(Beck, 1999: 175f.)

Thus, soccer, amongst many other sports, exemplifies and illustrates the indoctrination of sporting competition with the National Socialist belief system – though evidence shall be given that in reality, football in Nazi Germany had never been able to meet its ascribed role.

Providing this evidence is particularly important as one has got to understand the role and the function of sport in the past in order to understand the role and the function of sport today. It is this way that we can avoid what Norbert Elias called the “retreat of sociologists to the present”, i.e. the adoption of today-centred thinking and ‘the tendency of sociologists to view their subject matter as concerning the “here and now” – without reference to how it has emerged out of the past’ (in Maguire and Young, 2002: 4, 16). In other words, neglecting the past would mean to also neglect a long process of knowledge acquisition and thus to neglect any body of knowledge given today, as this body can only be explained as part of the wider development of the society in which it developed (ibid.: 5).

Hence, in the best case, a study of the German national soccer team during National Socialism may help to better understand the role of sports in the policy of (totalitarian) states, the abuse of sports for reasons of propaganda and the relationship between sports and politics in

general. With the following pages I hope to contribute to such an understanding.

The first chapter will give details about the methods and historic methodology that were used and applied for the research on the present topic. Amongst others, issues such as to what to pay attention to when working with documents and problems of involvement and detachment will be considered. Furthermore, the concepts of functionalism and figurational sociology, both of which applied in my research, shall be illustrated.

The second chapter will provide an overview of Norbert Elias' study on National Socialism and particularly the results of his work on 'The Germans' will be taken into account. As there seem to be countless of different studies trying to offer an account on the subject of National Socialism, the overview shall help the reader to understand the theoretical framework on which my research is based.

In the third chapter a brief outline on the National Socialist idea of sports, *Leibeserziehung* (physical education) and soccer shall be given. In order to understand why the National Socialists regarded soccer as an appropriate means to transport their ideology and reach their goals, it first of all is essential to understand their concept of sports and physical education in general.

In the fourth chapter, the role of the German National soccer team during National Socialism will be analysed. With the help of Stevenson

and Nixon's account on five major social functions of sport it shall be shown that in the Nazi idea the national team was to fulfil certain functions. The emphasis of the chapter will be placed on the political function and by applying the concept of figurational sociology it shall be explained why the team was not able to meet its ascribed role.

Finally, the fifth and last chapter will provide a brief conclusion.

1. Methods and methodology

As the research on the German national soccer team and National Socialism deals with events, which took place more than 65 years ago, methods such as participant observation, questionnaires, and interviews naturally cannot be applied. Hence, the particular research demands a historic methodology. It requires working with documentary sources such as contemporary newspaper articles, political speeches, administrative and government records, different correspondences, maps, drawings, books, memoirs of contemporary witnesses, biographies, diaries, oral histories, and audio-visual materials (Fischer and Lindner, 1999: 11, Schwarz-Pich, 2000: 6ff., May, 2001: 179). As Tim May explains:

Documents, read as the sedimentations of social practices, have the potential to inform and struc-

ture the decisions which people make on a daily and longer-term basis; they also constitute particular readings of social events. They tell us about the aspirations and intentions of the periods to which they refer and describe places and social relationships at a time when we may not have been born, or were simply not present.

(May, 2001: 176)

Whilst working with such qualitative data (Pole & Lampard, 2002: 4) the document 'becomes a medium through which the researcher searches for a correspondence between its description and the events to which it refers' (May, 2001: 182). However, the researcher has got to be aware of the possibility that these sources might be somehow distorted as documents are always produced behind a certain social background and within a certain social context. They contain subjective opinions or statements and are influenced by individual feelings, ideologies or moral concerns as well as emotions and *Schutzmechanismen* (protection mechanisms). Thus, an objective account is at times made impossible (Fischer and Lindner, 1999: 11).

Or, to use the words of Maguire and Young (2002: 17): 'In archival work, ... there is no such thing as an innocent text. Texts are produced and survive in a social context [...] the task is to subvert or escape from the ways of thinking and feeling in which the documents were conceived.' Not only is this true for the so-called primary sources, which

were written or collected by those who witnessed the events which they describe, but, to a lesser degree, though, also for the work with secondary sources, which were written after an event the author had not personally witnessed. When working with secondary sources, it is very likely that the researcher additionally is confronted with subjective interpretations of primary sources. This is why the researcher might use the help of tertiary sources to check his or her findings. The most important tertiary sources are indexes, abstracts and bibliographies (May, 2001: 180).

However, May points out that research reports based on documentary sources generally 'may find themselves subject to misunderstanding' (May, 2001: 176). Moreover, he underlines that there is a difference of emphasis between historical and sociological research. Citing Goldthorpe (2000: 31), May explains that sociologists "do not seek to tie their arguments to specific time and space co-ordinates so much as to test the extent of their generality" (ibid.).

The deficiency of an absolute reliability on historic sources is also due to the fact that both the author as well as the analysing researcher are involved in the subject to a certain extent. None of them is able to wholly detach from the subject, be it intellectually or emotionally. Dunning (1999: 9) supports this opinion and suggests that a '...relatively detached understanding has to be tempered by a motivating and familiarity-conferring involvement' as '[A] document cannot be read in a "detached" manner.' The same point of view is also expressed by May (2001: 183), who claims that 'we must approach documents in an en-

gaged, not detached, fashion.’ With reference to Goudsblom (1977), Maguire and Young point out that

[s]ociologists must recognize that they are also part of this social world. They cannot escape it. Indeed, they must not try to do so. Their very participation and involvement is itself one of the qualities implicated in the craft of comprehending the world they seek to study [...] the sociologist must avoid static, non-relational concepts and words. Instead, the use of a personal pronoun model (I-We-Us-Them) can be employed to better represent the set of co-ordinates in terms of which human groupings and societies can be plotted.

(Maguire and Young, 2002: 16f.)

Moreover, in documentary work, the researcher must be able to identify with the “we” perspective of different groups to gain access to the significance of certain actions. But at the same time, the researcher must keep enough distance, be detached enough, to grasp that his interpretations could be misleading. Therefore, comparing different “we” perspectives can be helpful for the analyst, but only ‘the employment of “they” perspectives, which show the situation from a greater distance, offers a different vista on how the actions and intentions of the various groups are interlocked’ (Maguire and Young, 2002: 18).

With the social researcher being part of relational concepts, so-called figurations, his or her involvement can never be completely eliminated. Referring to Norbert Elias, Dunning gives to understand that, during research, scientists should be

...striving to hold one's emotions and value-commitments momentarily in check in order to focus on the research object *per se* – [as this] increases the chances that one will be able to come up with adequate diagnoses and find workable solutions.

(Dunning, 1999: 8, italics in original)

In other words, scientists should not desperately strive for total “value-freedom” but for a prudent balance between involvement and detachment, as this is a precondition to the understanding *per se*, which then is ‘likely to be conducive to the realistic solution of problems in sport and elsewhere’ (Dunning, 1999: 9).

Furthermore, one has got to be aware of the fact that in the modern West there is ‘a tendency to think dualistically’. This way of thinking leads to a split of initially interdependent phenomena, for instance individuals and societies, body and mind, or rationality and emotion. According to Elias (1978: 119ff.) this split could emerge because many people have an experience of self as

a socially detached *Homo clausus* rather than as one of a number of *Homines aperti*, open people who live in a context of pluralities and interdependencies from the start to the finish of their lives. [...] [A] *Homo clausus* has an experience of self as a detached and isolated ego who possesses a “mind” which is experienced as somehow separate both from his/her “body” and the other humans with whom he/she is inextricably interdependent.

(paraphrased in Dunning, 1999: 10-11, italics in original)

Hence, it is the experience made as a *Homo clausus* that leads to a split between rationality and feelings, between self and others and that consequently does not take into account the interdependencies between people and processes. But just these interdependencies are important to locate a document within wider political and social contexts, as it is only then that researchers ‘examine the factors surrounding the *process* of its production, as well as the social *contexts*’ (May, 2001: 183).

However, just like other fields of research,

sports are amenable to detached *analysis*. And that ... is what a sociological study consists of: it is an attempt to free oneself from the interest and