



Knockout Tales

Footsie in Germany

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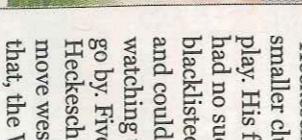


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According to some, the World Cup only really began two weeks after the first match. We're now into the knockout phase, where only the best teams remain and where every match has to have a winner. Four years ago, giants France and Argentina didn't make it past the initial group stage. This year, the biggest casualties among the early exits were the Czech Republic and the United States, ranked as the world's second and fifth best teams respectively. They were in the same group from which Italy and Ghana advanced. For world football, it was good to see Ghana advance. Without them there would only have been European and Latin American teams left.

Doing well, of course, is also a matter of perspective. Angolan said goodbye to the World Cup after their last group match with Iran. But Angolan picked up their first two World Cup points ever, after drawing with Iran and Mexico. "We have to be pleased," remarked Angolan coach Luis Goncalves after their last match in Leipzig. "We've gained experience, which will help us in the future." In 2002, when the previous World Cup was played, Angolan's warning factions had just signed a peace agreement, ending decades of brutal civil war. Four years later, their footballers qualified for the World Cup, got two draws and a single goal defeat to Portugal. "The team will get a great reception when they go home," said Paulo Caculo of the Angolan sports daily, *Jornal dos Desportos*.

Boasting seems to come naturally to World Cup winners; maybe it's a privilege they are entitled to



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For Asia, it's been a disappointing World Cup. After reaching the semi-final four years ago, Korea had not thought they would be home as quickly as they were this time. Japan and Iran have plenty of players in European leagues, but that didn't help them much.

The biggest expectations are always on the previous winners of the World Cup, and all six teams who can make that boast — and Italy — have cleared the first group hurdle. Boasting, by the way, seems to come naturally to World Cup winners, and maybe arrogance is a privilege they are entitled to. When it comes to proclaiming one's own greatness, few have done it more thoroughly — and less convincingly — than Franz Beckenbauer, who coached West Germany to the championship in 1990. Looking ahead at the time, Beckenbauer remarked: "We'll be unbeatable for years to come. Already we're the best in the world, and now we can add all the talent from East Germany too." Invincibility lasted less than a year, before a reunited Germany lost to Wales.

SUJAY DUTT sifts through the rubble the Fall of the Wall left over East German football

CHILDREN OF A LESSER GERMANY

"In East Germany, only two clubs ever won the league — Dynamo Berlin, and Dynamo Dresden.

CUP TAKE

in Dresden. In

today's German

team, Michael Ballack is the shining star. He

has long been

sought by lead-

ing clubs in

England and

Spain, and after

the World Cup

grew up in Chemnitz, a city

that went by the name of Karl

Marx Stadt when Michael

began playing. Like all East

German children, Michael

Tobias was out of the

team for the same

reason his father lost

his job. His father had

refused to turn

informer for the Stasi

Ballack learned Russian in

school. Some say that one of

the reasons he chose Chelsea

is because he'll be able to com-

municate with the club's

owner, Russian multibillion-

aire Roman Abramovich.

A few days before meeting

Tobias and friends to the bar-

beque in Cologne, I'd made a

trip to Leipzig in the heart of

12 host cities for the 2006

World Cup. Leipzig is the only

one in the eastern part of the

country. I was expecting it to

be a grey mass of prefabricat-

ed Soviet-style housing es-

uates, and though there was

some of that, the overwhelm-

ing impression was comple-

ly different. From the railway

station to its squares, parks

and churches, the city wore all

the elegance of the ages before

the 40 years of the GDR. This,

after all, is the city that has

Johann Sebastian Bach for its

favourite son.

Leipzig also has a rich foot-

ball history. Germany's first

football champions, of 1903,

came from this city, and the

biggest stadium in

Germany. It is not only archi-

tecturally pleasing, but it is

also an excellent arena.

Unfortunately, the match I

watched there, Iran-Angola, a

1-1 draw, was by no means as

enjoyable as its setting.

So, is Leipzig truly a happy

and integrated part of reunif-

ied Germany? No, not for

some time. A closer look re-

veals another side. Blocks and

blocks of beautiful apart-

ment buildings with attractive inner

city locations stand absolutely

empty, and are rapidly crum-

pling for lack of upkeep. One

reason is that families who've

regained ownership from the

East German state find it too

expensive to keep up the

maintenance. Especially since

young people in

general, who have gone west

in droves. Watching football

in the park in Cologne, there

were other "Ossis", besides

Tobias. One of his friends was

Gabriel from Dresden. "After

university, I moved to Cologne

because this is where I could

find a job," Gabriel said. "I

don't see myself moving back

east again."



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Sorry son," the youth coach at Dynamo Berlin said, "but you can't play in this team anymore." Though East German sports were always ruthlessly competitive — a fact that landed the erstwhile German Democratic Republic heaps of Olympic medals in various sports — this was not the reason why football-loving 10-year-old Tobias Heckescher, His father had refused to turn informant for the Stasi, the East German secret police. "Until then, I'd always been a Dynamo supporter," Tobias, now 32, told me. "I didn't know they were a Stasi club." From then on, he started supporting Union Berlin. And the West German national team. I met Heckescher in the Volksgarten park in Cologne one evening, where he was following the World Cup matches along with some 20 friends. All of them, cheeks painted with the German tricolour, were enjoying a barbecue around a television set taken out to the lawns and plugged into a car battery.

Heckescher was born in East Berlin in 1974. In 1984, when he was forced to quit Dynamo Berlin's youth team, Heckescher soon found a smaller club where he could play. His father, a geologist, had no such option. He was blacklisted by the authorities and could only sit at home, watching the days and years go by. Five years later, the Heckeschers were allowed to move west. Six months after that, the Wall came down.

In East Germany, football was every bit as organised and restricted as the economy. Clubs prefixed "Dynamo" before the city's name were clubs belonging to the police — and the secret police. "Lokomotive" clubs represented the railways. The media and film industries had their own "Rotation" clubs, though none of these were ever as successful as Dynamo Berlin, Dynamo Dresden and Lokomotive Leipzig. In all, 18 trades had their own clubs. The best players were generally moved to "Dynamo" clubs.

Heckescher was far from

the only football fan in East Germany to support the West Germans. And, like many others, Tobias cared more about the "Wessi" club teams than the "Ossi" ones.

Matthias Sammer, the only player to play the libero position to perfection since Franz Beckenbauer, led Germany to the European Championship in 1996, and club team Borussia Dortmund — West German, of course — to the Champions League title in 1997. Sammer, whose career was cut short through in-

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