

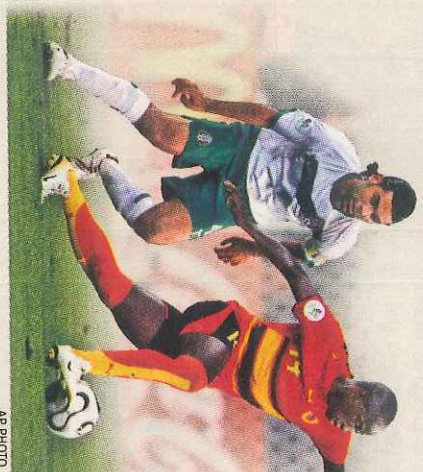


Footsie in Germany
SUJAY DUTT

Knockout Tales

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. Angola said goodbye to the World Cup after their last group match with Iran. But Angola picked up their first two World Cup points ever, after drawing with Iran and Mexico. "We have to be pleased," remarked Angola 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, Angola's warring 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*.



AP PHOTO

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

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 — Argentina, Brazil, England, France, Germany 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.

CHILDREN OF A LESSER GERMANY

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

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 Heckscher, had to leave the Dynamo youth team. Tobias was out of the team for the same reason that his father had lost his job. His father had refused to turn informer 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 Heckscher 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 barbeque around a television set taken out to the lawns and plugged into a car battery. Heckscher was born in East Berlin in 1974. In 1984, when he was forced to quit

Dynamo Berlin's youth team,

Heckscher 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 Heckschers 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.

Heckscher 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.



"In East Germany, only two clubs ever won the league — Dynamo Berlin, and Dynamo Dresden. It was pretty boring," Tobias told me. "My teachers knew about my football sympathies, just like they knew about my father's situation," he continued. "That didn't always help me in school."

In East Germany, the 1990 reunification had the same effect on football as on other sectors. In industry, for in-



AP PHOTO

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 communicate with the club's owner, Russian multibillionaire Roman Abramovich.

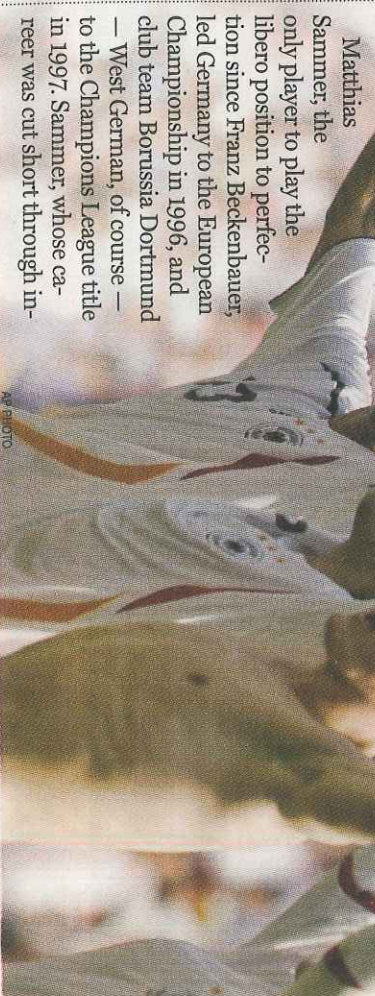
A few days before meeting Tobias and friends at the barbeque in Cologne, I'd made a trip to Leipzig in the heart of former East Germany. Of the 12 host cities for the 2006 World Cup, Leipzig is the only one in the eastern part of the country. I was expecting it to be a grey mass of prefabricated Soviet-style housing estates, and though there was some of that, the overwhelming impression was completely 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 football history. Germany's first football champions, of 1903, came from this city, and the German Football Association, the DFB, was founded here as well. Leipzig's World Cup stadium, the Zentralstadion, is built over the previous structure of the same name, once the biggest stadium in Germany. It is not only architecturally 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 reunited Germany? No, not for some time. A closer look reveals another side. Blocks and blocks of beautiful apartment buildings with attractive inner city locations stand absolutely empty, and are rapidly crumbling 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 potential tenants are hard to find. Over the past decade-and-a-half, it is not just footballers, but 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."



AP PHOTO

Mathias Sammer, 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-