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4 July: Germany becomes football world champion for the first time

In the first years following the end of the Second World War, both German states are excluded from all international sporting events. Initially, the divided, destroyed and demoralised country has far too many other concerns that easily take precedence over participation in sporting competitions. However, in 1952, a West German team is allowed to participate in the Olympic Winter Games in Oslo, and the Summer Games in Helsinki. In reality, it is anticipated that a team representing all of Germany would participate, but the GDR refuses to be a part of this option and, as a result, stays away from the games. Despite this, the German team wins three gold medals in Oslo. However, it is not until 1954 that the Federal Republic of Germany will achieve a sporting success that will trigger excitement and enthusiasm across the entire country.



After the 1950 Football World Cup had been held in Brazil without a German team, the West German team is allowed to participate in the qualifying games for the 1954 World Cup, which was to take place in Switzerland. The GDR team, which had only been a member of the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) from 1952 was still excluded from the qualifying games for this World Cup. The West German team successfully qualifies easily with victories against Norway and against the Saarland, known then as the Saar Protectorate, which was still under French occupation and administration. In this way, the German team is able to participate once again in a major international event in the sport that is easily the most popular in Germany.



The German team prepares well for the tournament. Before the war, the team's trainer, Sepp Herberger, had been the coach of the German representative team. He had gained a lot of experience there and knows all the 'ins and outs' when it comes to tactics. To some extent he can count on players who have already played at an international level, and have experience in the national team from the pre-war era. A really strong player, Fritz Walter, is named as captain, while Helmut Rahn is primarily responsible for scoring goals. The German team has a good balance of technically skilled and strong players. In addition, the Germany players are extremely devoted and moral, which helps them to push their individual limits. Without a doubt, Hungary is the favourite for the tournament. It is clear to everyone that the Hungarians have the world's best football eleven in 1954. With their outstanding technical players, such as Ferenc Puskas and Nandor Hidegkuti, Hungary was the first team in Europe to beat England, the homeland of football, in 1953. Scoring 6:3, they triumphed over England at London's own

..... Wembley Stadium. At the presumed Revanche-Spiel or 'revenge match' just one  
..... year later, Hungary absolutely thrashed England with a score line of 7:1. Therefore  
in 1954, there is no mistaking that the world cup winner is sure to be Hungary.

The West Germans win their first match of the tournament effortlessly, with a 4:1 victory against Turkey. Hungary is in the same group with Germany, and decimates South Korea 9:0. In the teams' second match, Hungary and Germany meet. Tactically, Sepp Herberger decides to save his best players and puts a B-eleven into the match. The Hungarian players are tackled with great vigour and toughness. Puskas is injured in a rough foul. Nevertheless, the Hungarians are victorious, winning 8:3, consolidating their role as tournament favourites. However, after a second win against Turkey, the German national team reaches the knock-out rounds. Following victories against Yugoslavia and Austria, and against all expectations, Germany lands a spot in the final on 4 June in the Wankdorf Stadium in Bern. Unsurprisingly, their opponents are the Hungarians, for whom victory in the final appears to be a mere formality. It is raining in Bern, which favours the Germans' fighting strength rather than the Hungarian superior skill level. In addition, Puskas is still fighting to recover from the injury he suffered in the foul during the Hungarians' victory against the Germans in the preliminary game. It is possible that this early game also caused the Hungarians to be a little over confident, even careless. After conceding a very fast 2:0 lead, the Germans equally quickly equalise. At half time the scoreboard reads 2:2. The game remains tied in the second half, even though the Hungarians are clearly the superior playing team. However, in the 84th minute comes the moment that every German remembers to the present day through the euphoric radio commentary, 'Aus dem Hintergrund müsste Rahn schießen. Rahn schießt. Tooor! Tooor! Tooor! Tooor!' ('Rahn will really have to shoot from deep. Rahn shoots. Goooo! Goooo! Goooo! Goooo!') With a left foot shot from the penalty line, Helmut Rahn had kicked 3:2 for Germany. The Germans have to withstand the furious Hungarian attacks for another four minutes, until the sensational result becomes reality. Germany wins its first of what have since become four Football World Cup titles. The German fans in the stadium are beside themselves with joy. During the presentation ceremony, in sheer exuberance, some fans even sing the scandalous first verse of the Germany hymn: 'Deutschland, Deutschland über alles...' ('Germany, Germany, over everything...')

In Germany, millions of fans follow the game on the radio. At this time, very few Germans own their own television. Therefore, most Germans watch the games on public screens in pubs or in the shop windows of radio and electrical shops. Following the World Cup, however, sales of televisions increase rapidly across all of Europe. Even in the GDR, millions of fans were barracking for the West German team. The Helden (heroes) homecoming in a train from Switzerland to Germany becomes an absolute victory parade. At the same time, amidst all the excitement, there are elements that arouse some concerns in post-war Europe. At the celebrations to mark the victory held by the German Football Association (DFB) on 6 July in the Munich Löwenbräukeller, the DFB president felt moved to claim that 'mit dem Sieg nun die deutsche Schuld endgültig getilgt [sei]' ('with this victory, German guilt is now definitively redeemed.') This over-the-top speech, and the singing of the Germany hymn in the Bern stadium, meet with harsh criticism in other countries, and trigger very real concern of a new German egomania and craving for status. Outside Germany, many a critical sports fan also asks the question as to how much NS-Geist (Nazi spirit) still resides in those virtues of discipline, camaraderie and willpower, all of which were key to the German eleven being able to conquer their opponents.

In Hungary, the defeat is greeted with incredulous horror. Just as the memory of the victory continues to be uplifting for many Germans to the present day, the defeat remains a traumatic nightmare in Hungary's collective memory. Even the failed Hungarian uprising in 1956 is sometimes associated with

this defeat that so many had believed to be impossible.

In the years after the World Cup, this final has increasingly been portrayed as the Wunder von Bern (Miracle of Bern). Some researchers even want to view the victory as the eigentlichen Gründungsakt (actual act of foundation) for the Federal Republic of Germany, and as the true impetus for the beginning of the 'economic miracle'. Perhaps, however, it is sufficient simply to describe this triumph as Germany's first internationally discernible contribution to a world in which victories are now to be gained on the sporting field, and no longer on the battle field.

**T**ranslated into English by Heather Rae, proofread by Maria-Philippa Wieckowski



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