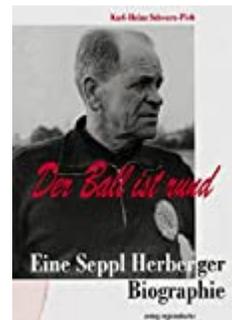


Dirk Bitzer, Bernd Wilting. *Stürmen für Deutschland: Die Geschichte des deutschen Fußballs von 1933 bis 1954.* Frankfurt and New York: Campus Verlag, 2003. 252 pp. EUR 21.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-593-37191-7.



Franz-Josef Bröggemeier. *Zurück auf dem Platz: Deutschland und die Fußball-Weltmeisterschaft 1954.* Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2004. 381 pp. EUR 24.90 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-421-05842-3.

Karl-Heinz Schwarz-Pich. *Der Ball ist rund: Eine Sepp Herberger Biographie.* Ubstadt-Weiher: Verlag Regionalkultur, 1996. 224 pp. EUR 14.90 (paper), ISBN 978-3-929366-39-6.



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The Sporting Event and Its Social Impact: The Case of the

The ubiquity of sport in world culture is unquestioned. One must work diligently to avoid the never-ending stream of televised sporting events, press coverage, and chat that sport engenders across all media. Yet, despite growing critical interest in sport over the past three decades, scholarly treatments of sport still have a difficult time competing with popular collections that can

win a wide following by employing satisfying and familiar formulas for understanding the past. Two of the three books under consideration reflect just that predicament. The works of Schwarz-Pich and Bitzer and Wilting, although not devoid of merit, seem aimed at a popular audience of soccer fans who already have a sense of German soccer history and its trajectory during the

twentieth century. BrÄ½ggemeier's text, on the other hand, is a thoroughly engaging and effective scholarly treatment of the West German soccer team's triumph in the 1954 World Cup and its place in the larger German society and culture. In his work BrÄ½ggemeier not only raises important questions about sporting events and their place in the larger society and culture, but he also prompts careful consideration of historiographical questions about events in general and how historians handle and interpret them.

The point of convergence for all of the texts under consideration is the World Cup soccer championship contested at Bern, Switzerland, in the summer of 1954. It was during that tournament that the heavily favored Hungarian team lost 3-2 in the final match against a West German team that they had handily defeated, 8-3, in a previous game. The West German victory shocked the soccer world and spawned a wave of popular jubilation in Germany. Many at the time, and since, have claimed that the "Miracle at Bern" served as a marker of West Germany's recovery from the horrors of the National Socialist era and the Second World War, marking a period of renewed confidence and vigor both at home and abroad. The team that delivered the victory became lionized and memorialized as embodying all of Germany's best values: technically accomplished, well trained, creative, and disciplined. As a result, the team became a touchstone for Germans after the war, serving, whenever it was in doubt, as an example of what German values could produce in the wake of the catastrophe of National Socialism. At least, that's how the legend would have it.

Schwarz-Pich's biography of Josef (Sepp) Herberger, the coach of the national team that won the 1954 title, is a straightforward description of the life of one of Germany's (and world soccer's) great coaches. The book details Herberger's birth and upbringing in a working-class family that struggled after the death of his father at an early age. Forced by economic constraints to abandon school and seek employment, Herberger found a way out of a mundane working-class existence through his skill at soccer. His soccer talent enabled him to secure notoriety and opportunity, allowing him to ascend to the German national team and provide a comfortable existence for himself and his family. Yet, in the 1920s, when at least the veil of amateurism needed to be preserved, Herberger became embroiled in a scandal when he accepted 10,000 marks during a move from his original team, SV Waldhof, to their rival VfR Mannheim. As a result, the German Soccer Federation (DFB) suspended Herberger for one year and his career, for a time, suffered. Thanks to influ-

ential patrons, however, like sport leader Carl Diem and national team coach Otto Nerz, Herberger secured a place in the Hochschule für Leibesübungen in Berlin (this despite not having completed his studies and the *Abitur*). Securing his coaching certificate, Herberger went on to serve as Nerz's assistant with the national soccer team. He replaced his mentor when Nerz was removed following Germany's disappointing performance in the 1936 Berlin Olympics, where they were ousted in the second round. A member of the NSDAP since May, 1933, Herberger spent the National Socialist era trying to improve, and then preserve, his team. After the war, he underwent denazification, claiming like so many others that he did not subscribe to Nazi ideals, was uninterested in politics, and joined the party to maintain his position with the national team. Cleared, Herberger then began building the team that led to success in 1954 and a secure place in the pantheon of German sports heroes.

Schwarz-Pich's treatment of Herberger's life is workman-like and largely effective. He does not offer much information that cannot be obtained in other biographies and sources, but he does have a straightforward style that is clear and concise. The book's major flaw is that it lacks any real analysis of Herberger's life and the events that he participates in. We are told that Herberger was important, but not convinced by careful analysis and argument. Still, Schwarz-Pich's text is useful for readers who know little about Herberger and German soccer and desire an accessible introduction.

Bitzer and Wiltung's text performs a similar function. The two authors present a sketch of German soccer history from 1933-1954. In reality, the book offers a short reprise of the beginnings of soccer in Germany and its course after the founding of the German Soccer Federation (DFB) in 1900. In some measure thereafter the book pursues a kind of institutional history of the DFB until 1954. Along the way, Bitzer and Wiltung offer chapters on the careers of individual players, soccer administrators, prominent teams; and the fate of Jewish athletes and sports functionaries during the period. Relying on personal interviews and DFB archives, the book has a rather hodge-podge organization and feel. In many cases the material is interesting and sometimes illuminating, but it suffers from trying to offer too many perspectives with too little careful analysis and development of its themes. Despite these weaknesses, and covering, in the main, ground that has been trod by other soccer scholars in a much more careful way, the book may serve as a useful introduction to a deeper study of the game during the period.

The book that deserves careful attention by scholars of sport history, and German history generally, is Br  ggemeier's. Unlike the previous titles that accept and echo the conventional wisdom that the "Miracle at Bern" marked a decisive moment in the postwar history of Germany (West and East), Br  ggemeier seriously challenges that claim. Ultimately, he finds that despite the hoopla, and the subsequent mythic stature of the contest in German popular culture, the impact of the victory at Bern did not amount to much of significance.

Br  ggemeier approaches his evaluation of the 1954 World Cup team and its social and cultural impacts by detailing and analyzing not only the composition and character of the team and its coach (Herberger), but also by examining the social, economic, and political situation of West Germany after the war. He succeeds in grounding his study of a sporting event and its significance in the context of the time far better than the other texts under consideration. Br  ggemeier details the difficulties that the German population faced after the horrors of the Second World War: devastated cities, economic ruin, displaced populations, the coming to grips with the horrors of the Holocaust. He then presents the impacts of the economic miracle of the postwar years and how that influenced the reception and understanding of the World Cup victory. He also recognizes how other German triumphs that occurred at nearly the same time (a Mercedes victory at Le Mans in auto racing and a German woman becoming Miss Europe) were linked in the popular consciousness and helped to foster a sense of a burgeoning German postwar renaissance and self-confidence. In the political sphere, Br  ggemeier treats the successes of the Adenauer government in securing a place at the table

for West Germany in world political and diplomatic circles with the advent of the Basic Law and the deepening of the Cold War. Thus, his study provides a deep context for understanding the 1954 soccer championship and its purported significance.

But what was that significance? Br  ggemeier recognizes that for a few days after the victory in Bern West Germans did engage in spontaneous demonstrations and celebrations. Reports of the game in all media trumpeted the victory as a confirmation of German national values and national rebirth. Yet, only a few days later the hoopla died down and everything was back to business as usual. Br  ggemeier tracks the sustained lack of interest in the game in the months and years that followed. If the game was so important, why, he asks, was there no sustained impact? His answer is that the game, ultimately, was not that important. It was not, as claimed, a singular event in the history of postwar Germany. Rather, he argues that it created a short-lived, "virtual community" that allowed West Germans to revel and celebrate, but, that it didn't have any real and lasting impact. Thus, for Br  ggemeier what is as interesting as the study of the game itself is the way in which the myth of "the Miracle at Bern" originated and has been perpetuated in the ensuing years.

Br  ggemeier's approach is thorough, careful, and analytical. He offers an important and exemplary corrective to much that passes for sports history. In addition, his evaluation of "the event" that became the "Miracle at Bern" might profitably lead us to consider not only how we consider and interpret sporting events and their place in the wider social and cultural world, but in other areas of historical inquiry as well.

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