

The relevance of the 'irrelevant': football as a missing dimension in the study of British relations with Germany*

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Is sport irrelevant to International Relations?

During May and June 2002 Will Self, the novelist and self-confessed football-phobe, admitted the difficulty of ignoring the global impact of football's World Cup finals, which were hosted jointly by Japan and South Korea. Indeed, he found himself writing a weekly column for *Folha de S. Paulo*, a leading newspaper in Brazil, whose national team finally emerged as 2002 World Cup champions. Despite claiming that his 'football-ignorant mind' made it difficult for him initially to 'engage with the World Cup except at the level of historical and cultural analysis', Self confessed that his mindset was transformed as the tournament progressed, and particularly as England advanced to a quarter-final date with Brazil.¹ Throughout the tournament, he drew upon history to pen a series of perceptive reflections about Britain and the world game in a way that highlighted the futility of trying to deny the significance of football beyond the sporting arena.

Any nation's attitude towards the game of football is a reflection—to a greater or lesser extent—of its own consciousness of itself. With England, that self-consciousness is incalculably greater. Not only do the English have a profound sense of themselves as the inventors of the sport, but they view the major historical and social developments the country has seen in the past century or so as directly mirrored in the great game.

Looking forward to their quarter-final clash, Self presented Brazil and England as 'great colossi, who bestride the inflated leather bladder as if it were the globe itself'.

Certainly, England's World Cup matches evoked impressive displays of national unity and commitment through all sections of society, at least in England, at a time when many feared that apathy was threatening to become the order of the day, particularly for the young. The red cross of St George appeared on T-shirts across the country. Flags of St George in their millions flew from houses, office

* This article has been developed and updated from a paper delivered at the Grossbritannien-Zentrum, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, in June 2000.

¹ 'Will Self's World Cup (or how I taught the Brazilians a thing or two about football)', *Independent*, 29 June 2002.

buildings and cars. For Tom Utley, football-obsessed dinner parties demonstrated that what was depicted traditionally as 'the people's game' 'had taken the place of literature and the arts in the conversation of the educated middle classes'.² But for Minette Marrin, among others, 'the maniacal roar of the football crowd' proved a worrying phenomenon.³ Utley quoted another worrier.

He saw the spread of soccer madness to the middle classes as a symptom of national decline, and blamed it on the Blair Government's anxiety to present a blokey, laddish face to the world ... He felt, too, that there was something very sinister about huge numbers of people feeling the same emotions at the same time—particularly when those emotions were fired by nationalism.⁴

In this vein, in June 2002 Sheena McDonald rationalized her failure as the presenter of BBC Radio Four's *Talking Politics* programme to include any reference to the ongoing World Cup finals in terms of 'I don't speak Football'.⁵ Such an assertion might seem equally applicable to International Relations (IR) practitioners, given the manner in which they treat sport as a trivial activity warranting no more than a marginal place, if that, in their work.⁶ There are notable exceptions, like Barrie Houlihan and Trevor Taylor, who have followed Lincoln Allison in acknowledging the manner in which sport creates 'politically usable resources'.⁷ There are also signs of change; for example, both the LSE's conference on 'The Image, the State and International Relations' (2000) and the 2000 British International Studies Association (BISA) conference included sessions on sport, and led to publications on IR and sport. Nevertheless, generally speaking, sport has been written out of IR, and hence figures rarely, if at all, in IR books and journals. No doubt a large number of Britain's IR practitioners were avid followers of the World Cup finals—perhaps many often turn first to the sports pages of their daily newspapers—yet their teaching and research allow little or no place for sport.

Perhaps international sport really is irrelevant to IR; but the experience of living through the 2002 World Cup finals—and, similarly, the Olympic Games and other major sporting events attracting widespread public interest and commitment, visible displays of patriotism, large-scale media coverage, and commentaries evaluating their political, economic, social and cultural significance—suggests the need at least to question, if not to challenge, the realism of this assumption.

² Tom Utley, 'Oh, dear: now we've got to find something else to talk about', *Daily Telegraph*, 22 June 2002. In fact, many, pointing to the game's reinvention and repackaging as well as to Nick Hornby's book *Fever Pitch*, would date the gentrification of football back to the early 1990s: Dave Russell, *Football and the English: a social history of Association Football in England, 1863–1995* (Preston: Carnegie, 1997), pp. 209–40.

³ Minette Marrin, 'Today's football roar can be tomorrow's Nazi rant', *Sunday Times*, 16 June 2002.

⁴ Utley, 'Oh, dear'. John Humphrys, presenter of BBC Radio Four's *Today* programme, was another example of a self-confessed football-phobe unable to ignore the event's broader significance: John Humphrys, 'It's a game of two halves: the overpaid and the exploited', *Sunday Times*, 23 June 2002. Nor was Germany an exception to 'World Cup mania': Toby Helm, 'At last, Germans find an excuse to get flags out', *Daily Telegraph*, 29 June 2002.

⁵ Sheena McDonald, *Talking politics*, BBC Radio Four, 8 June 2002.

⁶ Lincoln Allison and Terry Monnington, 'Sport, prestige and international relations', *Government and Opposition* 37: 1, 2002, pp. 105–10.

⁷ Lincoln Allison, ed., *The politics of sport* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), pp. 12–13.

An appreciation of present-day realities was shown by the *Independent's* one-page review of 2002. Unsurprisingly, political and economic topics predominated, but one paragraph looked more widely: 'Still, politics remains a small part of the social landscape in which most of us live our lives. For many, England's reasonable, but again, limited showing in the football World Cup, defeated 2–1 in the quarter-finals by Brazil, the eventual winners, featured larger. It is probably better not to look back over the year's cricket'.⁸ Statistical data relating to the 2002 World Cup finals—a cumulative television audience of 28.8 billion viewers in 213 countries made the tournament 'the most extensively covered and viewed event in television history'—might be taken as reinforcing Alan Tomlinson's claim that 'the impact of the serious study of sport, leisure and popular culture can no longer be denied. The game is well and truly up for those to whom sport and leisure are mere epiphenomena ... some kind of "world apart"'.⁹ The fundamental problem is that hitherto only a few academics have been convinced that 'the game is up' for IR. Nor is the position in other disciplines, like history or sociology, much better.¹⁰

Within this context, this article investigates sport's potential in terms of promoting an improved and more comprehensive understanding of international relations, with particular reference to football's often ignored, yet seemingly central, role in Anglo-German relations as well as to the extent to which this relationship has been overshadowed on the British side by what has been described as the 'two world wars and a World Cup' mindset.¹¹ Significantly, when addressing Chatham House in June 2002, Dr Hans-Friedrich von Ploetz, the German ambassador in London (1999–2002), began by describing Britain as 'a friend and ally which is held in unwavering high regard by the Germans—no matter what happens on the football pitch'.¹² The impact of this remark, acknowledging implicitly the broader importance of England–Germany games, was accentuated by the possibility that the two countries' national teams might have to face each other in the ongoing World Cup finals, perhaps even in the final itself.

British–German relations are the 'best ever'

In March 2000 Gerhard Schröder, the German federal chancellor, told the 50th Anglo-German Königswinter Conference, held at Oxford, that British–German

⁸ 'Review of the year', *Independent*, 28 Dec. 2002.

⁹ '41,100 hours of 2002 FIFA World Cup coverage in 213 countries', FIFA media release, 21 Nov. 2002; David Bond, 'England still big draw for armchair fans', *Sunday Times*, 8 Dec. 2002; Alan Tomlinson, *The game's up: essays in the cultural analysis of sport, leisure and popular culture* (Aldershot: Arena, Ashgate Publishing, 1999), p. xii.

¹⁰ For example, Anthony Giddens, though a keen football fan and Tottenham Hotspur season-ticket holder, has failed to cover sport in successive editions of his major sociology text: Anthony Giddens, with Karen Birdsall, *Sociology*, 4th edn (Cambridge: Polity, 2001); Emily Mott, 'Portrait of Anthony Giddens', *Financial Times*, 11 March 2000.

¹¹ Letter from Oliver Franiel, *The Times*, 21 Feb. 1999.

¹² Dr Hans-Friedrich von Ploetz, 'The Hun has met the Sun: serious and other thoughts about Germany, Britain and Europe, on my road to Moscow', address at Chatham House, 17 June 2002, Archive: speeches and statements, German Embassy in London: http://www.german-embassy.org.uk/speech_by_ambassador_dr_von_pl.html.

relations could not be better: indeed, they were ‘the best ever’.¹³ The British prime minister Tony Blair attracted warm applause from delegates when echoing this view: ‘Our relations are as excellent as any bilateral relations can be.’ Significantly, the European Union, an enduring source of tension between the two countries, was presented as the context within which—to quote Schröder—‘we can develop together’.

However, later the same year, Anthony Nicholls of St Antony’s College, Oxford, employed these exchanges to frame a less rosy picture of the current position during the course of an authoritative overview of Anglo-German relations over the past fifty years.¹⁴ Admittedly, Nicholls, who was delivering the 2000 Bithell Memorial Lecture at the Institute of Germanic Studies, London University, started by agreeing with the Blair–Schröder claim that currently no serious conflict of interest divided the two countries.¹⁵ But he feared that the two countries had yet to learn to live comfortably together at all levels of society.¹⁶ Their relationship, Nicholls observed, was still soured by serious misunderstandings. Indeed, the range of ‘bogus and synthetic threats’, underpinned by the negative world war imagery repeatedly used by the British media and opinion about today’s Germany, prompted Nicholls to warn his audience that ‘The [British–German] problem is there and needs to be addressed and to have attention drawn to it.’¹⁷

In fact, notwithstanding his positive spin, Schröder himself conceded the widening gap between a predominantly harmonious official relationship and a relatively unsympathetic, frequently hostile, British media discourse about Germany when acknowledging that the British press was part of the problem: ‘Well, we seem to have something of a time lag sometimes. I like to see reporting on the Germany of today, not on a Germany that does not exist.’¹⁸ Significantly, more recently (in December 2002) Thomas Matussek, von Ploetz’s successor, felt the need to reaffirm his country’s concern about the way in which the British people and media were still imprisoned by visions of Germany’s Nazi past.¹⁹

¹³ Press release, German Embassy in London, 27 March 2000.

¹⁴ Anthony J. Nicholls, ‘Fifty years of Anglo-German relations’, 19th Bithell Memorial Lecture, Institute of Germanic Studies, University of London, 2 Nov. 2000. The lecture has been published: A. J. Nicholls, *Fifty years of Anglo-German relations* (London: Institute of Germanic Studies, University of London, 2001).

¹⁵ Nicholls, *Fifty years of Anglo-German relations*, p. 1; Günther Heydemann, ‘Grossbritannien und Deutschland: probleme einer “stillen Allianz” in Europa’, in Hans Kastendiek, Karl Rohe and Angelika Volle, eds, *Länderbericht Grossbritannien* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1998), pp. 443–6.

¹⁶ Harald Husemann, quoted in D. Ballance, ed., *Anglo-German attitudes—how do we see each other? The changing attitudes of young people in Britain and Germany* (London: Goethe Institute, 1992), p. 29; Sir Oliver Wright, ‘Britain and Germany: good friends and bad relations: Part 1’, *Initiative* 2, 1995, pp. 13–14; Jürgen Krönig, ‘Vergiften die Medien die deutsch–britischen Beziehungen?’, in R. Tenberg, ed., *Intercultural perspectives: images of Germany in education and the media* (Munich: Iudicium, 1999), p. 10.

¹⁷ Nicholls, *Fifty years of Anglo-German relations*, p. 21. The quotation is based on the wording used in his actual lecture.

¹⁸ Press release, German Embassy in London, 27 March 2000. His point was reinforced by an ongoing press controversy, as referred to on p. 243 (this pages to change folio number).

¹⁹ Jeevan Vasagar, ‘History teaching in UK stokes xenophobia, says German envoy’, *Guardian*, 9 Dec. 2002; ‘Ambassador’s interviews’, German Embassy in London: http://www.german-embassy.org.uk/history_teaching_in_uk_stokes_.html.

One element glossed over, indeed ignored, in Nicholls' otherwise full and wide-ranging historical survey was sport. This failing, replicated by more recent studies, such as Sabine Lee's *Victory in Europe* (2001), reflects in part the relative marginalization of sport by IR specialists mentioned earlier; and yet arguably this activity is crucial for British popular and media perceptions of the country's contemporary relationship with Germany.²⁰ After all, sport, described by President Nelson Mandela as 'probably the most effective means of communication in the modern world', crossing 'all cultural and language barriers to reach out directly to billions of people worldwide', represents an important, albeit frequently overlooked, instrument of soft power in a globalized world, capable of impacting both positively and negatively upon international relations and national prestige.²¹ Moreover, to employ a phase beloved of both politicians and IR specialists, football, a game 'made in Britain' and one of the country's most successful cultural exports, is still a sport in which Britain is expected to punch, or rather kick, above its weight.

Certainly, the Blair–Schröder Königswinter exchange made little impact upon the perceptions of Germany held by most Britons, compared to several highly visible confrontations taking place on the football field in the full glare of the world's media. Two of these clashes in what is claimed as the national sport in both countries were set up in December 1999. First, the 2002 World Cup football draw, held at the Tokyo International Forum, placed Germany in the same qualifying group as England, alongside Albania, Finland and Greece. The audience gasped. Franz Beckenbauer and Sir Bobby Charlton, footballing rivals from an earlier era when England defeated Germany in the 1966 World Cup final and currently championing competing 2006 World Cup bids, turned and smiled at each other. The media took full advantage of a strong storyline as old enemies on both the battle and football fields were destined to take on each other yet again in a major tournament held on the world stage. As Oliver Holt observed in *The Times*, the draw 'rekindled one of the fiercest, most bitterly contested rivalries in the sport ... The beauty of the draw, from England's perspective, is that it stirs football passions like no other pairing could.'²² A few days later, the draw for the finals of Euro 2000 (European championships) paired the two countries once again, as lamented by *Das Bild*: 'Oh, No! Schon wieder diese Engländer.'²³

²⁰ Sabine Lee, *Victory in Europe: Britain and Germany since 1945* (Harlow: Pearson, 2001). There are only a few lines on football, p. 205. Significantly, Thomas Kielinger, though devoting four to five pages to football in a publication inspired by the British and German governments, makes minimal effort to examine its IR significance: *Crossroads and roundabouts: junctions in German–British relations* (London: FCO/Bonn: Federal Government of Germany, 1997), pp. 12–13, 186–8.

²¹ Quoted in Peter J. Beck, 'Britain, image-building and the world game: sport's potential as British cultural propaganda', in Alan Chong and Jana Valencic, eds, *The image, the state and international relations* (London: European Foreign Policy Unit, LSE, 2001), pp. 58, 64; Louis Turner, 'Going for goal', *World Today* 58: 5, 2002, p. 12; Allison and Monnington, 'Sport, prestige and international relations', pp. 106–7.

²² *The Times*, 8 Dec. 1999; *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 8 Dec. 1999. Whether or not the same is true for Germany remains debatable, given the reputed significance of games versus Austria or Italy; see Nicolò Porro and Pippo Russo, 'The production of a media epic: Germany v. Italy football matches', *Culture, Sport and Society* 2: 3, 1999, pp. 155–72.

²³ *Das Bild*, 13 Dec. 1999; *The Times*, 13 Dec. 1999.

Table 1: Key dates in English–German footballing relations, 2000–2001

| <i>Event</i> | <i>Date</i> | <i>Location</i> | <i>Score/comments</i> |
|--|-----------------------------|------------------|--|
| Euro 2000 qualifying group | 17 June 2000 | Charleroi | England 1, Germany 0 |
| Bids to host 2006 World Cup | 5 July 2000 | Zurich | FIFA selected Germany to host the 2006 World Cup. Unsuccessful bidders included England's Football Association |
| 2002 World Cup finals qualifying group | 7 Oct. 2000 1 Sept. 2001 | London Munich | England 0, Germany 1 Germany 1, England 5 |

The first of these matches was played in June 2000, when England defeated Germany 1–0 in their Euro 2000 qualifying round game. A rare victory over an unusually disappointing German side was hailed as a major British sporting triumph, even if an equally mediocre England team failed to qualify for the final stages of Euro 2000.²⁴ Then, a few weeks later, FIFA, rejecting a rival British bid, among others, selected Germany to host the 2006 World Cup. Inevitably, this outcome proved unwelcome in Britain, whose footballing representatives, despite being supported strongly by the Blair government, were depicted as having been outmanoeuvred by their German rivals.²⁵ Even worse, in October 2000 a seemingly rejuvenated German team triumphed 1–0 over England in a 2002 World Cup qualifier given added significance by the fact that it was the final football international played at Wembley before the stadium's reconstruction. The return match took place at Munich in September 2001, when yet another England victory over the 'old enemy' helped secure qualification for the 2002 World Cup finals. Moreover, a crushing 5–1 scoreline, achieved on German soil, prompted euphoric rejoicing throughout the nation.²⁶ As one *Guardian* reader commented, 'England won a football match and people thought it was everything that mattered.'²⁷

Naturally, the result gave renewed emphasis to longstanding debates about Britain's position in the world game. For example, had Sir Bobby Charlton

²⁴ In April 2000, Germany's unimpressive draw against Switzerland even led one newspaper to suggest to the manager (Erich Ribbeck) that the team should not be sent to Euro 2000: 'Armes Fussball-Deutschland. Herr Ribbeck, bei der EM bleiben wir besser zu Hause', *Das Bild*, 27 April 2000.

²⁵ 'Political football: England has lost out to hooligans and horse-trading', editorial, *The Times*, 7 July 2000. See Paul Hayward, 'Power and the glory: Anglo-German rivalry renewed in bid to host 2006 World Cup', *Daily Telegraph*, 24 April 1999.

²⁶ See Mick Hume, 'They thought it was all over in 1966: now they hope it's starting again', *The Times*, 3 Sept. 2001; Simon Barnes, 'For once, the nation's jam butty has landed jam-side up', *The Times*, 3 Sept. 2001. It is, of course, revealing that *The Times*, like other newspapers, covered the broader issues raised by the result in different parts of the paper on the same day.

²⁷ Letter from William Rosato, *Guardian*, 4 Sept. 2001.

been right in claiming that 'we are *the* major football nation'?²⁸ Are football internationals merely a trivial matter of sport? Or do they have a broader significance? In particular, what do England–Germany games tell us, if anything, about the state of the British–German relationship in general? After all, Lord Weidenfeld once observed that England–Germany fixtures have often prompted exchanges serving as 'shorthand' for debates about both Britain's relationship with Germany and the British role in Europe and the wider world, particularly for Britons of a Eurosceptic disposition.²⁹ For example, when the two countries met on the football field in Euro 96, John Redwood employed the occasion 'to ask the basic questions about Britain's relationship with Germany'.³⁰ Thus, he reminded *Times* readers that England–Germany football matches were always 'something special', 'stirred deep feelings' on the part of Britons, and 'invite us all to think again about the problem of Germany. The German question has bedevilled Europe in the 20th century.' Four years on, Euro 2000 prompted a similar rash of press articles and television programmes linking politics and sport; indeed, the *Sun* even gave space to the German ambassador in London to review his country's relations with Britain.³¹

The September 2001 England–Germany encounter proved no exception to the rule. Indeed, following England's victory, the celebratory national mood, alongside the congratulatory statements issued by the prime minister and sports minister, among others, prompted yet again serious questions about present-day British society.³² Why does football possess a special, perhaps unique, status in the national consciousness? Why was a mere football match treated by many Britons as a significant shared national experience, indeed a historic event, so that—to quote Simon Barnes—'it is not just that a traditional sporting foe has been defeated. It is as if the hostile Universe has turned benign'?³³ Was the England football team the only national symbol attracting widespread popular support, especially among the young, at a time of declining public legitimacy for traditional markers of British identity and patriotism?³⁴ To what extent was

²⁸ Quoted in Steve Curry, 'Charlton's fear over Euro thugs', *Sunday Times*, 7 May 2000. FIFA/Coca-Cola's world ranking list, dated December 2002, ranked Germany and England as fourth and seventh respectively: http://www.fifa.com/rank/index_E.html. The number of national teams ranked increased from 167 in August 1993 (date of first ranking list) to 203 in December 2002. See figure 1 below.

²⁹ Lord Weidenfeld, 'Such a diatribe would cause a public outcry in Britain', *Daily Telegraph*, 19 July 1999; Reinhard Tenberg, 'Introduction', in Tenberg, ed., *Intercultural perspectives*, p. 2. See also Lord Weidenfeld, 'Why I say we can live with the Germans', *Mail on Sunday*, 15 July 1990. Weidenfeld, a leading British publisher, was a refugee from Nazi Germany.

³⁰ John Redwood, 'Stand up to Germany, on and off the field', *The Times*, 26 June 1996. Redwood, Welsh Secretary from 1992 to 1995, unsuccessfully challenged for the Conservative party leadership in July 1995.

³¹ Hans-Friedrich von Ploetz, 'Let's hope football is the winner', *Sun*, 16 June 2000. See also Roger Boyes, 'Siblings at war', *The Times*, 16 June 2000; 'Do mention the war', editorial, *Independent*, 17 June 2000; Daniel Johnson, 'Our friends the Germans', *Daily Telegraph*, 17 June 2000.

³² Hume, 'They thought it was all over in 1966'. See also the letters published under the headline 'Now the war's finally over', *Guardian*, 4 Sept. 2001.

³³ Barnes, 'For once, the nation's jam butty has landed jam-side up'.

³⁴ In May 2002 Roy Williams's *Sing Yer Heart Out for the Lads*, a play set around the England–Germany match played in October 2000, opened the National Theatre's 'Transformation' season of new work for younger audiences: *Daily Telegraph*, 4 May 2002. Repeated surveys have made the point that in England

the resulting nationalist overreaction a reflection of longstanding British arrogance, growing perceptions of decline (even inferiority) or old-fashioned xenophobia, particularly towards Germany and all things European? As ever, it seemed easier to pose questions than to give answers, but every England–Germany fixture can be guaranteed to provide debating variations on the same theme, so that—to quote an infamous footballing cliché—we need to take each game as it comes.

Britain's other 'special relationship'

Most Britons took their country's role in the world for much of the twentieth century to mean great power status supported increasingly by the so-called 'special relationship' with the United States. By contrast, British relations with Germany have never acquired the distinctive quality attributed to the link with Washington, in spite of the fact that—to quote John Major—'Germany was pivotal to Britain's European relations.'³⁵ Yet, looking back over the past century or more, this relationship has proved equally 'special' in the sense that, politically, militarily, economically and culturally, Germany represented a perennial focus for British policy-makers and opinion-formers, if only because of its responsibility for launching repeated, indeed severe, tests of Britain's power and status in Europe and the wider world.³⁶

The way in which we view and interpret today's world always has a subjective colouring determined in part by history and prejudice. In this vein, present-day British attitudes towards Germany, far from resulting from a balanced and informed assessment of contemporary realities, are often influenced, indeed distorted, by fading memories of British greatness and unity of purpose, alongside mythologies, images, emotions and irrational prejudices moulded principally by Hitler's Germany and the Second World War.³⁷ As Tony Baldry, minister of state at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in John Major's government, remarked in 1995, British thinking about Germany often 'seems stuck in a time warp'.³⁸ Germany is viewed more frequently as a former wartime enemy than as, say, a NATO ally; more frequently as an economic threat than as a partner in the European Union. Far from alleviating long-standing fears, the EU has been presented by many Britons as merely an alternative instrument for Germany's perennial attempts to dominate Europe. Inevitably, German reunification, like

public displays of patriotism are largely confined to football. One of the more recent surveys, conducted as part of a wider study by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, was reported by the *Sunday Times*, 8 Dec. 2002. There is not space here to cover the debate about the way in which football both reinforces an English view of British identity and undermines Britishness by encouraging 'ninety-minute patriots' in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland: see Peter Beck, 'Politics and the 90-minute patriot', *Independent*, 4 May 1999.

³⁵ John Major, *The autobiography* (London: HarperCollins, 1999), p. 503.

³⁶ See Kielinger, *Crossroads and roundabouts*.

³⁷ Lee, *Victory in Europe*, pp. 228–37.

³⁸ Quoted in Robin Gedye, 'Major eager to strengthen German ties', *Daily Telegraph*, 26 May 1995; Matt Frei, *The trouble with Germans: 1*, BBC Radio Four, 6 Feb. 2000.

Germany's previous 'spectacular metamorphoses' (Lothar Kettenacker), had a predominantly negative influence upon the thinking of many Britons.³⁹

For some Britons, these anxieties about supposed hegemonic tendencies on Germany's part, accentuated by a reluctant appreciation of decline on Britain's, derived from the experience of living through the 1930s and the Second World War; for others, learning about the German past through history—the Nazi period and the Holocaust feature prominently in history courses at schools and universities—fostered a view of Germany as an enduring, occasionally serious, problem for British policy-makers and people. Hitler remains by far the best-known German among Britons; indeed, recent German ambassadors in London—including Gebhardt von Moltke (1997–9), von Ploetz and Matussek—have complained that the teaching of German history in Britain often seemed to stop at 1945 and hence to ignore more recent benign developments.⁴⁰ Alternatively, for those who have not studied history in depth at school or college—unfortunately, the way in which history has been squeezed out of school curricula renders this a more common trait—popular 'histories' and mythologies propagated by the media, most notably tabloid newspapers and television histories, are full of stereotypes (e.g. Huns, gauleiters, krauts) imbued with wartime imagery exhibiting—to quote von Moltke—'profound ignorance' of today's German realities.⁴¹ Indeed, in June 2002 von Ploetz used an infamous 1990 *Sun* front-page headline—'The Sun meets the Hun'—in the title of his Chatham House address. Goethe Institute seminars, held during the 1990s, illuminated alternative ways of fostering such outdated imagery; for example, Cullingford and O'Sullivan pointed out that British children's books continue to be dominated by wartime, not contemporary, portrayals of Germany.⁴²

One staunch believer in German continuities was Margaret Thatcher, British prime minister from 1979 to 1990, whose much-publicized absence from the tenth anniversary celebrations of the fall of the Berlin Wall held in November 1999 recalled her reluctant acceptance of German reunification. By contrast, George Bush senior, Mikhail Gorbachev and Helmut Kohl were all in attendance. Thatcher's caution was in part a product of lessons drawn from the past, most notably her fears that a larger Germany would exert even greater influence and power in the European Community. John Major, her successor, pointed to

³⁹ Günther Heydemann, 'Partner or rival? The British perception of Germany during the process of unification, 1989–1991', in Harald Husemann, ed., *As others see us: Anglo-German perceptions* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1994), p. 123.

⁴⁰ Gebhardt von Moltke, 'Some room for improvement', *Initiative* 5, 1999, p. 5; *The Times*, 13 Oct. 1999; Vasagar, 'History teaching in UK stokes xenophobia, says German envoy'; Geoff Sammon, *Coping with stereotypes: British school-students' image of Germany and the Germans* (London: Goethe Institute, 1996), p. 6. The best-known eleven Germans also included Goebbels and Goering.

⁴¹ Quoted in Andrew Gimson, 'Teach British the war is over, says German envoy', *Daily Telegraph*, 12 Oct. 1999. See Giles Radice, *House of Commons Debates*, 24 May 1995, vol. 260, col. 861.

⁴² Emer O'Sullivan, 'National stereotypes as literary device: the traditions and uses of stereotypes of Germans in British and the English in German children's literature', in Ballance, ed., *Anglo-German attitudes*, pp. 1–4; Cedric Cullingford, 'Children's' attitudes to Germany (and other countries)', in Ballance, ed., *Anglo-German attitudes*, pp. 8–12; Emer O'Sullivan, 'National stereotypes as literary device: Traditions and uses of stereotypes of Germans in British and the English in German children's literature', in Husemann, ed., *As others see us*, pp. 88–9.

the way in which Thatcher interpreted Germany as ‘dangerously powerful’: ‘Margaret’s view was direct: “Never trust the Germans.”’⁴³ Thatcher, shrugging off accusations of Germanophobia, repeatedly pointed to her version of the past: ‘You cannot just ignore the history of this century as if it did not happen.’⁴⁴ For her, ‘the prospect of a reunited, powerful Germany, possibly with renewed ambitions on its eastern flank’, was extremely worrying, especially as an unshakeable belief in the continuities of ‘national character’ allowed her to brush aside countervailing advice about contemporary realities as well as to avoid making ‘a single positive statement’ (Heydemann) about a country reunified upon a democratic constitutional model.⁴⁵ Growing up during the 1930s ensured that Hitler’s Germany made a powerful and enduring negative impression on Thatcher’s thinking, particularly following an alleged encounter during 1938 in her home town of Grantham with an Austrian Jewish refugee from Nazi excesses.⁴⁶ Thatcher herself, viewing Hitler’s ‘wickedness’ in the context of her reading about the First World War, recalled watching with ‘distaste and incomprehension’ cinema newsreels about Nazi Germany.⁴⁷ Unsurprisingly, when prime minister she was prone to anti-German outbursts, as recorded by one close confidant, Nicholas Ridley, who related the story of an adviser being scolded by Mrs Thatcher for arriving at Chequers in a German-made Volkswagen car: ‘Don’t ever park something like that here again!’⁴⁸

Ridley himself achieved notoriety in 1990 for extreme opinions expressed in an interview conducted by Dominic Lawson, the editor of the *Spectator*, who admitted that he was ‘taken aback by the vehemence of Mr Ridley’s views on the matter of Europe, and in particular the role of Germany’; thus, he described monetary union as ‘a German racket designed to take over the whole of Europe’.⁴⁹ Ridley, who was then minister for trade and industry, even appeared somewhat ambivalent about whether he preferred Kohl to Hitler; in fact, Garland’s infamous cartoon accompanying the interview depicted the German chancellor sporting

⁴³ Major, *The autobiography*, pp. 155, 175; Paul Sharp, *Thatcher’s diplomacy: the revival of British foreign policy* (London: Institute for Contemporary British History/Macmillan, 1997), pp. 202–26; George R. Urban, *Diplomacy and disillusion at the court of Margaret Thatcher: an insider’s view* (London: Tauris, 1996), pp. 124, 133–4.

⁴⁴ *House of Commons Debates*, 17 July 1990, vol. 176, cols 859–60; ‘Interview with Michael Jones’, *Sunday Times*, 25 Feb. 1990; Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street years* (London: HarperCollins, 1993), p. 769.

⁴⁵ Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, pp. 790–1, pp. 813–15; Heydemann, ‘Partner or rival’, pp. 131, 134 n. 30. Thatcher’s anxieties came to the fore in the 1990 Chequers seminar involving ministers, officials and academics (including Norman Stone). Here, she outlined features, including aggressiveness and assertiveness, allegedly embedded in the German character over time: ‘The memo on German unification’, *Independent*, 16 July 1990; Richard Norton-Taylor and Michael White, ‘Scholars with the PM’s ear’, *Guardian*, 16 July 1990; Urban, *Diplomacy and disillusion at the court of Margaret Thatcher*, pp. 118–59.

⁴⁶ Norman Stone, ‘Germany? Maggie was absolutely right’, *Sunday Times*, 29 Sept. 1996; Margaret Thatcher, *The path to power* (London: HarperCollins, 1995), pp. 24–5.

⁴⁷ Thatcher, *The path to power*, pp. 24, 27. See also John Campbell, *Margaret Thatcher*, vol. 1: *The grocer’s daughter* (London: Cape, 2000), pp. 38–40.

⁴⁸ Dominic Lawson, ‘Saying the unsayable about the Germans: Dominic Lawson meets Nicholas Ridley’, *Spectator*, 14 July 1990, p. 9.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 8. See also Lachlan R. Moyle, ‘The Ridley–Chequers affair and German character: a journalistic main event’, in Husemann, ed., *As others see us*, pp. 107–20.

a Hitler-style moustache. Ridley's views, coloured by the experience of living through the 1930s and the Second World War, had been reinforced by a recent visit to Auschwitz in Poland: 'for Ridley, it would appear, the Germans of today can only be understood by using the day before yesterday's yardstick.'⁵⁰

Nor has the problem gone away under post-Thatcher governments, as highlighted in February 1999, when Michael Naumann, the German culture minister, criticized Britain for being 'the only one nation in the world that has decided to make the Second World War a sort of spiritual core of its national self, understanding and pride'.⁵¹ Reportedly, Robin Cook, when Blair's foreign secretary, issued a departmental instruction: 'Don't mention the war.'⁵² At the same time, von Moltke pressed the inaccuracy of the usual stereotypes: 'I want to show people here that we are not the Hun.'⁵³ Nor was the German ambassador content merely to demythologize the images so beloved of British tabloids: 'And I want the British to start liking the Germans as much as I like the British.' But Cook and von Moltke faced an uphill struggle, given the negative impact of episodes such as German restrictions upon the import of British meat in the wake of the BSE affair or BMW's sale of the Rover car group.⁵⁴ Moreover, sections of the British media, far from merely reporting developments, have frequently been instrumental in creating, even sharpening, problems, as happened in March 2000 by way of reaction to remarks made to *Die Welt* by Sir Paul Lever, the British ambassador in Germany. Ostensibly, the interview focused on the return of the British embassy to the Berlin location used between 1875 and 1939, but the British media targeted his references to their coverage of Germany.

I think part of the problem is that, when [German correspondents in London] read the British press, they look at, say, the *Sun* or the *Times*, and they see a portrayal of Germany that is rather dominated by a vocabulary from the war and permeated by a feeling that somehow Britain is under threat ... Their underlying political philosophy is anti-European, and Germany is after all the biggest country in Europe. So naturally they want to portray what is happening in Europe and in Germany in a negative light. That's what they're there for, they're not there to provide objective truth and enlightenment, they're there to sell newspapers and to sell a particular political line.⁵⁵

The inevitable British media reaction to Lever's remark merely reaffirmed the way in which the British press remained a central part of the British–German problem identified by Nicholls.⁵⁶

⁵⁰ Moyle, 'The Ridley–Chequers affair', pp. 118–19.

⁵¹ Tony Allen-Mills, 'British obsessed by war, scoffs German minister', *The Times*, 14 Feb. 1999; Andrew Gimson, 'Germans go to war over British attitude to history', *Daily Telegraph*, 15 Feb. 1999; 'Naumann', *Berliner Zeitung*, 17 Feb. 1999.

⁵² Graham Jones, 'I won't mention the war', *Daily Telegraph*, 16 Feb. 1999.

⁵³ Quoted in Gimson, 'Teach British the war is over'.

⁵⁴ 'Ridley's hollow notion of British sovereignty', *Independent on Sunday*, 15 July 1990; O'Sullivan, 'National stereotypes as literary device', p. 2; Husemann, quoted in Ballance, ed., *Anglo-German attitudes*, p. 29; Lee, *Victory in Europe*, pp. 220–2.

⁵⁵ *Die Welt*, 22 March 2000.

⁵⁶ *Die Welt*, 24, 25 March 2000. See also Ballance, ed., *Anglo-German attitudes*, p. 12.

International football as a crucial British–German battleground

British attitudes towards Germany, then, at least at the popular and media levels, remain rooted in a rather selective and static approach towards the past. This says more about Britons than about Germans, and impacts upon most spheres of activity, including sport. Within this context, football's centrality and popularity in contemporary Britain and Germany ensure that international matches are high-profile clashes in which national teams are seen as participating in something more than a mere game. After all, international footballers are—to quote Eric Hobsbawm—'primary expressions of their imagined communities' engaged in a 'national struggle' in which political considerations impart an extra edge to the game's inherently competitive nature.⁵⁷ Footballers might see themselves as engaged in a purely sporting activity, but in practice governments, the media and public opinion have seen players as representatives, embodying and projecting messages about national values and qualities across the globe regardless of territorial, linguistic and other boundaries in a dramatic gladiatorial contest attracting a capacity crowd, a vast television audience and widespread media coverage.

What has made sport so uniquely effective a medium for inculcating national feelings is the ease with which even the least political or public individuals can identify with the nation ... The imagined community of millions seems more real as a team of eleven named people. The individual, even the one who cheers, becomes a symbol of his nation himself.⁵⁸

Hobsbawm himself recalled listening with several Austrians to a radio commentary of the Austria–England match played at Vienna in 1930: 'I was England, as they were Austria ... In this manner did twelve-year-old children extend the concept of team-loyalty to the nation.'⁵⁹

Unsurprisingly, this political dimension has prompted frequent attempts to identify meaningful links between the results of football internationals and abstract considerations of national prestige and power, as evidenced in June 1996, when *The Times* tried to capture the national mood after England's impressive victory over the Netherlands in a Euro 96 qualifying game. 'In 90 minutes, and four goals, football has done what a thousand speeches by government ministers, and a hundred election promises by Tony Blair, have failed to do. England feels great about itself, almost invincible.'⁶⁰ There are, of course, alternative views,

⁵⁷ Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and nationalism since 1780: programme, myth, reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 143; Barrie Houlihan, *Sport and international politics* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), p. 170; Arnd Krüger, 'On the origins of the notion that sport serves as a means of national representation', *History of European ideas* 16, 1993, pp. 863–7.

⁵⁸ Hobsbawm, *Nations and nationalism since 1780*, p. 143; Beck, 'Britain, image-building and the world game', pp. 58–64.

⁵⁹ Hobsbawm gives the wrong date (1929) for the match.

⁶⁰ *The Times*, 20 June 1996. Tony Blair was then leader of the opposition, but note his stress as prime minister on 'the power of sport' and belief that 'sport matters': *A sporting future for all* (London: Department of Culture, Media and Sport, 2000), pp. 2–3. See Peter J. Beck, "'The most effective means of communication in the modern world": sport and national prestige in the modern world', in Roger Levermore and Adrian Budd, eds, *Sport and international relations: an emerging relationship* (London: Frank Cass, 2003).

and Brian Glanville, among others, has questioned 'what correlation was there between kicking an inflated bladder between three wooden posts more times than one's opponents, and acquiring national prestige?'⁶¹

The Second World War ended over fifty years ago, but popular cultural representations of footballing encounters between *England* and Germany (Germany's matches against Scotland and the other home countries are viewed rather differently) are still characterized by highly politicized images drawn from the wartime past, especially as it appears that in Britain—to quote Paul Hayward's comments about Euro 96—'some newspaper editors would like to turn sport into war.'⁶² Significantly, Ridley's controversial *Spectator* article, though prompted largely by German reunification and European currency union, was published less than a fortnight after West Germany's victory over England in a penalty shoot-out in a match heralded by British tabloids as representing far more than just the 1990 World Cup semi-final. Thus, on 4 July, the front page of the *Sun*, making links with both the Second World War and England's 1966 World Cup triumph, proclaimed: 'We beat them in '45, we beat them in '66, now the battle of '90.' In the event, West Germany advanced to the final in which its victory suggested, for many Britons, the worrying sporting potential of a reunified Germany. Nor was the latter able to shake off the Nazi past, as highlighted in 1994, when the Germany–England match, scheduled to be played in Berlin on what was subsequently realized to be the anniversary of Hitler's birthday (20 April), was cancelled because of fears of exploitation by right-wing groups.⁶³

Subsequently, Euro 96 prompted perhaps the crudest and most blatant examples of what the British parliamentary National Heritage Select Committee called 'xenophobic, chauvinistic and jingoistic gutter journalism', most notably upon the part of the *Daily Mirror*, which reran the events of September 1939 on its front page and declared 'a state of soccer war' between the two countries: 'Achtung! Surrender. For you Fritz, ze Euro 96 Championship is over.'⁶⁴ As Henry Winter noted in the *Daily Telegraph*, 'apparently, we're at war. One tabloid marches on Germany, England players have tin helmets superimposed on their heads while another organ promises to "blitz the Fritz" at what is supposed to be a sporting occasion.'⁶⁵ Clearly, sections of the British media seem to find it as easy to express national prejudice as national pride—if not easier—and

⁶¹ Brian Glanville, *Soccer: a panorama* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1969), p. 82.

⁶² Paul Hayward, 'Vogts plays down paper talk and German chances', *Daily Telegraph*, 26 June 1996. This recalls George Orwell's often-quoted comment about a 1945 Anglo-Soviet match as 'war minus the shooting'. British–German footballing relations have been complicated also by a serious hooligan problem, which is not pursued in this study.

⁶³ See the critical letter from Andrew Cruickshank, a Briton resident in Berlin: *Daily Telegraph*, 9 April 1994.

⁶⁴ *Daily Mirror*, 24 June 1996. For the resulting developments, including complaints to the Press Complaints Commission, see *Guardian*, 25 June 1996; Jon Garland and Michael Rowe, *War minus the shooting?: jingoism, the English press and Euro '96*, Scarman Centre Occasional Paper 7, 1997, p. 1; David Head, 'Teaching *Kraftwerk* not craft work', in Tenberg, ed., *Intercultural perspectives*, pp. 48–9. In fact, the resulting backlash against what the *Daily Mail* described as an 'orgy of jingoism' soon led the *Daily Mirror* to tone down its rhetoric: *Daily Mail*, 25 June 1996; Hayward, 'Vogts plays down paper talk'.

⁶⁵ Henry Winter, 'Time to ignite national pride not prejudice', *Daily Telegraph*, 25 July 1996.

to be incapable of referring to today's German football teams without mentioning past wars.⁶⁶ History continues to provide an enduring subtext for any England–Germany fixture. As Naumann complained in 1999, German footballers, like the country's politicians, continue to be routinely described by wartime imagery: 'Think of poor old Franz Beckenbauer, one of the most elegant players in the game, and the only metaphor you had available for him was to call him a panzer.'⁶⁷ Gerhard Fischer agreed, and moved on to fear the worst when reviewing the 2002 World Cup draw for the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*:

The Panzers will be rolling again across English newspaper columns. Perhaps footballers will be urged to strike at the evil *Krauts*. English newspapers love writing about war when the subject at hand is football, especially when the Germans are involved. And now they are up against the Germans in the qualification for the 2002 World Cup, and Germany is a rival in staging the World Cup 2006.⁶⁸

In the event, and despite the match's high visibility and footballing significance, British media presentations of the England–Germany Euro 2000 qualifier proved remarkably restrained, even if ITV did its best to remind Britons of football's wartime legacy in a poorly researched television programme transmitted on the eve of the game.⁶⁹ Nor could the *People* avoid the temptation of headlining its match report of England's 1–0 win with a stereotypical score-based pun, 'Hun Nil'.⁷⁰ Significantly, the *Daily Mirror*, having incurred considerable opprobrium for its coverage of the Euro 96 encounter, proved far more circumspect in pre-match comment, at least at first sight:

England play Germany at football tonight. *The Mirror* has had a few problems covering this fixture in the past, so we won't try and squeeze in any clever little jokes about you know what ... All we say is that the kick-off is at 1945. Time for victory, boys.⁷¹

Nevertheless, the fact that it assumed readers' continued familiarity with 'you know what', in conjunction with the publication of the kick-off time in a format reminiscent of the final year of the Second World War, implied the usual Germanophobic prejudices. By contrast, the *Sun* adopted an unusually outgoing attitude by publishing a brief overview of British–German relations written by the German ambassador in London as well as confining its historical references to Waterloo, the 1815 battle in which British and Prussian forces joined together against Napoleon's France.⁷²

⁶⁶ Roger Boyes, 'Germans just want to be understood', *The Times*, 3 Oct. 1999; Hugo Young, 'Germanophobia still grips us in a Britain refusing to forget the war', *Guardian*, 16 Feb. 1999.

⁶⁷ 'Naumann', *Berliner Zeitung*, 17 Feb. 1999. Allen-Mills, 'British obsessed by war'; Tony Allen-Mills, 'Tabloids draw German blood', *The Times*, 21 Feb. 1999; Gimson, 'Germans go to war over British attitude to history'; Young, 'Germanophobia still grips us'.

⁶⁸ *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 8 Dec. 1999.

⁶⁹ *England versus Germany: the first 100 years*, ITV, 16 June 2000.

⁷⁰ *People*, 18 June 2000.

⁷¹ 'Time for glory', editorial, *Daily Mirror*, 17 June 2000.

⁷² Von Ploetz, 'Let's hope football is the winner'; 'Let's welly them Kev!', *Sun*, 17 June 2000. Clearly, the choice was inspired by location of the England team's prematch hotel at Waterloo.

1966 and all that

Following the Germany–England game played in September 2001, one *Guardian* reader complained about the television commentator: 'it took John Motson 49 minutes to mention 1966 and 68 minutes to mention the war.'⁷³ For many Britons, England's 4–2 triumph over Germany in the 1966 World Cup final represents a major historical landmark to be viewed alongside the Second World War.⁷⁴ Inevitably, this success has been regularly exploited by the media as a source of inspiration during World Cup and European Championships; for example, during Euro 96, played in England, the *Sun* even exhorted readers to play videos of England's victory to any visiting German tourists!⁷⁵ More recently, repeated showings of Geoff Hurst scoring England's fourth goal in extra time as part of the title sequence of a popular television programme entitled *They Think It's All Over*, accompanied by Kenneth Wolstenholme's reassuring tones to the effect that 'They think it's all over. It is now', have reminded Britons *ad nauseam* of British (or rather English) football's finest hour. England had beaten the old battlefield enemy, as Wolstenholme noted in his memoirs when recalling the wartime vocabulary frequently employed to frame press previews of the 1966 final. For example, Vincent Mulchrone, writing for the *Daily Mail*, asserted that 'if Germany beats us at Wembley this afternoon at our national sport, we can always point out to them that we have recently beaten them twice at theirs.'⁷⁶ For John Humphrys, the presenter of BBC Radio Four's *Today* programme, this was the last football match he watched from start to finish: 'I did so because it had almost nothing to do with football and everything to do with the war. The Germans were still the enemy and we had beaten them again.'⁷⁷

Today, the 1966 World Cup television footage has acquired an added poignancy, given the fact that German's football teams subsequently proved far more successful than England's. Thus, Germany, having triumphed already in 1954, won the World Cup again in 1974 and 1990—only Brazil has a better record—reached the final in 1982, 1986 and 2002, and added the European championship in 1972, 1980 and 1996. Furthermore, after 1966 Germany, having traditionally come off second best in encounters versus England, came to

⁷³ Letter from Mike Moir, *Guardian*, 4 Sept. 2001.

⁷⁴ Although the Second World War and the 1966 World Cup remain key reference points, a longer-term perspective establishes that England–Germany football internationals have always possessed an extra-sporting significance, most notably the matches played in 1935 and 1938: Peter J. Beck, *Scoring for Britain: international football and international politics, 1900–1939* (London: Frank Cass, 1999), pp. 173–205; Peter J. Beck, 'England v. Germany, 1938', *History Today* 32: 6, 1982, pp. 29–34; David Downing, *The best of enemies: England v. Germany, a century of footballing rivalry* (London: Bloomsbury, 2000). Christiane Eisenberg's publications cover the broader sporting context: 'English sports' und deutsche Bürger. Eine Gesellschaftsgeschichte, 1800–1939 (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1999); *Fussball, Soccer, Calcio. Ein englischer Sport auf seinem Weg um die Welt* (Munich: DTV, 1997).

⁷⁵ Garland and Rowe, *War minus the shooting?*

⁷⁶ Kenneth Wolstenholme, *They think it's all over: memories of the greatest day in English football* (London: Robson, 1996), pp. 118–19.

⁷⁷ Humphrys, 'It's a game of two halves'. See also Frank Roberts, *Dealing with dictators: the destruction and revival of Europe, 1930–70* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1991), p. 244.

Table 2: England versus Germany since 1900

| <i>Date</i> | <i>Home team</i> | | <i>Away team</i> | | <i>Ground location</i> |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|----|-------------------|----------------|------------------------|
| 1901 | English Amateurs | 12 | Germany | 0 ^a | London |
| | English Professionals | 10 | Germany | 0 ^a | Manchester |
| 1908 | Germany | 1 | England | 5 ^b | Berlin |
| 1909 | England | 9 | Germany | 0 ^b | Oxford |
| 1911 | Germany | 2 | England | 2 ^b | Berlin |
| 1913 | Germany | 0 | England | 3 ^b | Berlin |
| 1914–18: FIRST WORLD WAR | | | | | |
| 1930 | Germany | 3 | England | 3 | Berlin |
| 1935 | England | 3 | Germany | 0 | London |
| 1938 | Germany | 3 | England | 6 | Berlin |
| 1939–45: SECOND WORLD WAR | | | | | |
| 1954 | England | 3 | West Germany | 1 | London |
| 1956 | West Germany | 1 | England | 3 | Berlin |
| 1965 | West Germany | 0 | England | 1 | Nuremberg |
| 1966 | England | 1 | West Germany | 0 | London |
| 1966 | England | 4 | West Germany (WC) | 2 | London |
| 1968 | West Germany | 1 | England | 0 | Hanover |
| 1970 | England | 2 | West Germany (WC) | 3 | Leon, Mexico |
| 1972 | England | 1 | West Germany (EC) | 3 | London |
| 1972 | West Germany | 0 | England (EC) | 0 | Berlin |
| 1975 | England | 2 | West Germany | 0 | London |
| 1978 | West Germany | 2 | England | 1 | Munich |
| 1982 | England | 0 | West Germany (WC) | 0 | Madrid |
| 1982 | England | 1 | West Germany | 2 | London |
| 1985 | England | 3 | West Germany | 0 | Mexico City |
| 1987 | West Germany | 3 | England | 1 | Dusseldorf |
| 1990 | England | 1 | West Germany (WC) | 1 | Turin |
| | | 3 | | 4 | (on penalties) |
| 1991 | England | 0 | Germany | 1 | London |
| 1993 | England | 1 | Germany | 2 | Detroit |
| 1996 | England | 1 | Germany (EC) | 1 | London |
| | | 5 | | 6 | (on penalties) |
| 2000 | England | 1 | Germany (EC) | 0 | Charleroi |
| 2000 | England | 0 | Germany (WC) | 1 | London |
| 2001 | Germany | 1 | England (WC) | 5 | Munich |

^a Not generally listed as internationals.

^b Classified as amateur, not full, internationals.

WC World Cup game

EC European Championship game

Matches versus East Germany are not usually counted in England–Germany fixtures. The four England–East Germany games played between 1963 and 1984 saw 3 England wins and 1 draw.

England's record versus Germany in full internationals played since 1930:

Played 25 Won 11 Drawn 3 Lost 11

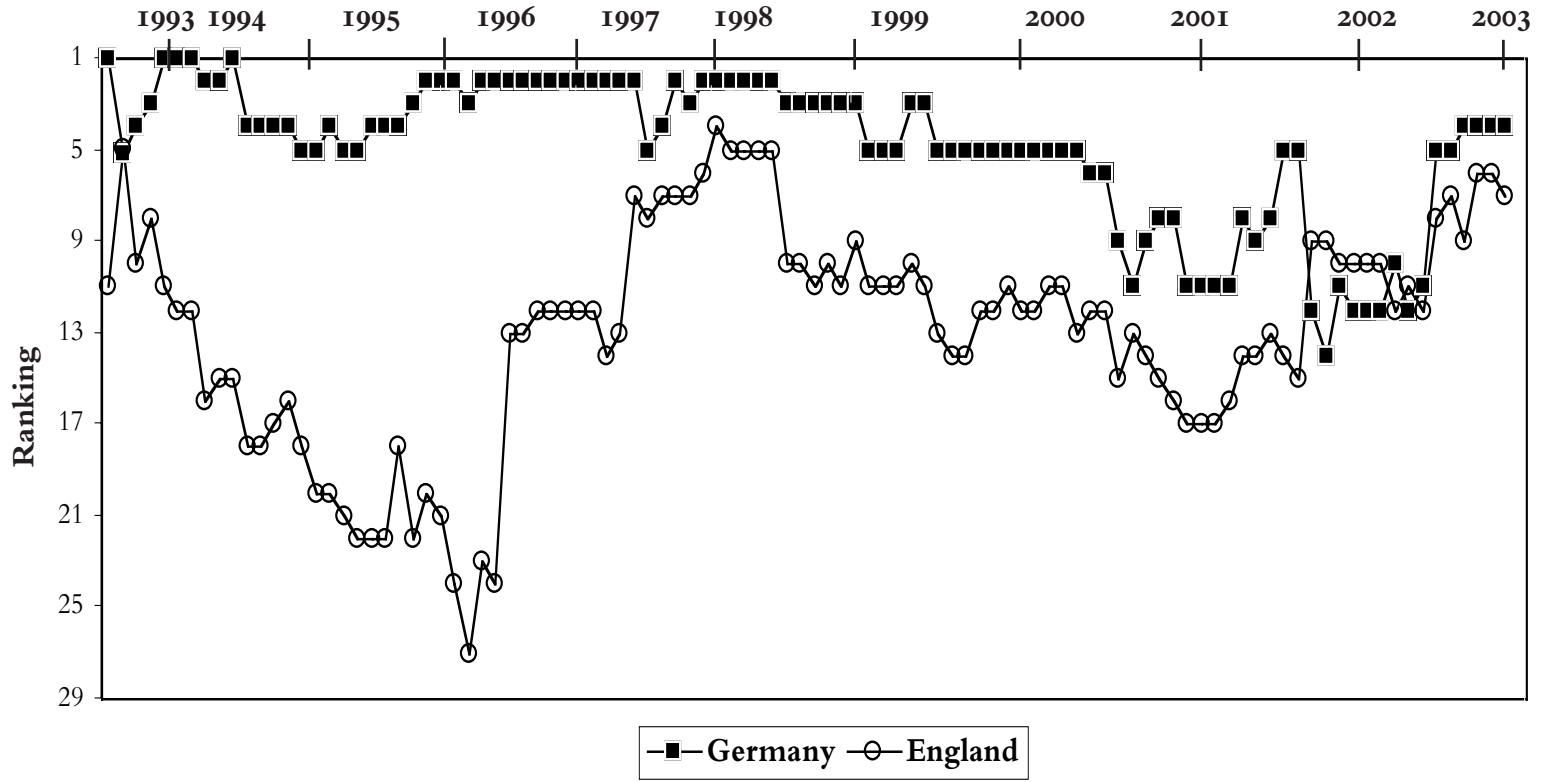


Figure 1: England and Germany in FIFA/Coca-Cola's national rankings since 1993

be depicted as the prime obstacle to British progress in such tournaments, as demonstrated vividly in the 1970 World Cup quarter-finals when a 3–2 extra-time win ended England's high hopes of retaining the title.⁷⁸ More recently, the impact of England's defeats by Germany in semi-final penalty shoot-outs in the 1990 World Cup and Euro 96 competitions was accentuated by Germany's going on to win both tournaments. Even worse, in 1996 Germany soon deflated the mass euphoria prompted by England's much-hyped victory over the Netherlands mentioned earlier. Prior to Euro 2000, England's previous victory over Germany dated back to 1985. As a result, FIFA's monthly ranking list, first introduced in 1993, has regularly ranked England below, frequently well below, Germany. Only during 2001/2 did England move ahead, and then only for brief periods. Significantly, in 2002 Germany, despite taking second place to England in their World Cup qualifying group, reached the World Cup final yet again.

The continuing 'tyranny of history' during the 1990s and early 2000s

As outlined above, Thatcher, seemingly believing that she was 'the repository of truth and rectitude', capable of 'speaking for the great British public', exhibited a deeply embedded Germanophobia immune to expert advice, rational argument and contemporary German realities.⁷⁹ Even worse, in 1990 she tried to use a private Chequers seminar to place 'the seal of intellectual respectability' upon prejudices embedded in her imagined past. In the event, Thatcher's critical attitude towards German reunification, based in part upon miscalculations about Britain's capacity to influence events, ended in what even she conceded was 'unambiguous failure'.⁸⁰ George Urban, a former admirer, expressed dismay that her views about Germany 'were not all that different from the Alf Garnett version of history':

More imagination, less nostalgia for the past, and a more courageous Cabinet would have served Britain better than the visceral reactions of its famous but misguided prime minister. Not for the first time in our century, the tyranny of history was playing havoc with the judgement of British politicians.⁸¹

Generally speaking, the post-Thatcher period, though failing to shake off what Sir Oliver Wright described as 'the dominion of history', witnessed a transformation of British government thinking and policy towards Germany, and ushered in what Sir Percy Cradock, Thatcher's policy adviser, described as a more constructive phase in the relationship.⁸² Indeed, as von Ploetz, the German

⁷⁸ Barnes, 'For once, the nation's jam butty has landed jam-side up'.

⁷⁹ Urban, *Diplomacy and disillusion at the court of Margaret Thatcher*, pp. 5, 83, 118, 134, 136, 142–3, 199.

⁸⁰ Thatcher, *The Downing Street years*, p. 813; Sharp, *Thatcher's diplomacy*, pp. 223–5.

⁸¹ Urban, *Diplomacy and disillusion at the court of Margaret Thatcher*, pp. 101, 103–4. Alf Garnett, a British television character, was infamous for his bigoted xenophobic views.

⁸² Gedye, 'Major eager to strengthen German ties'; Sir Oliver Wright, 'Britain and Germany: good friends and bad relations: Part 2', *Initiative* 3, 1995, p. 5; interviews with Sir Percy Cradock, n/d (1997), DOHP 26, p. 20, and Sir Christopher Mallaby, 17 Dec. 1997, DOHP 28, pp. 18–20, The British Diplomatic Oral History Programme (BDOHP), Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge University.

ambassador in London, pointed out on the eve of the Euro 2000 game, extremely cordial relations provided 'a pretty impressive backdrop to the football': 'As far as other aspects of relations between our two countries [are concerned] ... they were never closer or better than they are now.'⁸³ In June 2002 he reiterated these sentiments at Chatham House: 'our bilateral relations have never been better in living memory.'⁸⁴ Even so, the cautious stance adopted by the Major and Blair governments towards the European Union dashed hopes of a new era in British–German relations moving beyond the bad old days.⁸⁵ Britain's insular mentality, the enduring power of stereotypes, the vogue for cliché journalism exploiting fictional bogies, and Europhobic excesses ensured that wartime images fossilized rather than faded, and have been neither diminished nor superseded over time by more positive images reflecting today's Germany. Indeed, Nicholls feared that for younger age groups the position had regressed.⁸⁶

Nor has the situation been helped by the fact that media and popular perceptions of footballing contacts with Germany have been out of synchronization with those characterizing official discourse. Admittedly, the overall manner in which the three England–Germany games played during 2000–1 were viewed and presented by the media and opinion marked an advance upon the blinkered and bigoted attitudes accompanying Euro 96, but much still needs to be done, as was apparent in October 2000, when the *Sunday Times* printed one reader's concern about the Wembley crowd's chants mentioned in its match report:

For the English, German history seems to span from 1933 to 1945. As Rob Hughes reported (last week) the England football supporters' slogan 'Stand up if you won the war' very clearly demonstrates how brainwashed the young generation is to ignore the last 50 years of German history.⁸⁷

This complaint recalled comments made by Simon Barnes at the time of the 2002 World Cup draw:

⁸³ Von Ploetz, 'Let's hope football is the winner'; Boyes, 'Siblings at war'.

⁸⁴ Von Ploetz, 'The Hun has met the Sun'.

⁸⁵ Nicholls, *Fifty years of Anglo-German relations*, pp. 18–20; Heydemann, 'Grossbritannien und Deutschland', pp. 443–6; Gedye, 'Major eager to strengthen German ties'; Lee, *Victory in Europe*, pp. 216–26.

⁸⁶ Terence Hughes, *The image makers: national stereotypes and the media* (London: Goethe Institute, n.d. [1994]), p. 2; Moyle, 'The Ridley–Chequers affair', pp. 116–18; Heydemann, 'Partner or rival', pp. 138–40; Tenberg, 'Introduction', p. 2; *Don't mention the war*, Channel 5, 4 Oct. 2000. For evidence, based in part upon opinion polls, regarding an intensification of British suspicions of Germany, see Tony Halpin, 'We can't find ways of liking the Germans', *Daily Mail*, 30 Sept. 1997; Kielinger, *Crossroads and roundabouts*, pp. 18–19; Radice and Baldry, *House of Commons Debates*, 24 May 1995, vol. 260, cols 863, 868; Krönig, 'Vergiften die Medien?', p. 10; Jürgen Krönig (political correspondent of *Die Zeit*), *The 1999 Reuters Lecture. The mass media in the age of globalisation: implications for Anglo-German relations* (Canterbury: University of Kent at Canterbury, 1999), pp. 10–13.

⁸⁷ Letter from Erika Fabarius, London, to Sports Editor, *Sunday Times*, 15 Oct. 2000. In this vein, the editing process ensured that the views expressed about Germany by young people interviewed in a Channel 5 documentary suggested the static and bigoted nature of their attitudes: *Don't mention the war*, Channel 5, 4 Oct. 2000.

The playing field history goes so deep that if ever the two countries go to war again, it will be a case of 'don't mention the football'. The anguished, bloodless footballing skirmishes between England and Germany have done much to define the relations between the two countries, as war slowly becomes a matter of history rather than personal remembrance.⁸⁸

Perhaps Barnes was guilty of typical journalistic hyperbole, but sport's role in reflecting, articulating, influencing and reinforcing current and future British images of Germany, at least at the popular and media level, should not be underestimated.⁸⁹ Extensive coverage in both the political and sporting pages of newspapers, accompanied by leading articles, renders it difficult to contemplate a meaningless football match between the two countries. Also in October 2000, a *Times* editorial articulated the broader significance of the World Cup qualifier: 'England against Germany is the ultimate sporting encounter ... For England, Germany is the oldest enemy. Matches between them matter more than all the others ... Old ghosts and football history haunt the pitch.'⁹⁰ For many Britons, especially the young, sport provides perhaps the principal point of contact with contemporary Germany, as suggested by the Goethe Institute's 1996 survey asking British school students to identify prominent Germans. With the sole exception of Hitler, German sportsmen and women dominated the list.⁹¹ In fact, six sporting personalities, four of whom followed Hitler in the top five, were the only living Germans identified in the top eleven, alongside Beethoven and Einstein!

What Blair has described as 'the power of sport' has yet to be fully mobilized in the cause of improved British–German relations; but by implication, sport, though characterized hitherto principally as a vehicle for recycling wartime images, possesses the potential for propagating more positive views of today's Germany. To some extent, one way forward was suggested in May 1965, when Queen Elizabeth II undertook a state visit to West Germany. Frank Roberts, the British ambassador, ensured that Uwe Seeler, a leading German football international, was introduced to the queen as part of the embassy's efforts to reach Britons through the press and television with 'the message that the new German democracy had nothing in common with Hitler's Third Reich'.⁹² More recently, Kielinger pointed to Jürgen Klinsmann's role as a German sporting ambassador during his stay with Tottenham Hotspur.⁹³ Indeed, he was not only voted 1995 Footballer of the Year by England's football journalists but also challenged Hitler for top spot in the Goethe Institute's 1996 survey of Germans most commonly recognized in Britain. Today, Liverpool's Dietmar Hamann and Tottenham's Christian Ziege continue this ambassadorial role.

⁸⁸ Simon Barnes, 'Draw offers redemption with no penalty clause', *The Times*, 8 Dec. 1999. Note the 'Do mention the war' editorial in *Independent*, 17 June 2000.

⁸⁹ Beck, 'Britain, image-building and the world game', pp. 73–4.

⁹⁰ 'The Last Enemy', editorial, *The Times*, 7 Oct. 2000.

⁹¹ Sammon, *Coping with stereotypes*, p. 6. Cf. Simon Hoggart, 'Enterprise or culture?', *Observer Magazine*, 8 Aug. 1990, p. 5.

⁹² Roberts, *Dealing with dictators*, p. 244.

⁹³ Kielinger, *Crossroads and roundabouts*, pp. 187–8.

In the meantime, German football will continue to loom large in the sights of Britons. During any future battle in what Tenberg calls their 'football-war', the tone and language of surrounding media and public debates will be as interesting as the game itself, given the way in which any England team is handicapped by the weight of national expectation of another victory over the 'old enemy'.⁹⁴ In 1935 one press cartoon, previewing the forthcoming England–Germany international at White Hart Lane, suggested that the best way for England to win was for forwards to shout 'Heil!' and then to shoot the ball past the goalkeeper, whose arm would have been raised automatically in the Nazi salute.⁹⁵ Contemporary tabloid writings, permeated by Nazi and Second World War imagery, imply that such a tactic might work even today, whereas, of course, the reality is that during recent decades Germany has proved by far the more successful footballing nation. Also, as happened in October 2000 and again in June 2002, when what many saw as one of the country's less distinguished national teams reached the World Cup Final, history shows that German football should never be underestimated, particularly when under pressure and challenging for a major trophy. Indeed, even here it seems difficult to get away from past wars when trying to explain the lengthy run of German successes, especially in coping with the pressure of penalty shoot-outs. According to Klinsmann, the secret is to be found in his country's 'mentality': 'It has to do with German history, and the way we have had to twice [after two world wars] build up our country.'⁹⁶

Obviously, there is nothing original in pointing out history's impact upon present-day British–German relations, and particularly the manner in which memories and images of a twelve-year Nazi regime still overshadow the fifty-year-plus history of a peaceful democratic Germany. In many respects, the attitudes of many Britons, though moulded by past German realities, reflect their apparent difficulty in accommodating decline that is blamed on the world wars, in relating to continental Europe, and in accepting the growing political, economic and footballing power of a country defeated in two world wars and the 1966 World Cup Final.⁹⁷ As a result, Germany has suffered from the British tendency to go on reliving past glories—during the mid-1990s the fiftieth anniversary celebrations of the end of the Second World War reinforced the impact of footballing battles presented by an increasingly 'sensationalist sporting press'—rather than adjusting in a constructive fashion to a contemporary world witnessing dramatic shifts in the global balance of power.⁹⁸ Of particular relevance perhaps is Britain's persistent identity crisis in the wake of both empire

⁹⁴ Reinhard Tenberg, "'Szenen einer Beziehung': zum Deutschlandbild in den britischen Medien nach der Wende", in Tenberg, ed., *Intercultural perspectives*, p. 27.

⁹⁵ *Football Pictorial*, 2 Nov. 1935.

⁹⁶ ITV, *England versus Germany: the first 100 years*.

⁹⁷ Moyle, 'The Ridley–Chequers affair', p. 112; Heydemann, 'Partner or rival', pp. 146–7.

⁹⁸ Richard Holt and Tony Mason, *Sport in Britain, 1945–2000* (Oxford: Institute for Contemporary British History/Blackwell: 2000), pp. 172–3.

and the Cold War, most notably the difficulty of equating Britishness with toleration and openness rather than xenophobia and chauvinism.⁹⁹

Conclusion

Very different, and contradictory, attitudes towards the Germans coexist in the minds of Britons. The increasingly positive attitude articulated by Blair and other government ministers is frequently qualified in sections of the British media and opinion by a complex blend of mocking contempt and puerile humour centred upon outdated wartime stereotypes and simplistic clichés.¹⁰⁰ Of course, stereotypes will remain a fact of contemporary British life, offering a useful and powerful form of shorthand that helps us to make sense of relationships with other countries and cultures.¹⁰¹ Although this study has highlighted the dangers of such broad-brush subjectivism, for the time being, as one German journalist lamented, 'kraut bashing', like football, seems likely to remain a national sport in Britain.¹⁰²

In December 2002, critical comments made by the German ambassador in London about outdated British views on his country refocused attention upon the British–German problem, as articulated by a *Guardian* editorial headed 'Prisoners of the past':

It is absolutely pathetic that, more than half a century after the end of the second world war, this country is so lazy about its attitude to Germany ... The truth is that Britain, not Germany, is the nation that is the prisoner of its past ... German society is far more serious than we are about facing up to the past, far more knowledgeable about it, and far more committed to putting its lessons to the service of the future.¹⁰³

Clearly, a British–German problem exists and needs to be addressed on the British side—through, say, the avoidance of wartime stereotyping, an improved grasp of post-1945 German history, informed intercultural studies of today's Germany, educational exchanges, and more responsible British media coverage. Nor are British–German relations the sole preserve of governments. Contacts between people, including those between representative organizations and teams, matter too. In this vein, the role of sport, especially football, should be taken into account as both part of the problem and part of the solution. In the meantime, there remains the need to 'confront the British people with the

⁹⁹ John Theobald, 'Manufacturing Europhobia out of Germanophobia: case studies in populist propaganda', in Tenberg, ed., *Intercultural perspectives*, pp. 31, 39. This problem was illuminated by the Runnymede Report on multiculturalism and the National Centre for Social Research's annual survey of British Social Attitudes: *Daily Telegraph*, 25 Nov. 2000; *Guardian*, 28 Nov. 2000.

¹⁰⁰ Heydemann, 'Partner or rival', p. 129.

¹⁰¹ K. Peter Fritzsche, 'Can textbooks be without prejudices?', in Husemann, ed., *As others see us*, pp. 41–6; Tenberg, 'Introduction', pp. 1–4.

¹⁰² Jürgen Krönig, quoted in Hughes, *The image makers*, p. 25; Krönig, *The mass media in the age of globalisation*, pp. 13–15.

¹⁰³ 'Prisoners of the past: British views of Germany harm us all', *Guardian*, 10 Dec. 2002; Michael Burleigh, 'Don't let the Nazis occupy your mind', *Sunday Times*, 15 Dec. 2002.

The relevance of the 'irrelevant'

opportunity and the necessity of examining their own sentiments towards Germany and of approving or rejecting the core of that official British policy'.

The need for such re-examination is acute, as public opinion and Government policy towards Germany have for too long been out of step with one another, governed and influenced by considerations which on each side bear little or no relation to those working on the other ... At every level opinion is conditioned by the persistence of an image of Germany formed out of the experience of the two world wars.¹⁰⁴

Donald Cameron Watt's assessment, as quoted here and echoed recently by both Nicholls and the *Guardian*, proves very relevant to the theme of this article. The only problem is that Watt wrote this over 35 years ago.

¹⁰⁴ D. C. Watt, *Britain looks to Germany: a study of British opinion and policy towards Germany since 1945* (London: Oswald Wolff, 1965), pp. 13–14, p. 152. One participant in the 1994 Goethe Institute seminar argued the case for more and better history teaching: David Childs, quoted in Hughes, *The image makers*, p. 25. Arguably, the footballing problem might be helped if England proved capable of not only beating Germany more frequently but also winning major tournaments.