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Between Manipulation and Resistance: Viennese Football in the Nazi Era

What happens when everyday life, the ‘things we take for granted and usually do not discuss because they work automatically’¹ is suddenly disturbed because it collides with a different ‘mass phenomenon’? This is the question to be answered when analysing the ‘Vienna School of Football’ in the years of national socialism from 1938 to 1945.² What are the consequences when established practices, rituals and passions³ meet other structures, which are imposed out of the blue but all the more radically? To what extent could everyday culture resist the extreme ‘culture of national socialism’?

Studies of popular culture and everyday life during the years of national socialism have played an important role in coming to terms with that era since the beginning of the 1980s. Such studies have disproved the theory that almost everything in national socialism was ‘enlightened’,⁴ as only the framework and structure of the totalitarian regime were enlightened, but not the way it was dealt with. When writing about the popular phenomena of the Nazi era, there is always the danger of trivializing things.⁵ During the Nazi years, the Holocaust was relevant to Viennese football only to the extent that Jews were banned from participating in public sports, and football was also played in the concentration camps.⁶ From a military point of view, from 1941 soldiers on leave formed the core of many Viennese football clubs, and airforce sports clubs played an important role in football during the Third Reich.⁷

1 Konrad Köstlin, ‘Lust aufs Ganze. Die gedeutete Moderne oder die Moderne als Deutung — Volkskulturforschung in der Moderne’, *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Volkskunde*, L/98 (1995), 263.

2 Matthias Marschik, “‘Entscheidende Empfindungen’: Der ‘unpolitische’ Sport zwischen Konformität und Resistenz am Beispiel des Wiener Fußballs 1938–1945” in E. Müller and E. Schwameder (eds), *Aspekte der Sportwissenschaft* (Salzburg 1996), 9–22; Matthias Marschik, “‘Am Spielfeld ist die Wahrheit gewesen’. Die Wiener Fußballkultur in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus. Zwischen Vereinnahmung und Widerstand’, *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Volkskunde*, L/99 (1996), 181–203.

3 Christian Bromberger, Alain Hayot and Jean-Marc Mariottini, *Le match de football. Ethnologie d’une passion partisane à Marseille, Naples et Turin* (Paris 1995).

4 Wolfgang Benz, ‘Die Abwehr der Vergangenheit. Ein Problem nur für Historiker und Moralisten?’ in D. Diner (ed.), *Ist der Nationalsozialismus Geschichte? Zu Historisierung und Historikerstreit* (Frankfurt/M. 1987), 17–33.

5 Peter Reichel, *Der schöne Schein des Dritten Reiches. Faszination und Gewalt des Faschismus* (Frankfurt/M. 1993), 7.

6 Werner Pieper, *Der Ball gehört uns allen* (Lohrbach 1992), 172.

7 Karl-Heinz Schwind, *Geschichten aus einem Fußball-Jahrhundert* (Wien 1994), 121.

Peter Reichel⁸ has shown the danger emanating from the violence of a totalitarian regime and its ‘myths, decoration and staging’, which at the same time has fascinating aspects. But it is important to mention that football as a sport was not part of the ‘embellished reality of the nazi regime’ as were some areas of architecture, recreational culture (travel, music) and the nazi idea of sport (physical exercise and mass events). Analyses of people’s behaviour during the nazi era largely draw a clear line between ‘non-conformity and conformity, opposition and consent’, reflecting either the ‘enthusiastic approval of the masses’ or a silence and the ‘helplessness of the population’. Large parts of everyday life, however, would suggest another conclusion: ‘A partial rejection of national socialism existed in large sections of the population along with a partial acceptance.’⁹ This refers not exclusively to thinking and behaviour, but mainly to the ‘state-free sphere’, which was explicitly guaranteed by the nazi regime for a long time, at least until 1942.¹⁰

Football in Vienna was an area in which the government and politics supposedly did not interfere (though, in fact, they did all the time). But football was granted certain liberties, both at the organisational and club level and among individuals. ‘I was never involved with a party, I was always involved with football’, Josef Argauer, a long-time coach and sports journalist once said. Similar remarks were made by many football players commenting on their sport in the nazi era. This can only partly be attributed to the myth of football generally being a ‘non-political sport’, because it is part of the understanding of football players and fans, who see football as something different from everyday life and make a small ‘celebration’ of every game. The former football coach Josef Argauer said: ‘I was never a politician, only a fanatical athlete’.

As early as 1890 attempts were made in Austria to establish football at a few élitist schools.¹¹ In 1894, the first clubs were founded in Vienna and Graz, whose players were recruited mainly from members of the English colonies. Austrian players were only gradually accepted. The games soon found a limited, bourgeois audience. Admission fees were kept fairly high in order to keep away ‘inferior’ spectators. The names of the clubs, the usage of English sports jargon as well as the style of playing, with the emphasis on fair play, were tributes to the motherland of this sport. But soon there were less élitist imitators of the game, especially in Vienna. In the streets, parks and squares of the city, children and young people began to imitate the ‘English game’.

8 Reichel, *op. cit.*, 7.

9 Ian Kershaw, ‘Alltägliches und Außeralltägliches. Ihre Bedeutung für die Volksmeinung 1933–1939’ in D. Peukert and J. Reulecke (eds) *Die Reihen fast geschlossen. Beiträge zur Geschichte des Alltags unterm Nationalsozialismus* (Wuppertal 1981), 273.

10 Hans Dieter Schäfer, *Das gespaltene Bewußtsein. Über deutsche Kultur und Lebenswirklichkeit 1933–1945* (München and Wien 1981), 114; Gert Kerschbaumer, *Faszination Drittes Reich. Kunst und Alltag der Kulturmetropole Salzburg* (Salzburg 1988).

11 Matthias Marschik, *Vom Herrenspiel zum Männersport. Die ersten Jahre des Wiener Fußballs* (Wien 1997), 15.

Lacking a 'real' ball, they often chased after rag balls.¹² As football was quickly taken up by working-class youth, it lost its character as a bourgeois pastime since both players and spectators increasingly came from a working-class background, which also changed the character of the game. Winning became more important than playing a fair game, and among the working-class spectators a specific male proletarian culture grew up.

After the first world war, this transformation of football from an élitist to a proletarian sport was reflected in the steep increase in the number of clubs¹³ and of spectators. It was no longer unusual for 70 or 80,000 spectators to attend an important game. Within a few years, football gained a tremendous significance, equalled only by that of the cinema:¹⁴ 'The father has his beer, the mother her cinema and the brother his football.'¹⁵ In the early 1920s a diverse football culture already existed in Vienna. Its main characteristics were that it mobilized the masses and that it was dominated by males. Another important feature was that it was an urban culture: it was limited to Vienna and had more in common with the football culture of Prague and Budapest than with that of the rest of Austria. The resulting Central European School of Football,¹⁶ which was very famous in the 1930s, was thus dominated by those who had lost the first world war and were excluded from international competitions for many years.¹⁷ However, there were clear-cut lines between the city clubs, which were still élitist, and the suburban clubs, between bourgeois and proletarian fans, and between workers' and 'non-political' clubs.¹⁸

After attempts by social democrat officials to integrate football into their movement had failed, they had to agree to the introduction of professional football. This was the beginning of football's splitting into two associations, which became final in 1926. But even before the social democrats had attempted to monopolize football politically, it became obvious that fans and spectators, who were often politically affiliated with the socialists, wanted to keep sport as a politics-free zone and vehemently supported genuinely working-class football.¹⁹ The 1930s were the heyday of the Vienna school of

12 Leo Schidrowitz, *Geschichte des Fussballsportes in Österreich* (Wien, Wels and Frankfurt/M. 1951), 29.

13 Matthias Marschik, 'Topographie der freien Zeit', *SWS-Rundschau* 33, 3 (1993), 354.

14 Matthias Marschik and Johanna Dorer, 'Kino — Der Weg zum Massenmedium. Die Etablierung des Kinos am Beispiel der Stadt Wien', *Medium*, 23, 4 (1993), 74.

15 Michael John, 'Bürgersport, Massenattraktion und Medienereignis. Zur Kultur- und Sozialgeschichte des Fußballspiels in Österreich', *Beiträge zur Historischen Sozialkunde*, 22, 3 (1992), 78.

16 Michael John, 'Sports in Austrian Society 1890s–1930s: The Example of Viennese Football' in S. Zimmermann (ed.), *Urban Space and Identity in the European City 1890–1930s* (Budapest 1995), 133–50.

17 Pierre Lafranchi, 'Fußball in Europa 1920–1938. Die Entwicklung eines internationalen Netzwerkes' in R. Horak and W. Reiter (eds), *Die Kanten des runden Leders. Beiträge zur europäischen Fußballkultur* (Wien 1991), 168.

18 Roman Horak and Wolfgang Maderthaner, *Mehr als ein Spiel. Fußball und populäre Kulturen im Wien der Moderne* (Wien 1997).

19 Matthias Marschik, *Wir spielen nicht zum Vergnügen. Arbeiterfußball in der Ersten Republik* (Wien 1994), 205.

football, characterized by the success of the 'miracle team' and the individual clubs in the 'Mitropa Cup'. Only a few clubs were able to afford the financial burden of professionalism. All the others had great economic problems and just managed to survive in the lower leagues. The interest of the masses was enjoyed only by the national team, which was really a Viennese team, and a few major clubs, especially Austria and Rapid, two teams that were not just clubs but rather two different mentalities. The matches of these two clubs and of the national team were watched by at least 40,000 people. Going to see a football game was on every Viennese man's weekend schedule. Football was marketed, professional players became stars and many products were advertised using pictures of football players.²⁰

The popularity of football was also based on the fact that, at the time, it was the most important international feature of Vienna, which had largely lost its significance within Europe. The Vienna School of Football, however, was known all round the world. Even smaller clubs were constantly invited to tour other countries, and many players and trainers from Vienna transferred to foreign clubs;²¹ the Viennese style of playing, often referred to as 'Scheibergspiel', reflected the Viennese mentality in that it did not primarily aim at strength, but rather at cunning and technique, enjoyment of the game and, surprisingly, at individualism and variety. At the same time, Viennese football was an abstract ideal and a concrete example of the rise of the working class. The stars were successful representatives of the Viennese worker in all his facets. Moreover, a career as a professional footballer was often the only way to escape from unemployment, which was rampant at the time, and to provide for one's own and one's family's survival. Thus, the Viennese identified with 'their' football on different levels, or as Walter Bierschok, a player for the team of Helfort, put it: 'Football dominated my life'.

Three rounds of the 1938 spring championship had already been played when German troops invaded and it became clear in Viennese football circles as well that many things would not stay as they were. But the changes to sport, which were imposed rather suddenly in the 'Ostmark' after March 1938, had already been tried out over a five-year period in the German Reich. In concrete terms, this meant that national socialism had imposed a largely new organisation as well as new aims and objectives on sport.

As opposed to Austria, sport in Germany had been based on a strong exercise movement before the turn of the century. The national socialist regime built on this movement, but emphasized the 'nationalist aspect of sport and its significance in educating the people'.²² National socialist sport was characterized by the rejection of top performance and professionalism, and emphasis on physical and moral exercise and making 'the people as a whole' fit to

20 Wolfgang Maderthaner, 'Der "papierene" Tänzer. Matthias Sindelar, ein Wiener Fußballmythos' in Horak and Reiter, op. cit., 212.

21 Matthias Marschik, 'They lived like Heroes. Arbeitsemigration im österreichischen Fußball der dreißiger Jahre', *Spectrum der Sportwissenschaften*, 7, 2 (1995), 14–29.

22 Hajo Bernett, *Untersuchungen zur Zeitgeschichte des Sports* (Schorndorf 1973), 7.

fight.²³ The main aim was to reduce club sports and to transfer sports activities to several different party-affiliated organisations — the SA and SS, the Hitler Youth and the ‘Kraft durch Freude’ movement.

Yet football remained very important in Germany. Although it was rejected by the government due to its competitiveness and the danger of professionalism, it still remained the most popular sport. At the same time, it was used to win the working class over to the government and it fitted into the national socialist idea of staging mass events, as was shown at the Olympic Games in Berlin in 1936. In addition, football was the ideal way to offer a large part of the male population some distraction and total freedom. Schalke 04, the so-called ‘bourgeois workers’ club’, which was on the edge of breaking up in autumn 1930 due to non-compliance with the amateur rules, became the new showcase of nazi football, heavily supported by the regime.²⁴ Soon Schalke also turned into the biggest challenge to Viennese football.

Shortly after Austria was annexed by Germany, Viennese football was subjected to drastic changes. All sport in Austria became subject to the premises and objectives of nazi sport policy and was formalized accordingly. A large part of sport was subordinated to the state and party organisations created for this purpose and thus removed from the influence of individuals. Training in military qualities and ‘race’ consciousness was promoted and a strict separation of the sexes introduced. Club sport was reduced to a minimum and abolished completely for young people, while school sport was expanded significantly.²⁵

Football in Vienna thus experienced substantial changes right from the beginning. On the one hand, smaller clubs were confronted with worries, which in many cases led to the discontinuation of their activities by the beginning of the war. On the other hand, many pitches were closed to football games because they were needed for military training. Furthermore, the clubs no longer attracted new young athletes, as they were all trained by the Hitler Youth and by schools. This also meant the end of street football, which in turn deprived Viennese football of the raw material upon which it relied. As the *Sport-Tagblatt* wrote somewhat ambiguously,²⁶ it was the end of a time when

... for decades young boys used their mothers’ stockings to make rag balls, when every little street in a suburb had their ‘Horvath’, ‘Schindi’ or ‘Uridil’, young people showing off their excellent techniques in the street. ... Today, our youth no longer needs to play their favourite sport under such difficult circumstances.

As a result of reforming intervention, football as played by the smaller clubs and in the streets, together with the clubs’ work with the younger generation

23 Rudolf Müllner, *Die Mobilisierung der Körper. Der Schul- und Hochschulsport im nationalsozialistischen Österreich* (Wien 1993), 34.

24 Dietrich Schulze-Marmeling, *Der gezähmte Fußball. Zur Geschichte eines subversiven Sports* (Göttingen 1992), 118.

25 George L. Mosse, *Nazi Culture* (New York 1978), 285.

26 *Sport-Tagblatt*, 24.4.1938, 3.

of players, disappeared almost completely. Top-class football underwent a different development. Within a few weeks, some major changes were made, but these could not alter the role and importance of football in Vienna. The mass culture of Viennese football was by no means suppressed by the new regime, and the nazi government was well aware that it would be better gently to adapt football culture to its own ideas or to use it as an instrument, but at the same time leave its external appearance unchanged. Thus the working class would be appeased,²⁷ a distraction provided and the 'Viennese soul' calmed in the light of Vienna's relegation to a provincial city.²⁸

Two days after the Anschluss, some football games were played, but not all those scheduled, such as the cup match between the Jewish sports club, Hakoah, and Simmering. On 14 March all Jewish clubs were banned from any further activity, and Jewish players were only allowed within the framework of the 'Maccabi Vienna'.²⁹ They were excluded from all sport, which affected in particular the football club, Austria. Almost all managers and half the players left the country. The club was temporarily closed and subsequently put under 'kommissarische Leitung' (provisional administration). Sports journalism was also 'purged' of its Jewish members. In public, these measures were accepted without comment, or even welcomed. Several clubs suddenly called on their nazi past, especially the Wiener Sportklub, a club that had always emphasized its nationalist aspect.

Clubs which could not fall back on their nazi-friendly past tried to compensate by appointing personalities from the SA, SS or NSDAP to their management. SK Rapid, for instance, made Otto Steinhäusl, Vienna's head of police, its honorary president, and awarded Thomas Kozich, deputy mayor and the man responsible for sports in Vienna, its golden badge of honour. To be on the safe side, district commissioner Franz Heymann was appointed 'Dietwart' of the club. The WAC, in turn, found its advocate in Otto Smolik, a district official in Vienna and illegal nazi before 1938. Such methods served both sides: from the clubs' point of view they helped to bypass the strict rules of the Hitler Youth regarding young players and postponed military service for important players or ensured that they were based in Vienna so that they would be available for important games. This coincided with the interests of the regime, which aimed to maintain football games anyway. Moreover, it had its people in every club, so that they could exercise control and pressure.

The next important step, taken after the spring season ended, was to abolish professional football. This measure was well received as it satisfied those of the opinion that professional football could not be financed in Vienna, but it was also considered proof that the national socialists took their promise of full

27 Rudolf G. Ardelt, 'Einleitung' in R. Floimair (ed.), *Nationalsozialismus und Krieg. Ein Lesebuch zur Geschichte Salzburgs* (Salzburg, Pustet 1993), 19.

28 Gerhard Botz, *Nationalsozialismus in Wien. Machtübernahme und Herrschaftssicherung 1938–1939* (3rd edn, Wien and München 1988), 16–17.

29 John Bunzl, *Hoppauf Hakoah. Jüdischer Sport in Österreich. Von den Anfängen bis in die Gegenwart* (Wien 1987), 127–8.

employment seriously, as even those who had a private income were integrated into the work process. Starting in summer 1938, several newspapers featured articles on former professional footballers in their new jobs. These showed Matthias Sindelar at his café ('Sindi looks after all his customers'), Willy Hahnmann at the municipal office for the disabled ('attentive and accurate — both in the penalty area and at the typewriter'), Stefan Skoumal as a cabinet-maker ('no wonder his passes fit like a well-cut piece of wood') and Pepi Stroh at a petrol station ('sells petrol and writes autographs').³⁰ However, the attitude towards professionals changed in 1940, when many spectators noticed a considerable decline in performance in Viennese football, although it was known that both fixed salaries and bonuses continued to be paid illegally.

Another change of direction affected the integration of clubs of other districts into the top league, the so-called 'Gauliga'. However, this plan to reduce Viennese domination had the opposite effect: clubs from Graz, Linz, Steyr and Wiener Neustadt repeatedly ranked last in the following years and suffered record two-digit defeats, which only earned them the scorn of the Viennese football fans. All these changes occurred without any great reaction from the football-interested public, as they did not cause any great difference in the substance of Viennese football. For the popular culture of football, other measures were far more conspicuous: English-sounding club names had to be 'Germanized', players who had joined the military had to wear the insignia of their branch or service, sports fields had to be decorated with swastika flags, and before and after each game the players and officials had to give the 'German sports salute'.³¹ National socialist order had also entered the football field, but in Vienna it was usually seen as 'Prussian order'.

Just as everywhere else, acts of open resistance to the national socialist regime were limited to a few single incidents. However, resistance manifested itself in the productions of 'Wien-Film'³² and their reception by the public, as well as in fashion, theatre, cabaret, carnival, the Viennese waltz and the youth culture of swing, in the continuous complaints about the nutritional situation and the kind of food available in the markets; it was not so much resistance directed at the regime, but rather anti-Prussian resentment, which was often open and constituted a stubborn, though rather quiet, rebellion against the 'Germans', often referred to as 'Piefke' by Austrians. This manifestation of resistance had implications of social protest and civil disobedience,³³ which were often vehemently displayed in football.

Shortly after the Anschluss, Vienna became more and more 'Prussian', and attempts to replace typical Viennese carelessness with German thoroughness

30 *Reichssportblatt*, 23.9.1938, 4–6.

31 *Fußball-Sonntag*, 20.3.1938, 12.

32 Bernhard Frankfurter, 'Rund um die "Wien-Film"-Produktion. Staatsinteressen als Impulsgeber des Massenmediums eines Jahrzehnts' in L. Wächter-Böhm (ed.), *Wien 1945. davor/danach* (Wien 1985), 185–95.

33 Margit Oberlander, *Die 'Verpreußung' Österreichs nach dem 'Anschluß'. Konflikte zwischen Altreichsdeutschen und Ostmärkern von 1938–1945* (PhD thesis, Wien 1986), 115.

could be felt everywhere — SA members patrolled the streets and ‘Schupos’ (police officers) from Berlin supervised the ‘referendum’ on whether Austria should become part of Germany. The presence of ‘German order’ was demonstrated with a certain amount of arrogance and was met with anti-German reaction. From mid-March 1938, most activities of the nazi regime in Vienna were geared towards the planned referendum. Thus a football game scheduled for 3 April 1938 was used as a propaganda exercise. The stadium was decorated all over with swastika flags, and all available prominent party members were present. Certain information indicates that the game was supposed to end in a tie, but the team of the Ostmark, wearing red-white-red uniforms at Matthias Sindelar’s request, won 2–0. After the second goal, ‘Sindelar ran to the stand where all the nazi big shots were sitting and performed a dance of joy.’³⁴ According to a report in the daily *Kronen Zeitung*,³⁵ Karl Sesta was also ‘overwhelmed with joy and all spectators felt the same way’. Sindelar and Sesta were the Viennese fans’ favourites and their nicknames ‘Papierener’ (the paper one) and ‘Blader’ (the fat one) show very clearly that they did not exactly correspond to the ideal of the Aryan man.

In any case, the spectators at the stadium were convinced that the Germans had been put in their place. The intended sports referendum had obviously failed, but at the same time it succeeded, simply because the game had been presented in such a propagandistic way — the first evidence of how closely related manipulation and resistance were. The Austrian newspapers celebrated the win of ‘their’ team, whereas the German sports papers adopted a much more neutral tone: ‘German football spring in Vienna’, ‘National team beaten by excellent play’ or even ‘Austria’s eleven for world championship’.³⁶

Because of his brilliant performance on the field and also because he refused to play for the German national team, Matthias Sindelar became a star, not only in football but also in the rebellion against the Prussians. Some remember Sindelar politely declining to play in the national team, telling the coach that he was getting too old, but others maintain that he emphasized his refusal to play by abusing the coach and that he was only just saved from being sent to a concentration camp. At the same time, the national socialists successfully used the player’s popularity for their own purposes: on the day of the referendum the Viennese edition of the *Völkischer Beobachter*³⁷ showed a picture of Sindelar and a sentence in his handwriting: ‘We football players thank our Führer from the bottom of our hearts and vote “yes”!’

Anti-Prussian resentment was a feature of Viennese football until at least 1943. Soon after the ‘annexation game’, this resentment became virulent again. The world championships were about to begin, raising two issues: that of putting players from the Ostmark into the pool of players and that of the style of playing. All football experts agreed that the German style, which

34 Maderthaner, op. cit., 213.

35 *Kronen Zeitung*, 4.4.1939, 9.

36 *Kicker*, 6.4.1938; *Reichssportblatt*, 5.4.1938; *Fußball*, 5.4.1938.

37 *Völkischer Beobachter* (Wiener Ausgabe), 10.4.1938, 17.

emphasized strength, and the Austrian style, which focused on other aspects, could not be combined. Yet, the German trainer tried to do so and failed: the team dropped out after the first match. This was the beginning of years of both verbal and physical conflict between Viennese and German football, which always boiled down to the question of style of playing.

The main reason for this was that football was an apparently non-political topic which could be discussed without fear of punishments despite the repression of all national quarrels, even by the Viennese nazi press, which otherwise clearly aligned itself with nazi views. But football reports proved that there were certain 'free areas'. There were obvious differences, even between the various regional editions of the *Völkischer Beobachter*. The Viennese edition was not just mouthing empty phrases when it said that it was working 'in the service of Viennese football without support and without any doubts'.³⁸ This led to openly published attacks by the Viennese sports press on the 'Altreich' as well as to several internal studies by the SS. One report of April 1940 explicitly points out that the behaviour of the press in Vienna was often contrary to national socialist policy and that 'at several events, the press had adopted a completely unacceptable position'.³⁹ Yet, not even such reports managed to change the way in which Viennese newspapers wrote about football. So at least on the sports page one could read between the lines, despite all efforts at streamlining.

The main topic on which the media differed was the German style of playing versus the Viennese style: the strong, athletic but unimaginative style of the German players versus the creative Viennese style. In Vienna, the German straightforward manner of play was associated with blind obedience, the intricate Viennese way with cunning and the ability to score a goal by making complicated or surprising moves. It was pointed out again and again that the difference in the styles of playing was a reflection of the completely different mentalities. The 'Wiener Schmäh' (the Viennese mentality of not taking things too seriously and with a certain sense of humour) was contrasted with German strength.⁴⁰ 'A German march is no match for the Viennese waltz, no matter how vigorous or dashing it may sound', an almanac stated as late as 1980.⁴¹ This opinion prevailed even more during the nazi era.

Regarding the style of playing, the Viennese papers pointed out more or less directly, that — despite its success — football from the Ostmark was at a disadvantage compared to that from the 'Altreich'. Viennese teams were extremely successful against the German teams, especially in the first 18 months, with both the selection of the Ostmark and the clubs celebrating

38 *Völkischer Beobachter* (Wiener Ausgabe), 19.11.1940, 10. The great German sports papers at this time (*Kicker*, *Reichssportblatt* and *Fußball*) worked out a completely different way of reporting, using a very neutral language, which tried to play down the differences.

39 Archiv der Republik, Reichsstatthalterei Wien, Bestand Schirach, O. 388.

40 John, *op. cit.*, 80–1.

41 *Fußball in Österreich. Der große farbige Fußball-Almanach. Fußball in Österreich seit Anbeginn bis in die Gegenwart* (Wien 1980), 14.

walkover victories against teams from the Altreich. Austria beat Schalke 2–0 and Rapid beat the reigning German champion, Hannover 96, 11–1, which was celebrated as a great victory over the ‘Prussians’ in Vienna, whereas the *Reichssportblatt* called it a ‘well-earned win’ by the ‘more competent’ team.⁴²

The Viennese spectators flooded the stadiums, especially for games against German teams, and after each victory they celebrated their team’s win euphorically. International matches had nearly disappeared in the Ostmark, and in national games the Viennese considered themselves almost unbeatable. Football was apparently the only area in which Vienna managed to maintain its former position as a metropolis. Otherwise, ‘everything in the Altreich was always considered, better, more beautiful and more modern’.⁴³ Football thus occupied an important place in the media and in (male) everyday discourse. Almost all Vienna defined or identified itself with success in football, especially as it was the only measurable success, as opposed to that of Viennese movies, for instance.

In June 1939, this euphoria was destroyed by one single blow, a devastating 0–9 defeat of Admira by the arch enemy, Schalke 04, in the final of the German championships. Hundreds of thousands had listened to the radio broadcast of the event from the Olympic Stadium in Berlin, and although there was little evidence, in Vienna it was unanimously felt that the game had not been won on the football field, but was the result of the deliberate disadvantages Vienna was experiencing in everyday life as well. Also, the Viennese papers searched for excuses and reasons for this disaster, while the papers of the Altreich began to adopt a new tone — one of superiority: Admira had to look to its game to find reasons for the rout and to accept it as a fact, even if it was ‘not incurable’.⁴⁴

The consequence of this match was an escalation in the confrontation between Viennese football and that of the Altreich. Each game was played as if determining who ruled German football, accusations and allegations of political influence accompanied every game, and physical confrontation was a common occurrence. But one event was seen as heralding the end of Vienna’s dominance in football, although it was not a sporting event. When, on the morning of 23 January 1939, the news of Matthias Sindelar’s death spread like wildfire through Vienna, everyone knew that an era in Viennese football had ended. Although the rumour that it was suicide has never been confirmed, in

... his famous and frequently quoted ‘Ballad on the Death of a Footballer’ [a story which played a certain role in Allied propaganda during the war, especially broadcast over Voice of America], Friedrich Torberg leaves no doubt that the centre-forward committed suicide because he no longer wished to live during a period of barbarism to which Viennese football

42 *Reichssportblatt*, 14.6.1939.

43 Angela Hareiter, ‘Man sollte fleischfarben sein. Die Alltagskulisse bleibt, die Requisiten ändern sich’ in Wächter-Böhm, op cit., 42.

44 *Kicker*, 21.6.1939; *Reichssportblatt*, 20.6.1939.

fell victim together with so much else — and in which in football, as in life, the Vienna School had no place.⁴⁵

In September 1939, the second world war began, bringing about once again a rapid deterioration in the food supply that was comparable to the winters of famine of 1917 and 1918. With the outbreak of war, football took on a new role: it compensated the people for all their deprivations and distracted them from their precarious domestic situation. Soon after war broke out, the SS reported that the working class no longer paid any attention to foreign policy and military issues, but were only interested in their personal worries concerning everyday life.⁴⁶

This was probably the reason why football experienced another boom. Although many were recruited by the military, the number of spectators at Vienna's football matches rose again, even though the 'war championships' were characterized by the absence of many prominent players from every club. According to contemporary reports, however, the fans had become more radical, and fights occurred not only at matches against German teams but also at local games. In September 1940, fights and clearly anti-Prussian demonstrations took place during the game between the club Austria and Schalke, and the following month the SS reported of a match between Rapid and Fürth: 'No sports event involving teams from the Ostmark and the "Altreich" or even a referee from the "Altreich" goes by without confrontation or unwanted scenes.'⁴⁷

In November 1940, the return match between Admira and Schalke 04 took place in Vienna. Although it was intended as a gesture of reconciliation, the Viennese fans viewed it as a confrontation right from the beginning, especially after they found out that the referee was Gerhard Schulz, who had refereed the 1939 game in Berlin. After he refused to give two goals by Admira, which the fans considered good, the crowd was furious. The game ended in a 1–1 draw.

The result: the police were called in against the rioting masses, seats were destroyed and windows broken, policemen were beaten up and the limousine of district leader Baldur von Schirach ended up with slashed tyres and broken windows in front of the stadium. A sports demonstration turned into a political one.⁴⁸

Even 50 years after this event a feeling of pride can be sensed in many of the memories of Viennese chroniclers, pride for getting even with the Germans. In addition, anti-Prussian riots were interpreted as resistance to the regime. It must be stated, however, that in part they really were acts of resistance, as the terms 'Prussian', 'German' and 'Piefke' were partly synonymous with 'nazi'.⁴⁹

45 Roman Horak and Wolfgang Maderthner, 'A Culture of Urban Cosmopolitanism: Uridil and Sindelar as Viennese Coffee-House Heroes' in *International Journal for the History of Sport*, 12, 2 (1995), 153; Maderthner, op. cit., 214.

46 Archiv der Republik, Reichsstatthalterei Wien, Bestand Schirach, O. 388.

47 Ibid.

48 Schwind, op. cit., 114.

49 Oberlander, op. cit., 1.

It goes without saying that such behaviour was heavily criticized by the media, who, however, did not mention the issue of the ‘Ostmark-German’ hatred. The fans, however, agreed on one thing: it was ‘a demonstration against the “Piefkes”’, as Johann Schliesser, an eye-witness, put it. Karl Stuiber, who was directly involved, reported that his gang had decided the following:

If we did not win the return match, we would destroy everything and beat up the Piefkes. . . . And then the game was over — it was a tie — and we ran onto the field and hit all those from Schalke, and before they left, we threw things at their buses, and then we ran into the Prater and hid from them.

Karl Kowanz, then a young player for Admira, even saw some benefit in the riot: ‘Because of this, later they did not dare to interfere as much when they came over from the Altreich.’

After this game, anti-Prussian demonstrations continued on the football field. The situation was made worse by the fact that the Viennese teams were now also abused in the Altreich, their fans beaten up and their players presented in a bad light by the media. Therefore it is understandable that even today Rapid’s victory over Schalke 04 in the German championships of 1941, which was won in Berlin of all places, is considered one of the greatest successes in Viennese football. Rapid’s victory was not only revenge for Admira’s defeat two years earlier, it was also the ‘resurrection’ of Vienna. Tens of thousands of fans welcomed the team of Rapid at the Westbahnhof when they returned home and booed the official speakers, some of Vienna’s prominent nazis. Soon after Schalke’s defeat, the NS-regime took revenge: within the next few months almost all the players of the victorious Rapid team were ordered to the front.⁵⁰

Although acts of resistance seemed to be the main feature of Viennese football, the regime’s technique of using football for its own purposes must not be ignored. Apart from the fact that the possibility of dissident behaviour was partly due to limited bureaucratic control⁵¹ and to the unclear distribution of responsibility, the regime was interested in keeping Viennese football running smoothly. It conveyed feelings of normality, of familiarity, despite all the political and social changes, and it presented men with the opportunity to act freely. Maintaining this situation helped to preserve the remaining self-confidence of Vienna, which was now a provincial city, and to channel resistance.

The history of the club Vienna as the Viennese club which experienced the greatest boost during the nazi era, is a paradigm in this context. The manage-

50 Even the *Kicker* (24.6.1941) had to accept the win by Rapid, although it tried to explain the reasons for Schalke’s defeat and ascribed it to a lack of luck, whereas the *Reichssportblatt* (23.6.1941) wrote an enthusiastic story about an exciting game without a ‘real’ winner. But the *Kicker* also reacted to Rapid’s success, publishing a special edition on the Austrian ‘miracle team’, in which, of course, every reference to its Jewish trainer, Hugo Meisl, is absent: *Das Wunderteam. Aufstieg und Ruhm der berühmtesten europäischen Fußballmannschaft* (Nürnberg 1941).

51 Schäfer, op. cit., 133.

ment of Vienna understood how to come to an agreement with the regime and managed to obtain a large number of players from the Altreich this way. Furthermore, Vienna was also promoted by Curt Reinisch, the chief of staff of the Viennese and military hospitals. He managed to employ some of the Vienna players in the first aid ward and thus ensured that they stayed in Vienna. He also saw to it that some prominent players, who were patients at the Viennese military hospitals, took a particularly long time to recover or suffered new injuries, which, however, did not prevent them from playing football. As obvious as it is that Reinisch prevented a great number of young men from being sent to the front and thus probably saved their lives, it is also clear that such manipulation could not have worked without the silent consent of the powers that be. The regime tolerated such action because it was in its best interest to maintain Viennese football. 'Maintaining' is also the key term in the development of Viennese football from about 1942: in view of the ever more desperate situation in Vienna, the primary task of surviving became more and more important. The number of football fans in Vienna was reduced because of military call-up and football events beyond the local level became rarer and rarer. All of this contributed to a notable de-escalation in the football scene. The main function of football was now to provide a little distraction, at least for a couple of hours a week, and the importance of football declined as well as the number of spectators and general interest in the sport. Results, victories and defeats mattered less and less. Yet, both the regime and the spectators were highly interested in continuing the championships. Therefore they were continued until March 1945, even though both players and supporters often had to endure hour-long rides on trucks, which had been organized with great effort, or even to walk to the other end of town only to find out that the game had been cancelled due to a bomb alarm.

What barely changed, though, was the interaction between resistance and manipulation, for there was still interest in the continuation of a regular football scene: the (male) population did not want to be deprived of its last pleasure apart from the cinema, and the regime did not want the game to disappear. In addition, both active and passively received sports contributed to the population's physical and psychological fitness to fight. While theatres, dance halls and other places of entertainment had long been closed, the opinion regarding sport was: 'All important military leaders agree on the necessity of physical exercise. The effect of sport and exercise on the people's health, productivity and attitude in general is also evident.'⁵²

Young people, armament workers and the few soldiers based near Vienna formed the core of the teams, which were supported by soldiers on leave or, now and again, those recovering. But here also the interaction between manipulation and resistance can be observed. Franz Konecny, for instance, who had been admitted to hospital with a serious leg injury in 1943, pretended for months that his injury had not healed completely, while playing for Admira

52 *Neues Tagblatt*, 27.8.1944, 6.

every Sunday and becoming the top-scoring player in the first league. His activities could be covered up because of another man who had the same name but nothing to do with football. When the hoax was discovered, the doctor responsible was bribed with 15 free tickets to every Admira game. Konecny played in the first league until the end of the war.

There are several examples which show that this was not a unique case. Many players had two or more IDs. Before matches, the names of the team members were announced very unclearly or not at all. Some players inflicted injuries on themselves in order to be able to stay in Vienna. At any rate, it is hardly imaginable that such activities went unnoticed: while even children were sent to fight during the last few months of the war, there were still hundreds of young men running around the few remaining football fields each weekend. This would have been impossible without the acquiescence of the regime, or at least of some of its exponents.

The prerequisite for football as a medium for both potential and actual dissidence and as a means of manipulation⁵³ was that it was 'non-political' on the surface. The example of the Nazi era shows that football really was non-political because the attempts at both resistance and manipulation balanced each other out. Both sides were interested in continuing the tradition as each could claim success in maintaining an everyday situation. The players themselves were also quite content with this situation as they looked for and found freedom from omnipresent politics in football. According to Otto Fodrek, 'Politics never played any part in football. . . . Nobody ever said a word about a party or anything else.' Alfred Körner, who later played for Rapid, thinks that football as a sport could not be influenced: 'On the football field, there was truth.' Certainly, it was a truth that was characterized by fear. And Robert Dienst remembers: 'The people were quiet, nobody dared to say or do anything, nobody. Especially not at the club. Our trainer always told us: "Guys, this is none of our business. We play football, and nothing else interests us."'

But this truth could be bent different ways. First, 'non-political' football was a means of agitation for the regime, later it was used to keep up normality, and for the spectators it was a free space in which they could express themselves, continue a tradition, and now and again rebel against the oppressor without being punished. Daily police reports contained hundreds of charges related to statements criticizing the regime, statements usually made in those public places where the regime did not have total control and which therefore had an illegal connotation: in cafés, on public transport or in the street. They did not include a single statement made at a football match. For both players and fans, football was 'a little happiness', which made them forget the deprivations they suffered during the week. After all, this promise of 'a little happiness' was one of the crucial offers of identification that the regime made: travel, a Volkswagen, one's own home, modern consumer goods and appliances were

53 Martin Polley, *Moving the Goalposts. A History of Sport and Society since 1945* (London and New York 1998), 16.

promised to everyone, but hardly ever did those dreams come true. The people's little happiness in football, however, came true every weekend. As Otto Fodrek remembers:

You always prepared for it, a week in advance you got ready for the next game. You lived for this sport. Especially in those years when I was young, football was *the* task in my life and I felt that football fulfilled my life.

Therefore, maintaining football in Vienna was not an act of resistance but simply an attempt to keep up a tradition.

The resistance of Viennese football thus cannot be described using political terminology. Defending Viennese football was a fight to maintain something different. After all, non-political football was 'only' a game — though one that attracted a very big audience — that functioned according to the motto, 'The show must go on'. But it was this 'show' character that was endangered by national socialism in Viennese football, and the aim was to keep it up. However, 'show' is different from sport, a show is entertainment, which is produced for the pleasure of an audience. A sports show is not the same as sport, as it does not work according to the rules of sport, or according to fair-play or to the motto, 'May the best one win'. But show is not politics either, which is why the phrase 'non-political football' is correct. It is not that the football players and fans are non-political, but rather that these people are non-political as football players and fans.

A show means putting something on stage, which produces happiness and suffering, and acts as entertainment,⁵⁴ with a happy ending. Viennese football culture was a specifically Viennese type of such entertainment, which was tailor-made for (male) Viennese society and its mentality and expectations. And it was exactly this entertainment, this show of something between physical culture and armchair exercise,⁵⁵ that the Viennese would not do without.

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54 Richard Dyer, *Only Entertainment* (London and New York 1992), 3.

55 David Rowe, *Popular Cultures. Rock Music, Sport and the Politics of Pleasure* (London, Thousand Oaks and New Dehli 1995), 144.