6 The future of football is female!?

On the past and present of women's football in Germany[1]

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Introduction

'The future of football is female', declared FIFA president Joseph Blatter after the women's football World Championship in 1995. Whether or not his prediction will turn out to be correct will be discussed in the second part of this chapter. Football has a future in Germany, not least because of the World Championship which will take place in Berlin in 2006. In Germany, football is definitely on the agenda today, with books on football being published, discussions held and exhibitions planned. Politicians, artists and scholars are certainly talking about and reflecting on football – but about 'proper' football, i.e. the male version.

From the very start, football and masculinity were closely intertwined. In the 1880s, English students, businessmen and sailors imported football into Germany, where it was looked upon as being such an aggressive, exhausting and dangerous game that anxious physicians and educationists wanted to see football banned, especially for boys. But this opposition could not stop the enormous popularity of the game. Certainly by the end of the First World War football had become Germany's national sport, awakening both the interest and the national feelings of the (male) population (Pfister 2003a). Football provided (and still does provide) a stage upon which male attributes and behaviour such as toughness, strength and a fighting spirit are not only expected but also demonstrated and rewarded. The football stadium is a place where – whether on the pitch or in the stands – men can be men and act like 'real' men, and where fans can identify with players and imagine themselves as heroes (see, for example, Dunning 1986; Marschik 2003). Fighting for possession of the ball, the 'sworn brotherhood' of eleven players, the chanting and singing on the terraces ('*Deutschland vor – noch ein Tor*' ['Germany in the lead – another goal we need']), the playing of the game live and its coverage by the mass media, the speeches, texts and pictures, the numerous associations, symbols and myths – all this contributes towards the glorification of masculinity and national superiority. The language of football likewise belongs to the world of men, a world full of metaphors depicting the game as a battle and the players as soldiers and heroes attacking

and defending, striking and shooting and, in the end, either claiming victory or suffering defeat.

For a very long time women did not exist in this world, since football was totally incompatible with femininity. The exclusion and later the marginalization of women in football contributed at the same time to the construction and presentation of gender differences, and thus to the reproduction of a gender order based on gender duality. The question arises as to whether the growing popularity of women's football in recent years has changed the world of football and whether, in general, it signals a change in the gender arrangements prevailing in society. In this chapter, I reconstruct the history of women's football in Germany, analyse the initiatives for and the opposition to the participation of women in this 'unfeminine' sport, and describe the opportunities as well as the challenges for female football players today. In conclusion, I will discuss the prevalent discourses and reconstructions of gender in and through football.

From German gymnastics to sport and football – men's spheres

Backgrounds and contexts – women and physical activities

The development of women's soccer in Germany can only be understood against the backdrop of the social order and the gender arrangements of the time, and in the context of the developments of movement cultures such as *Turnen* and sport. *Turnen* (German gymnastics) developed at the beginning of the nineteenth century as a reaction to social and economic changes as well as to the military and political challenges of the period. The aim of the *Turner* movement was to liberate Germany from French occupation, to overthrow the feudal order, and to overcome the division of Germany into small kingdoms and principalities and form a German nation state. *Turnen* was developed by men and for men. The exclusion of women can be explained, on the one hand, with the political and military aims of *Turnen* and, on the other, with the role of women in the nineteenth century – a role which denied them, among other things, political rights, university education and academic professions. Legitimised by the theory of the polar differences between the 'natures' and the characteristics of the two sexes, women were considered the 'weaker sex' and their activities restricted to the home, the family and motherhood. Because of the myth of the 'weaker sex' and women's 'predestination' as wives and mothers, the participation of women in strenuous and dangerous exercises was unthinkable (Pfister and Langenfeld 1980, 1982).

From the 1830s onwards some physical education teachers provided courses in gymnastics for girls with the promise of improved health and enhanced grace, but it was not until the end of the 1880s that adult women began to take up *Turnen*. They founded women's gymnastics associations

or formed women's sections in men's *Turnen* clubs, where, however, they were denied the same membership rights as the male *Turner*. Girls' and women's gymnastics followed the principle of 'heads up and legs down' and, for the most part, consisted of simple and easy exercises on apparatus and gymnastic exercises (Pfister 1980).

By the end of the nineteenth century, English sports had spread to Germany. In stark contrast to *Turnen*, sport emphasized competition, quantifiable performance and records, thus giving rise to a serious conflict between the *Turner* movement and advocates of sport. It was a question not only of values and tastes but also of power and influence: whereas the *Turner* propagated the training of the whole body, the inclusion of the (male) masses and nationalism, sport was about specialisation, top performances and international competitions and comparisons (Pfister 2003b). The *Turner* concentrated their attacks on football, which was denounced as being un-German, unaesthetic and dangerous. While the number of female members joining *Turnen* clubs increased towards the turn of the century, sport was still considered to be particularly 'unfeminine'. Nevertheless, women, too, were overcome by the growing fascination with sport and dared – at first individually – to take up various sports from cycling to skiing.

In most sports women were confronted with specific problems, reflecting established opinions with regard to the abilities and competences of the so called 'weaker sex' on the one hand and the expectations which society had of women (and also of men) on the other. Swimming was problematic because women in bathing suits supposedly undermined public morals and offended the laws of propriety. And, since rowing was believed to be too strenuous for them, women rowers were restricted to competitions in style which focused on exact movements rather than on speed. Athletics was looked upon as especially unfeminine because it was competition-oriented and thus allegedly exceeded women's physical as well as mental capacities.

In Germany, the First World War had far-reaching consequences, bringing about fundamental changes to the political, social and economic situation. The political and economic problems and the related insecurity and crises of identity which followed Germany's defeat created a climate favouring manifold and, in part, contradictory developments in all areas of life. For women, these changes brought with them new opportunities: they now had access to university education and academic professions, and in 1919, through universal suffrage and the right to vote, they gradually gained political influence and power. Fashion freed women from corsets and long skirts, and the abolition of traditional norms and values gave women access, at least as long as they were single, to the labour market. However, this does not mean that the gender hierarchy had disappeared. Women mostly worked in low-paid occupations in factories or offices and, upon marrying, entered a new state of dependence, this time on their husband as the head of the family. However, it must be added that the expectations which society had

of women and the circumstances of their personal lives were dependent to a great degree on their social backgrounds and the attitudes of their surroundings. Although women's ideals and roles were various and ambivalent, the staunch belief in the unchangeable 'natures' as well as the pre-ordained order of men and women dominated popular wisdom (Frevert 1995).

During this period, increasing numbers of German women started to take part in physical activities, leading to a heated debate on the question of whether women ought to be allowed to take up sports which demanded strength, endurance or aggressiveness and whether it was appropriate for the 'weaker sex' to play in contests. The majority of educationists, physicians and journalists as well as sports officials rejected the participation of women in competitions, arguing that women did not have the necessary physical and mental capacities. Sports competitions were condemned for being not only unaesthetic but also a threat to women's health, especially to their ability to have children, and thus for being in contradiction to women's 'natures' (Pfister and Langenfeld 1982). As one can see from the programme of the early modern Olympic Games, the spectrum of the sports accessible to women was very small. Upper-class activities such as tennis or golf were accepted as well as sports like swimming because of the alleged health benefits. Athletics remained a contested terrain and it was only in 1928, after a lengthy dispute between the International Women's Sport Federation, the International Amateur Athletic Federation and the International Olympic Committee that women were first allowed to take part in Olympic athletic events (Pfister 2000).

'Ladies' play football – but only in other countries

Even more than athletics, football belonged to that category of sports which, according to popular belief in Germany, 'is not suited to the female disposition; it looks anomalous and deforming and therefore should be left to the male of the species' (*Sport und Gesundheit*, 1932, 1: 11). This, however, did not stop women in other countries such as England and France trying out football as a game for their own enjoyment. As early as 1894, a British Ladies' Football Club was inaugurated and only a year later various women's teams were playing matches against each other in England before thousands of spectators, both male and female (Lopez 1997; Pfister *et al.* 1998). Accompanied by the nationalist fervour of the First World War, women's football reached a zenith when football matches were organised between women's teams in order to raise money for charity. In 1921 there were around 150 women's football teams in England. In France, too, teams were founded during the First World War (Prudhomme 1996). In 1917 the first women's football championships were held and in 1922 two Football Cup competitions were introduced. In the 1920s, moreover, numerous matches took place not only between French teams but also against women's teams from other European countries. This comparatively tolerant

attitude towards women's football in England and France is partly due to the exceptional circumstances prevailing during the First World War, but it may also be attributed to specific constellations of sports politics, not least to the existence of and competition between various women's sports organisations in these countries.

Opposition to women's football in Germany

The general development of women's sports as outlined above, the labelling of sports as either 'male' or 'female' and, not least, the opposition to aggressive types of sport as well as competitive sports were the determining factors in shaping the opportunities, or rather the barriers, for girls' and women's participation in football. At the end of the nineteenth century the introduction of physical education for girls and their integration into the 'games movement' provided the first opportunity for them to play football. This movement, which in the 1880s propagated outdoor sports out of concern for the health of the German nation and its ability to defend itself against an aggressor, also sought to attract girls and women because of the widespread belief that 'strong offspring can only be born of strong mothers'. Among the activities that were recommended for girls were ball games such as 'football in the round' in which the ball was only allowed to be moved by kicking it with the feet. Like the typical games of the 'games movement', this type of football game completely lacked both a competitive impulse and any orientation towards performance. It was perhaps this game which Heineken was referring to when, in 1898, he claimed that 'for many years football has been played by girls, too, and they enjoy playing it' (1993: 226).

An advocate of women's football was also to be found among the first female doctors who were in favour of physical fitness for women. In order to build up strength and stamina, Anna Fischer-Dückelmann (1905) even went so far as to recommend football for women, provided that they wore the right clothing. There is no evidence that this unconventional advice was ever followed.

In spite of repeated reports in German sports journals of football matches being played between teams of women in England and France, there was never any question in Germany of the football field becoming a place for women. 'All types of sport which go beyond a woman's natural strength such as wrestling, boxing or football are unsuitable; furthermore, they are unaesthetic and unnatural' was, for example, how Willy Vierath expressed it tersely in his book *Modern Sport*, published in 1930. According to another author, German women disapproved of football, first, because the 'rough way' in which the game was played was contrary to women's sensibilities and, second, because the game was not suited to the 'build of the female body' (*Sport und Sonne* 1927: 24).[2] In similar vein, an article in a women's magazine called the *Damenillustrierte* commented in 1927: 'Women may

be playing football in England and America but it is to be hoped that this bad example is not to be followed in German sport' (Special Issue, *Frauensport*, p.7).

Because of the stigmatisation of football as an unnatural and unfeminine game for women as well as the critical voices about women's football in other countries, very few women in Germany dared to play the game.

There are a number of reports that individual sportswomen – for example, women handball players or the eccentric actress and later pilot, Antonie Strassmann – did try out football as a game. As far as we know, however, there was only one initiative to form a women's football team: in 1930 a women's football club in Frankfurt was founded with thirty-five members, all of them young women, who trained regularly on Sundays on the Seehofwiese in Sachsenhausen (Schreiber-Rietig 1993).

In a magazine called *Illustriertes Blatt* (27 March 1930) one of the few favourable reports about this initiative was published. The astonishingly positive article included the following comment: 'The lady footballers . . . intend to play a cheerful, combative kind of football. Whether it will be worse than hockey, we will have to wait and see. . . . It will be interesting to see what will come of this venture.' Other sports journalists had an entirely different view of this, describing women's football as a show of 'abominably bad taste' comparable to 'fairground sideshows' and, generally, putting them on a level with women wrestlers. The press reports of this 'scandal' caused a public outcry and the women's football club ceased its activities in 1931 (Schreiber-Rietig 1993).

Women's football had absolutely no chance of success in an age when gender differences were given great emphasis – among other things because the intrusion of women into men's domains like the labour market was perceived as a threat to traditional gender arrangements.

In contrast to Germany, a women's football movement arose in Austria and even an Austrian Ladies' Football Union was founded which, however, was disbanded by the authorities in 1938 after Germany's annexation of Austria (Marschik 2003). Under the National Socialists, who liked to highlight gender differences, women's football had to be stamped out since it offended their notion of gender segregation.

Initiatives after the Second World War

Although the lack of food and housing made the daily struggle for survival very difficult, people began to take a renewed interest in sport (and especially football) immediately after the war had ended. From August 1945 onwards football matches were organised in German cities nearly every Sunday, and from November 1945 even league games were played in some regions. Besides providing excitement and distraction, football paved the way for Germany's return to 'normality', and an important milestone in this phase – as well as being a source of new self-esteem – was the 'Miracle

of Berne', the legendary victory of 'our boys' in the 1954 football World Championship which – after all the uncertainty caused by the war, the country's defeat and years of internment in POW camps – enabled men to identify with new and positive ideals of masculinity (http://www.wunder-von-bern.de).

In the 1950s West Germany's economic upswing and the normalisation of everyday life was accompanied by a striving for a normalisation of gender relationships, too. In other words, men and women were expected to assume their traditional roles once more, a development which was legitimized by the re-establishment of the theory of 'gender polarity'. In the various sport discourses, too, emphasis was placed on gender differences and the myth of the 'weaker sex' was kept alive, especially by the medical profession. In spite of all this, a number of women did begin to play football. In the early 1950s, for example, the wives and girlfriends of the Tennis Borussia football team in Berlin held New Year's football matches at which – according to press reports – the spectators amused themselves exceedingly (Brüggemeier 2000: 300). Thus eventually, the German Football Federation (*Deutscher Fußballbund* – DFB) was forced to consider the question of whether or not to recognise women football players. Its reaction in 1955 was one of total rejection, forbidding its clubs from either founding women's sections or putting their grounds at the disposal of women's teams.[3] Nevertheless, in 1957, in the *Journal WFV-Sport*, the journal of the West-German Football Federation, 'neglected football dames' and 'lonely football wives' confronted the DFB with a 'revolutionary demand: "Equal rights for all! We want to play football, too!"' (*WFV-Sport*, 7, 11 April 1957). In 1957 there was even a women's international between West Germany and Holland in the Kornwestheim Stadium near Stuttgart. Many spectators were attracted to the stadium by the promise of a highly amusing and entertaining afternoon. Although it appears that the women played quite creditably, some reports of the game contained descriptions of the women covered in mud but failed to mention the result (*Christ und Welt*, 19 September 1957). In the same year a match took place between a women's team from West Germany and one from West Holland in the Dante Stadium in Munich in front of 14,000 spectators. While the sports reporters spoke enthusiastically about the victory of the West German team, the spectators, the majority of whom were men, seem to have had a less sporting and less gentlemanly view of things: 'The men clapped and slapped their thighs, bursting out laughing whenever a player slipped and fell on the grass.' The same article also mentions a West German Ladies' Football Association with twenty-two affiliated clubs; unfortunately, however, no further information is available about this association.[4] The author of the article then put forward the proposal that the DFB should incorporate women's football and take it under its wing in order to stop sensationalism and profiteering, and prevent women's football from sinking to the level of women's wrestling. Banning women's football was pointless, the author went on, and did not

make any sense, since ideals of femininity had changed and women had proved themselves in many other types of sport.

The demands of women football players and their (few) supporters did not succeed in inducing the DFB to change its mind. On the contrary, in 1958 it was again unanimously confirmed that grounds, apparatus and referees were not to be put at the disposal of women's football teams (Diem 1978).

The DFB was able to back up its decision with medical arguments ranging from certain anatomical characteristics such as 'knock-knees' and the difficulty of conditioning female muscles, to the 'diminished ability to reproduce' and the 'masculinisation' of women football players (*WFV-Sport*, no. 11, 13 June 1957). A medical review commissioned by the DFB likewise warned of the dangers to which women allegedly exposed themselves while playing football (Fechtig 1995: 25). Opponents of women's football even gained the support of the renowned philosopher F.J.J. Buytendijk, who in his psychological study of football published in 1953 remarked that:

> Football as a game is first and foremost a demonstration of masculinity as we understand it from our traditional view of things and as produced in part by our physical constitution (through hormonal irritation). No one has ever been successful in getting women to play football. . . . Kicking is thus presumably a specifically male activity; whether being kicked is consequently female – that is something I will leave unanswered.
>
> (Buytendijk 1953: 20)

Thus, because of the DFB's negative attitude, women were only able to play football 'unofficially' in recreational teams throughout the 1950s and well into the 1960s. Despite this lack of support, however, several women's football teams and clubs had been founded by the end of the 1960s, for example, *Oberst Schiel*, a club formed by a women's team in Frankfurt (DFB 1983; Fechtig 1995: 31; Ratzeburg and Biese 1995: 21). At Borussia Berlin, too, a regular team was formed in 1969 by players' wives along with a number of women handball players; this team went on to gain second place in the (still unofficial) municipal championship in 1971 (http://www.tennis-borussia-frauen.de/dt-hist.htm).

Women playing football – processes of institutionalisation

Women's football becomes 'official' in West Germany

In the late 1960s, the DFB could no longer react as it pleased to what it perceived to be an undesirable development; it was also forced to take account of the changing social conditions.

In West Germany the 1960s were a period of almost revolutionary social upheaval in which, for example, women's levels of education increased, leading to a growing integration of women into the labour market. At the same time, a new women's movement arose which contributed to a new image and to a new self-awareness of women, who no longer identified with the 'weaker sex'. One of the most important changes was the invention of methods of birth control, which allowed women greater choice with regard to both their bodies and their futures. In this climate of 'women's liberation' the DFB was forced to change its policies, and in 1970, at the DFB's national conference in Travemünde, 'ladies' football' was finally officially recognised. The reason for this change of heart was, as Hannelore Ratzeburg (the best-known of the DFB's women officials) noted, the federation's fear of losing control over the women's football movement (DFB 1983; Ratzeburg and Biese 1995: 21).

A pioneering role was also played by women's football initiatives abroad. In Italy, for instance, a first unofficial World Cup tournament was held in 1970, which was watched by 35,000 spectators and in which a selection of women players from German clubs took part (Ratzeburg 1986; Fechtig 1995: 31). A reporter from the *Münchner Abendzeitung*, who accompanied the women, wrote:

> Just before setting off for the World Championship in women's football, Helga Walluga, aged 28 from Bad Neuenahr, the German eleven's striker, went to the hairdresser's to have her hair smartly permed. Then she joined her twelve giggling team mates in the bus. . . . There was trouble, too, when the reporters wanted to visit the changing rooms while the women were in them. The German women had tried, they said, to keep their bosoms out of the limelight in order to be able to return safely to the haven of matrimony afterwards. . . . Unfortunately the prettiest team lost.
>
> (Brändle and Koller 2002: 225)

In short, the journalist ended up writing a 'humorous' (i.e. belittling) description of a spectacle which was supposed to be funny because of its absurdity.

Since women's enthusiasm for football could no longer be suppressed, it was thought that they ought at least to be 'kept on the right track' by means of suitable guidelines. Thus the DFB's Games Supervisory Committee developed a set of rules on how the game should be played by women's teams: for example, women were to play two halves, but only of thirty minutes each; they were to use the same specification of ball laid down for men's youth teams; they were not allowed to have studs in their boots; and advertising on jerseys was banned because it allegedly drew the spectators' gaze to the players' bosoms. In the years that followed, however, these rules proved to be superfluous, if not senseless, and were successively abolished (DFB 1983:12–4; Ratzeburg and Biese 1995).

The rise of women's football in West Germany

In the 1970s, women's football in West Germany made huge progress: in 1971 the first knockout competitions were organised; in 1972–73 championship matches took place in the regional football associations of the German federal states; and in 1974 the first national championships were held (Fechtig 1995: 35). In 1980–81, club cup matches were introduced in which all women's teams could take part, regardless of the league in which they played (*DFB-Vereinspokal*). Since then, selected regional teams (*Landesauswahlteams*) with the best players of each German federal state have competed for the DFB Women's Federal Cup (*Frauen-Länder-Pokal*). In 1985–86, regional leagues in the West German federal states were introduced and in 1990 a national league was established with two divisions of ten teams each. Since 1997–98 twelve teams have formed a national league with a single division in an attempt to concentrate women's football on the best clubs and thus raise standards of play (Ratzeburg and Biese 1995: 21–3). In 2004, finally, a second national league with two divisions was established, not least in order to put women's football on a broader base and give young players the opportunity to play in higher grade matches (http://www.ich-spiele-fussball.dfb.de).

In the 1980s, major breakthroughs were achieved by women's football at the international level and West German women numbered among the best and most successful players in the world game. The first unofficial World Championship in women's football, held in Taiwan in 1981, was won by a German club team, SSG 09 Gladbach, whose members had to finance the trip to Taiwan themselves. Subsequently, in 1982, an 'official' national team was formed from the country's best players and in the same year the German women's eleven played their first international against Switzerland, which they won five to one (http://www.ich-spiele-fussball.dfb.de).

Women's football in East Germany

Football fever also spread to girls and women in East Germany, where a highly efficient and centralised sports system had been established with the aim of gaining political recognition through success in sports. All available resources were invested in those athletes and sports with the greatest potential to win medals in world championships and the Olympic Games (Pfister 2000). After the first women's football team was founded at the Technical University of Dresden in 1968 on the initiative of a Bulgarian student, women's football spread quickly during the 1970s and by 1981 there were 360 women's teams playing football in the GDR (Pfister 2002).

Regarded as a leisure pastime and thus as a recreational sport, women's football was not officially recognised and supported as a top-level competitive sport. In 1979 a working group on women's football was set up which

extended the organisation of women's football to the regional and national levels. In the same year competitions took place for the first time to find the best team, but official championships were not held, even though the working group repeatedly demanded the organisation of leagues at all levels as well as official championships (Meier 1995).[5]

In the course of the 1980s women's interest in football decreased, partly because the players were confronted with problems which were similar to those faced by female players in West Germany, i.e. since football was looked upon as a men's sport, female players were not taken seriously and they often had to fight against inadequate conditions in training and matches. However, the main problem was the decision of leading GDR sports functionaries not to class women's football as a top-level sport and give it the corresponding support. This meant that East German women were excluded from international competitions. The scarce resources, especially the hard currency that was so valuable to the state, could not be allowed to go into a sport which was not accepted by the public and which did not have the potential to win medals.

It was not until the late 1980s that an upper league with two divisions was introduced and not until 1990–91 (i.e. after German reunification) that the East German Football Association established a national league and formed a national team (Meier 1995). Incorporated shortly afterwards into the DFB, the East German Football Association became the Regional Association North East, and 'finally gave women's football the recognition for which it had fought for 21 years' (Meier 1995: 37). Players from the former East Germany were then assimilated into West German women's football, organised as it was by the DFB. The GDR's best team, Turbine Potsdam, is today one of the few top teams that comprise the women's *Bundesliga*.

The discrimination against women football players in East Germany can only be properly evaluated if it is seen in the context of widespread public fascination with the game, as well as the many different privileges accorded to the GDR's male players. Although East German football was not very successful internationally, male players were greatly favoured by the state and the ruling party, and were supported in spite of the unfavourable cost–benefit ratio, which otherwise played an important role in the promotion of a particular sport.

Developments after German unification

The integration of East German players was of great benefit to women's football in Germany, which has since been very successful at the international level. The West German women's national team had already won the European Championship in 1989, and the German women continued their run of victories in the years 1991, 1995, 1997 and 2001. In 1991 the

first official World Championship was held in China, where the German team took fourth place. In the second World Championship tournament in Sweden in 1995 the German team lost to Norway in the final, thus becoming runners-up in the tournament (http://www.ich-spiele-fussball.dfb.de). The players were proud to play for their country and dreamed of participating in the Olympic Games. Sylvia Neid, one of the best German players of this period, even described participation in the Olympics as her life's goal (*Spiegel* 45, 1994, p. 193). This dream came true in 1996 when women's football became an Olympic discipline at the Atlanta Games. In the 2004 Games in Athens, the German team won the bronze medal.

Germany is world champion

The 1990s saw a radical change in the way women's football was played. The players' athletic abilities and competences improved along with their technical and tactical skills, thus increasing the tempo of play and making systematic and strategic sequences of passes possible. The football played by the top teams in the women's *Bundesliga* is characterised today by clever tactics and creative footwork.

German players proved that they could play excellent football at the 2003 World Championship in the USA, where they managed to eliminate a strong US team and won the final 2–1 against Sweden after Nia Künzer's header in extra time. The 26,000 spectators in the stadium experienced a game that had been full of excitement right up to the final whistle. The reaction in Germany was overwhelming. The DFB's president, Gerhard Mayer-Vorfelder, sang the team's praises, the German chancellor and the German president sent their congratulations, and FIFA president Joseph Blatter spoke of 'a new dimension', 'tremendous progress' and 'football of the highest order'.[6] The media poured on the superlatives and about 12.5 million football fans followed the match on television. On their return to Germany the players were given a reception in the Emperor's Hall of Frankfurt Town Hall and cheered by the jubilant crowd when they appeared on the balcony – a tradition hitherto reserved for the men's national team.

Suddenly women's football was being taken seriously – it was no longer 'Wiegman, Prinz and Co' but Germany; and now Germany was world champion. What would have been unthinkable (or even the object of mockery) twenty years before was suddenly something quite natural. Women's football evoked national emotions and processes of identification. But it was not just the World Championship title, it was the quality of the game, rather, which gave women's football the long-awaited stamp of respectability. After showing a certain amount of nervousness in the first half, the players proved that they were capable of playing attractive football of a high standard, both technically and tactically (http://fifaworldcup.yahoo.com/03/en/t).

Can one draw the conclusion that, through their achievements and triumphs, women have now finally conquered one of the most prestigious male domains, the game of football?

Women football players – still a minority

In spite of the successes of the national team, female players still form a small minority of members in the DFB, which, with its 6.3 million members, is the largest sports federation in Germany. In 2004 there were 857,220 female members enrolled in the DFB, 635,072 of them women and 222,148 girls (i.e. under 16 years of age). This means that women make up 14 per cent of DFB membership. Whereas the number of women members decreased slightly from 2003 to 2004, the number of girls in the DFB increased by about 7,000 over the same period. The DFB attributed this rise of young members to the success of the women's team in the World Championship tournament (http://www.dfb.de/dfb-info/eigenprofil/index.html). However, these impressive figures do not mean in any way that more than 850,000 girls and women play football in Germany, since it must be taken into consideration that the DFB also caters for other types of sport such as aerobics and 'keep fit' classes. Since only 3,466 women's and 3,400 girls' teams are registered with the federation for taking part in competitions, it may be assumed that only 10 per cent of the women and around 30 per cent of the girls enrolled in the DFB play football. What then are the reasons for the large under-representation of football players among the women members of the German Football Federation?

Opportunities and challenges for women's football

The continuing development of women's football and its record of success in the past should not be allowed to obscure the fact that women football players have always been confronted with various problems and that this is possibly still the case today.

Power in the hands of men

A problem that is still as topical and as serious today as it ever was is the lack of women in executive bodies (Linsen 1997). From the very beginning of women's football, decision-making bodies were made up of men and it was extremely difficult for women to assert claims or push through demands. Monika Koch-Emsermann, a player and coach from the early days of women's football, remembers that 'just about everything [that she proposed] was turned down' (*Caracho*, 1, 1986, p. 23).

The growing popularity of girls' and women's football is due in part to the establishment of women's committees and the appointment of officials in charge of girls' and women's football within the DFB and its regional

associations. Hannelore Ratzeburg (who in 1977 was the first woman to be made a member of the DFB's Games Supervisory Committee), together with the bodies responsible for girl and women members and the individuals appointed in the period that followed, initiated numerous projects and schemes in order not only to establish women's football as a recognised sport but also to ensure its continuing growth and development. However, the lack of female members in the DFB's governing bodies has still not changed today: in 2004 there was not a single woman among the fourteen members of the presidential committee, its highest body. The DFB's executive board, its next highest body, is made up of the twenty-four heads of the various sections; the only woman represented on this board is the head of the women's football section. Thus, although it is understood and even accepted that women should take an active part in women's affairs, as soon as they aspire to a role in men's football, they are seen as a threat and meet with strong opposition. The example of Britta Steilmann illustrates the mistrust that women face when they take over managerial positions in football. Britta Steilmann, the daughter of a businessman and sponsor of Wattenscheid 09 football club, took over the club's marketing and public relations work, thus becoming Germany's first woman football manager. There was subsequently a great deal of resistance in the club and among the fans, not only to the woman who wanted to 'lay down the law' in a male domain but also to her unorthodox ideas and methods (*Spiegel* 11, 1994, pp. 182).

Coaches

The further development of girls' and women's football also depends to a large extent on the work of committed coaches. In the early days of women's football these were exclusively male. It was not until 1985 that the first woman applied for a licence as a football coach. By the end of 1994, twenty-four women had obtained the highest licence, the 'A' licence, and five had qualified as football 'instructors' with a diploma (Ratzeburg and Biese 1995: 48). In German sports more widely, women are greatly under-represented among coaches: the higher the level of qualification of the coaches and the performance level of the athletes, the lower the percentage of female coaches. Here, it must be also taken into consideration that in many sports, including football, the majority of coaches work in a voluntary capacity parallel to their professional work. Very few coaches have a permanent, full-time position; and these are predominantly men (Cachay and Bahlke 2003). This is true of all sports with the exception of 'female' sports such as rhythmic gymnastics.

In 2001 only 0.8 per cent of football coaches with an 'A' licence and 1.2 per cent of football 'instructors' were women (Cachay and Bahlke 2003: 64). Whereas it seems quite natural that men should coach women's teams, female football coaches work solely with women's teams. In contrast to

many other sports, though, women also coach teams at the highest level in football: in the 2001–02 football season, for example, six women (four coaches and two assistant coaches) and eighteen men were employed in the twelve women's *Bundesliga* clubs.

The reasons for the low proportion of women coaches are various and complex, ranging from their training, which is oriented towards men's experiences and competences, to women's motivations and decisions as well as their personal circumstances (Kugelman and Sinning 2004). Nevertheless, there is seemingly more success than in most other sports in persuading experienced women football players to take up a career in coaching. Moreover, this could have a positive influence on the development of women's football, since well-known and successful coaches can serve as role models. A good example of this is Tina Theune-Meyer, who in 1996 was the first woman to take over the position of national coach. The German team's World Championship title in 2003 bears testimony to her competence and professionalism and, indeed, she was the first woman in the world to lead a football team to the title. In spite of this, it is still difficult today to find coaches, whether male or female, for girls' and women's football teams.

Fostering new generations of players

It has always been difficult to motivate talented girls to take up football. In girls' physical education football plays only a minor role – if it plays a role at all. Even in co-ed classes an informal kind of gender segregation often takes place, with boys playing football and girls doing gymnastics. The indifference of most schools to girls' football is a crucial problem, since most girls are unable to develop skills in controlling a ball, either in the family or in kindergarten. Girls' lack of skill in ball control, especially when playing football, is thus not compensated for at school (www.ich-spiele-fussball.de/schule/unterricht). In the whole of Germany there is only one DFB training centre for women's football and this is a boarding-school at which girls go to school and are able at the same time to take part in football training (*Berliner Zeitung*, 11/12 October 2003, p. 3). There are signs that the girls at the centre will go on to form a new generation of top-level football players (*Berliner Zeitung*, 11/12 October 2003, p. 3). On the other hand, women's football is not generally very high on the list of girls' sporting preferences, and playing football is certainly not 'in' in the same way as horse-riding or ballet are. Besides, many parents are not exactly thrilled when they learn that their daughter has discovered a liking for football (Pfister 1999). (After the final of the 1995 World Championship in women's football Gero Bisanz commented: 'We have seen that football is a sport for women and I hope that many parents will give up their aversion to girls playing football' [*Die Welt*, 20 June 1995].) As a result, it is very difficult to put together girls' teams and even more difficult to keep

them together. Teams that do exist often suffer from fluctuation and lack of continuity.

According to Kugelmann and Sinning, the reason for this large under-representation of girls in football and their lack of interest in it is the orientation of the game to male interests, competences and lifestyles: 'The football culture staged for the media and by the media as well as the way football is learned and played at school and in clubs is traditionally dominated by male behaviour and male perceptions' (2004: 135). The techniques of teaching football and the training instructions, for example, fail to take into account the fact that girls have often had no previous experience of the game. With this didactic consideration in mind, Kugelmann and Sinning have developed guidelines for a kind of football training which also appeals to girls and to different groups of girls with various interests.

It is still to be seen whether any lasting changes have occurred in girls' attitudes to football after the World Championship triumph. What has changed in the run-up to the 2006 men's World Cup, however, is the DFB's attitude towards fostering new generations of players as well as towards girls' football. In 2002, partly in view of the 2006 World Cup in Germany, the DFB developed a strategy for fostering young players and introduced a scheme for sponsoring new talent on a scale that had never been seen before anywhere in the world. Three hundred and ninety training centres with 1,200 coaches were established all over Germany, catering for 22,000 young players between the ages of 10 and 17 years. Only 3 per cent of these players are girls and, currently, a research project is looking into the reasons for their under-representation (http://www.claudia-kugelmann.ag.vu/s7.html). In 2005 the DFB launched a 'DFB Football Programme for Girls' with the aim of getting more girls to take up football. The addressees are not only the girls themselves but also parents, teachers and instructors (i.e. those groups which play a key role in promoting girls' football). In this project, strategies are developed, brochures are devised, contact networks are established and clubs are urged to form girls' football teams (*DFB-Journal* 2004, p. 4; www.ich-spiele-fussball.de).

Professionalisation of women's football?

It is conspicuous that most of the teams in the women's *Bundesliga* come from small towns and unknown clubs with few financial resources. In the past, the players frequently complained that women's teams 'played second fiddle' in their clubs, even when they were much more successful than the men's teams. The clubs' lack of interest in women football players resulted in numerous instances of discrimination, from the allocation of pitches to financial backing. 'We are the flagship of our club', commented a player in a small town in Westphalia, 'but, even still, when it comes to handing out funding, we're always at the end of the queue' (Linsen 1997: 256). Even in large and famous clubs like Bayern Munich, women are still disadvantaged

today: 'At FC Bayern women's teams are treated as though they were "C" youth teams', a former Bayern Munich player reported in 2003 (*Berliner Zeitung*, 11/12 October 2003, p. 3).

Moreover, the hand-outs paid to German women players for winning international matches have been shamefully small. After winning the European Cup in 1980, each member of the men's team received a bonus of 30,000 Marks while the women of the team which won the European Championship in 1989 were each presented with a coffee set. In 1995, however, things improved, and the women eleven's victory in the European Championship was rewarded with 3,000 US dollars. In 2003, moreover, after winning the World Cup, the women received €6,000 from German Sport Aid and €9,000 from the DFB (*Die Zeit*, 22 December 2003, No.1, http://www.zeit.de/2004/01/10_2f12_2fRottenberg).

In contrast to their male counterparts, women football players still have amateur status today. Whereas in the mid-1990s women players in the USA were already earning up to US$150,000 a year and great sums were being paid in Japan's professional women's league, playing women's football in Germany has always been and is still more or less an unpaid pastime.[7] Most *Bundesliga* players are either students or full-time employees and train four or five times a week in the evenings. Because of the lack of funding as well as the 'double burden' of women players through football and work, top-level training is still scarcely possible even today. It is small wonder that Germany has become an exporter of female football players: from 1990 onwards, after winning the European Championship, the first German players were asked to play as professionals in Italy, and in the following years some of the best German women players went as 'legionnaires' to other countries and gave added strength to teams in Italy and the USA (*Kicker* 1990, p. 64; *Der Spiegel* 45, 1994, p. 193). In 2001 three top players, among them Doris Fitschen, played in the newly founded professional league (WUSA) in the USA (*Der Spiegel* 24, 2001, p. 162).

The DFB took the first step towards the professionalisation of women's football with the establishment of a women's *Bundesliga* in 1997–98, but its aim of finding sponsors for this league could not be achieved. Thus the clubs have had to fend for themselves, with the consequence that most of them are chronically short of money since they lack both revenues and sponsors. Several clubs have had to withdraw their teams from the league after failing to find any financial backing (*Die Zeit*, 22 December 2003, http://www.zeit.de/2004/01/10_2f12_2fRottenberg).

'There's more money in every one of the men's regional leagues than there is in the whole of women's football', commented a player in 1997 (see also *Berliner Zeitung*, 11/12 October 2003, p. 3). Today the financial resources of the teams in the women's *Bundesliga* range between €100,000 and €300,000; this is a lot of money compared to the situation in the 1990s but still too little to pay the players more than their expenses. Consequently, even if clubs are proud of the achievements of their women's

teams, this does not guarantee good or even adequate conditions, since even today only a few clubs have adequate resources and infrastructure to support and market their women's teams adequately. Since 1998, four *Bundesliga* teams have left their clubs and founded their own associations in the hope of improving their marketing chances and shaping a more professional environment. They seem to have been successful in their venture, since they have been able to 'sign on' the best women players and attract the most spectators.

After the World Championship in 2003, demands for the professionalisation of the *Bundesliga* became louder. At the same time, experts doubted that the clubs could establish professional structures, not least because there is still relatively little interest in women's football and therefore it is difficult, if not impossible, to find sponsors. Even now, women's *Bundesliga* games attract no more than an average of some hundreds of spectators (see for example, *Berliner Zeitung*, 14 October 2003, p. 28). All the same, the absolute number of spectators at women's *Bundesliga* games rose from 50,000 in the 2002–3 season to 70,000 in the 2003–04 season – although this was due more than anything else to the increased interest of spectators in the three best teams.

The following comment in the *Berliner Zeitung* characterises the situation in women's football: 'The games of the women's *Bundesliga* are still played in a ghost-town setting . . . and the majority of the players will continue to pursue their sport as a hobby' (*Berliner Zeitung*, 13 October 2003, p. 31). The general view is that the clubs will first have to '"feel their way" towards professional structures' (*Bundesliga-Magazin* 2004–05, p. 6, http://www.ffc-frankfurt.de/c/cms/upload/blm/BLM_06+07.pdf). Even so, semi-professionalism does seem possible today in the best teams.

Women's football in the public sphere

As mentioned above, one of the greatest problems facing women football players from the very beginning has been the lack of public interest. Women's football matches were virtually played in private, so to speak. In 1993, for example, women's football was shown only three times on television for a total duration of four hours and twenty-one minutes. In 1995, the year of the qualifying games for the European Championship, approximately five hours of women's football were broadcast (Mende 1995: 6). In the print media, too, women's football scarcely existed (Kröger 1996). And in 1997, games of the women's *Bundesliga* were shown on television 'in clips lasting no more than seconds' (www.uebersteiger.de). The lack of public interest is also one of the complaints regularly raised by women football players: 'There is scarcely any interest in top-level women's football – unless something quite fantastic happens', Sylvia Neid told the *Spiegel* magazine (*Spiegel* 45, 1994, p. 193).

Whereas in the 1970s and 1980s the media repeatedly made fun of women's football, most reports today are objective, constructive and even enthusiastic. However, the coverage given to women's football is still extremely rare, especially in everyday football reporting, which continues to focus on the men's *Bundesliga*. Even the women's football World Championship in 2003 was no exception. The semi-final against the USA was watched on German television by a mere 650,000 viewers – compared to the audience of around 30 million the previous day which followed the Saturday *Bundesliga* matches in the ARD's traditional *Sportschau* ('Sports Review') programme (http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,987016,00.html). A journalist commented on this as follows: 'Women's football remains the stepchild of an overbearing father – men's football – at least as far as the interest of audiences and economic power are concerned' (ibid.).

However, we must not forget that the coverage of women's sport in general plays no more than a marginal role. According to a study conducted by Hartmann-Tews and Rulofs (2002), women's sport is given 12 per cent of the sports coverage of selected German print media. Television, too, concentrates on a few sports and mainly men's sports, not least because this provides a clearly defined target group (i.e. men between 16 and 49 years of age) for the advertising industry. As a consequence, women's football continues to be played mainly out of the public gaze. The final of the women's World Cup was an exception, and it is debatable if the popularity of this game signals a new trend. After the victory in the World Championship, at any rate, there was consensus among journalists that the 'Californian Rocket' would not bring women's league football, the sport of a tiny minority, into the public gaze (see, for example, *Berliner Zeitung*, 14 October 2003, p. 28). That their scepticism was well founded could be seen in the coverage of the women's matches during the Athens Olympics: the 8–0 victory of the German team over the Chinese women was given a 4cm-long text on page five of the *BILD* newspaper's sports pages (*Emma*, September/October 2004, p. 13).

Who does not know German football players like Bayern stars Oliver Kahn, Michael Ballack and Co? Today, *Bundesliga* stars have even become the heroes of girls' dreams. But who knows what team Kerstin Garefrekes or Petra Wimbersky play for? Like the 'invisibility' of women's matches, the fact that female football players are not idols in the same way as male players are has negative consequences in two respects. On the one hand, there are no female role models for girls; on the other, women's football cannot be marketed. Without well-known names and faces the decisive incentive for audiences to switch on the television set for a football game and the interest of potential sponsors is missing. For this reason, all the initiatives for promoting girls' and women's football endeavour to make the best players visible and their names familiar (http://www.ich-spiele-fussball.dfb.de). The motto is: 'The country needs idols.' One of these idols may

be Nia Künzer, a member of the World Championship team, whose 'golden goal' in the final was voted 'Goal of the Year' by 36.7 per cent of viewers, making her the first woman in the history of the ARD's *Sportschau* to receive this honour.

Women's football makes use of various media today in order to gain publicity and visibility, and several women's football magazines have been founded, only to be withdrawn from the market some time later. However, *die elf* or *FFMagazin* are journals which have been published since 2004 and which report extensively and knowledgeably about the game and the players. Moreover, a stylish women's *Bundesliga-Magazin* has appeared since 1999 which serves as a joint presentational brochure and 'visiting card' for all the *Bundesliga* clubs. The aim of the magazine is to 'give women's football a face and turn it increasingly into a product with a brand name', thus making it more attractive for the media, the fans and sponsors (*Frauenfußball Bundesliga-Magazin* 5, 2004–05, p. 1). In addition, the internet provides clubs, teams and players with the opportunity of presenting themselves on a platform which is accessible to an unlimited public.

Furthermore, the 'DFB Football Programme for Girls' mentioned above has launched an attractive website with the intention not only of providing information and knowledge but also of binding loyal fans, arousing interest in new ones and awakening the desire to emulate the stars. The pictures and biographies of the players of the national and the *Bundesliga* teams are meant to trigger processes of identification (http://www.ich-spiele-fussball.dfb.de).

In various respects, sports coverage, football and gender are interrelated and interdependent phenomena. First of all, the fans and spectators are predominantly male, even if women seem to have become more interested in football in recent years. Because of the lack of opportunity of identifying with the players, however, it is small wonder that girls and women make up only a small percentage of football fans. Consequently, sports reports are oriented towards male audiences – and these are predominantly interested in men's football. Furthermore, the overwhelming majority of sports journalists are male, the percentage of women among them being under 10 per cent. And, more often than not, the few female sports journalists that there are do not cover football, since, particularly in this sport, they are often confronted with mistrust, doubts about their competence and even rejection. A woman radio reporter, for example, was asked by a well-known *Bundesliga* coach about her qualifications before he gave her an interview (*Spiegel* 11, 1994, p. 183). And when, at the end of the 1980s, the German WDR radio station's head of sport, Sabine Töpperwien, worked for the NDR, another public broadcasting station, her colleagues tried to put her in the 'women's corner' and make her report on gymnastics. She refused to do so and subsequently became the first woman to commentate on *Bundesliga* games live on the radio (*Anstoss*, 1, 2004, p. 27–9). Players, journalists and audiences are in the same boat, so to speak, and

contribute in their different ways to the constant reproduction of gender structures and practices as well as to the presentation of football in the media as a men's sport.

To a certain extent women's football is caught in a vicious circle. The lack of interest shown by the media and, as a result, by the general public leads to a corresponding lack of interest among sponsors, which in turn hinders the professionalisation of women's football and prevents it from getting the public attention it deserves. Many steps have already been taken to lift women's soccer out of obscurity: the success of the German national team, the marketing efforts of the *Bundesliga* clubs as well as the initiatives of the DFB will certainly contribute to a greater acknowledgement of this sport. Even so, as far as its marketing is concerned, women's football is still in a dilemma: 'For real women it is too mannish and for real men it is too womanish. . . . The sponsors who are interested in women are put off by the football and the ones who are interested in football are put off by the women' (*EMMAonline*, http://www.emma.de/632065710772500.html). Here, though, there are signs of change and several players have been able to sign contracts with advertisers (for example, Nia Künzer and Steffi Jones are to be seen in coffee adverts for Nestlé). However, stereotypes of women football players, their image and, generally, the construction of gender in football are further important barriers that prevent women's football from becoming more popular.

Gender deconstructions?

Playing football, doing gender

Women's football is a product of, as well as, a driving force behind the gender order, which is embedded in institutions, conveyed by gendered scripts, enacted in interactions and appropriated by individuals. Here, gender is to be understood as a social construction that is based on the dichotomous categories of male and female (Lorber 1994, 2000; Connell 2002).

Gender is always something we present and do; and gender is the enactment of various ambivalent gender images which reproduce the gender arrangements of a given society. Since gender 'is always there' (even if for the most part subconsciously) and the gendered scripts are always present, the attributes and the behaviour patterns of men and women are perceived, interpreted and judged differently – even when they do the same thing (e.g. play football).

Sport always involves the presentation of the body as well as of abilities and skills which have masculine and feminine connotations. Sport also involves the enactment of identities and images. Thus sport is an activity in which physical differences as well as gender differences are produced and presented in a particularly visible way. Doing sport is therefore always to

some degree 'doing gender'. Hence, for the players, playing football means presenting themselves as women and men with more or less emphasis on masculinity or femininity. This also means that the definitions and social contracts on which sport is constituted, as well as the associations and evaluations which are connected with sporting activities, are created through discourse, constructed socially and influenced by the gender order. Depending on the images and ideals presented in it as well as on the norms and stereotypes and the behaviour patterns required by it, each sport has a distinctive culture which is produced by society, the media and the participants, and which is reflected in the self-awareness and the images of the sportsmen and women who play this particular sport. Since, in accordance with the prevailing gender arrangements, certain forms and cultures of movement connote masculinity while others connote femininity, sports develop either a male or a female image; and women and men develop preferences for certain sports and skills in certain disciplines in accordance with gendered social norms, values and expectations. The experiences and emotions conveyed by sport are, in turn, filtered through gender identity and thus serve to reinforce this identity (Klein 1997).

Football is clearly a place of enacting masculinity. The exclusion or – later – the marginalisation of girls and women from football has to do with the labelling of the game. So why, then, is football labelled 'male'? As mentioned above, from the late nineteenth century onwards football was considered in Germany to be competition-oriented, strenuous, aggressive and potentially dangerous. Thus playing football was totally incompatible with the prevailing ideal of femininity (Pfister 1993). The myth of football as an aggressive sport as well as the glorification of strong and hardy men has obscured the fact that the game can also be played in an entirely different way.

Even today football is only 'real' football for the fans when the game is rough and aggressive. Most fans and even the women players interviewed in various projects agree that football is still the same male sport it has always been (see, for example, Linsen 1997). It may be used for the production and demonstration of 'male' attributes such as strength, power and aggression. Several studies have pointed out how sport is used for the production and demonstration of masculinity. This is especially true of soccer and, to an even greater extent, to American football, which is a clear demonstration of the 'male' attributes mentioned above. Michael Messner (1994: 22) describes 'doing gender' in American football in the following terms:

> Football, based as it is on the most extreme possibilities of the male body . . . is clearly a world apart from women, who are relegated to the role of cheerleaders/sex objects on the sidelines. . . . In contrast to the bare and vulnerable bodies of the cheerleaders, the armoured bodies of the football players are elevated to mythical status and as such, bear

> testimony to the undeniable 'fact' that here is at least one place where men are clearly superior to women.

As Eric Dunning was able to show, using rugby as his example, sport gains particular importance as a source of male identity in times when a shift takes place in the balance of power between the sexes (Dunning 1986). Rugby and football teams along with their fans can – through their rituals and enactments – be interpreted as male bonds, alliances constituted above all on the exclusion of women and the rejection of both femininity and all the qualities related to it, such as gentleness and mildness (Völger and Welck 1990). Thus women who play football have transgressed the socially fixed boundaries between the sexes, posing a threat to gender ideals and myths. This is the reason why women's football is viewed sceptically, marginalised or even rejected; and this is especially the case when women players orient their style of play to men's football. Women who play rough and aggressive football do not fit into the dichotomous gender arrangements and therefore awaken misgivings and tension. After the World Championship victory, the DFB president deplored: 'You can't change the rules so that fighting for the ball becomes gentler' (*Berliner Zeitung*, 14 October 2003, p. 28).

It should also be noted that in Germany, as in many other countries, football is a national sport. National sports and myths of masculinity are interwoven in a special way: 'A specific male identity is produced and maintained in the national sport of any given society. This explains why the national sport in every society is not only a male preserve . . . but is also bound up with sexual claims, needs and anxieties' (Klein 1983: 18). This helps to explain why, even at the turn of the twenty-first century, women meet with resistance when they wish to play football on men's football pitches. In spite of all the enthusiasm after the women's World Championships, sports journalists doubt very much whether women's football will become a genuine national sport. All in all, the experts predict that it will be difficult for women's football to win over the hard-core fans for any length of time, to shed its image as a 'men's sport' or even to contribute to a deconstruction of gender. However, the 'metrosexuality' and 'gender play' of stars like David Beckham may help to popularise the new and alternative constructions of masculinity and thus make room for new constructions of femininities in football.

The image of female players

Women playing football present images that deviate from traditional feminine ideals. These feminine ideals, however, still play a very important role in football – perhaps not on the pitch but certainly in the private lives of the stars, accounts of which saturate the pages of the tabloid press. In the world of football the mass media focus on the male stars and the wives

they have either just abandoned or married, the girlfriends they have had for years or for days and their secret or not-so-secret mistresses. In answer to the question of who the eleven most important women in German football were, *BILD* newspaper wrote: 'The wives and girlfriends of the national team' (*Emma*, September/October 2004, p. 13). They are presented as the 'other sex', as erotic and attractive status symbols – and get much more public attention than do female football players, who radiate too little of the glamour that today's media demand of stars and starlets, including such sports idols as tennis player Anna Kournikova. American players like Brandi Chastain of the World Championship team have adapted to market principles, posing semi-nude for men's magazines. However, it is questionable whether this has helped to make women's soccer more popular in the USA, for even here women soccer players do not have a particularly good image, even though sixteen million girls and women play it. In the popularity hierarchy of the American high school, kids playing it is not exactly an advantage for girls: an old car, glasses, liking arts, being intellectual, not wearing the right clothes and being a member of the soccer team – single or in combination – are sins which make a girl 'undateable' for boys and an outcast for the other girls: (*Spiegel* 24, 1999, p. 221). Accordingly, the Women's United Soccer Association, the professional league founded in 2001, was not able to survive for very long, failing to generate adequate public attention and interest to sustain its sponsorship base.

With their bodies, their movements and their clothes, women football players send out a signal that they do not fit into the traditional ideals and stereotypes of femininity. Thus, being different, they are described as 'she-men' – which is to be seen in the many discussions in internet forums as well as in conventional media coverage (see, for example, *Welt am Sonntag*, 23 May 2004). And comments on women spectators may be found along the lines of: '1,500 spectators and 1,440 of them she-men. And that's exactly the reason why this sport will never be as popular as some people would like.'[8] Women football players are – at least until now – no role models; and here Alice Schwarzer, editor of the feminist journal *Emma*, and German football player Doris Fitschen are in complete agreement. In an interview Fitschen emphasised that only highly attractive athletes in 'attractive sports' can earn the big money and become top stars. The importance of appearance and appeal is something that other women players are indeed aware of. After the World Championship victory, Silke Rottenberg said, 'I used to think: the main thing is that I can play football. But for a few years now I've thought it's more important not to appear quite so masculine' (http://www.zeit.de/2004/01/10_2f12_2fRottenberg). Most soccer players, though, do not want to fit into current ideals of beauty. At the same time, most players reject traditional models of femininity and have developed their own definitions and constructions in order to be able to combine playing football with their lives as women (Pfister 1999; Pfister and Fasting 2004). Therefore, most of them refuse to serve as 'objects of

male desire', Sylvia Neid, for example, rejecting a highly lucrative offer from *Playboy* magazine to pose for nude photos (*Spiegel* 45, 1994, p. 193). Such responses show that femininity and strength are no longer as contradictory as they once were, an argument also made by Heywood and Dworkin in their book *Built to Win* (2003), in which they describe how – on account of changes in ideals and images – strong and successful athletes such as the soccer player Mia Hamm have become idols of at least a part of the American population. According to the *Berliner Zeitung*, the World Championship managed to become a popular event in spite of the fact that 'often rather brash women are to be seen scudding along the turf and many of the players refuse to observe the basic principles of marketing'. Is this a signal for the change of taste and a change of gender ideals in German society?

Homophobia

The image of women football players as well as their experiences are decisively influenced by homophobia, which is not directed exclusively at homosexual athletes but also at sportsmen and women who are suspected of being homosexual because they to do not conform to the traditional gender arrangements. This is especially true of soccer players because they have intruded upon a traditional and prestigious male domain (see, for example, Griffin 1998).

The results of the interviews conducted in the project 'Sport in Women's Lives' back up the assumption that women football players experience homophobia, regardless of their sexual orientation (Pfister 1999). The players interviewed talked quite openly about the topic of homosexuality, reporting that in all teams there were lesbian players but that this was in no way detrimental to either the solidarity among the players or the quality of their football. Some of our interview partners admitted to having a homosexual orientation during the interviews so that homophobic sentiments were relatively rare. Nevertheless, there were interview partners who felt that players who openly showed their sexual orientation had a harmful effect on the team, the club and the sport. Further, there were frequent reports in the interviews of homophobia in the football environment – among coaches, officials and spectators. All top-level players remembered situations in which homophobic attitudes were displayed, and some players related that they had been called 'mannish' and labelled lesbians. Several women also reported threats by managers and coaches that they would 'quit the job' if lesbians were allowed to the join the team.

The example of Martina Voss is illustrative of the extent to which homosexuality is taboo and of the damaging consequences that offending against 'compulsory heterosexuality' may have. As she reported to the *Spiegel* magazine, Voss was expelled from the national team without being given any official reason five months before the start of the Olympic Games in

Sydney after she had admitted to a lesbian relationship with another player (*Spiegel* 29, 2003, p. 160). Some of the interviewed players in the study mentioned above also claimed that showing affection towards another woman had to be avoided since the mere suspicion of being a lesbian could lead to being 'thrown out of the team'. Similar consequences were feared by players who were 'outed' as lesbians, for example, by taking part in the 'Gay Games'. And when in a radio interview the famous Green politician, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, described the World Championship team as the 'national lesbian eleven', 'the telephone lines of the NDR radio station were jammed – you can't say such a thing, can you?' (*Anstoss*, 1, 2004, p. 18).

Making homosexuality a taboo is one of the most important and effective strategies of homophobia. The consequence for lesbian players is that they conceal their feelings, their thoughts and their private lives. The pressure bearing down on lesbian athletes can have a harmful effect on their self-confidence and their self-image as well as on their sporting performance. Homophobia can have a decisive influence on a sport. Football is still a sport with a 'male' image, meaning that, while male football players connote heterosexuality (and today perhaps also various kinds of masculinity), women players connote masculinization and homosexuality. And the fact that women's football has relatively little attraction may be related – at least partly – to this widespread homophobia: it may be assumed that the image of women's football as a 'lesbian sport' is detrimental not only to the willingness of girls to take up football but also to the willingness of parents to let their daughters play the game. It is this argument, at any rate, that is used to great effect by clubs and associations to prevent the 'outing' of their women players. In general terms, too, making homosexuality a taboo is a way of preventing the deconstruction of gender arrangements, based as they are on the duality of gender and on heterosexuality.

Women's football and the construction of difference

Since the nineteenth century, women and football have been constructed and described as contradictions. From the beginning, football was a gender marker and produced gender differences partly by assigning competence in the sport to men and denying the same competence to women. Doubts about the abilities of the players have always belonged to the repertoire of arguments put forward by opponents of women's football. In 1986, for instance, the football idol Paul Breitner expressed the opinion that women players 'were wrecking the game of football' (*Characho*, 1, 1986, p. 23). In the above-mentioned interview-study with female soccer players, nearly all the players mentioned prejudices which referred not only to their competence as soccer players but also, as mentioned above, to their appearance and femininity (Pfister 1999).

Today, in a period of 'political correctness', it is not done to simply dismiss women football players on the basis of old prejudices. However, one exception to this is the famous football coach Max Merkel, self-styled 'custodian of the art of football', who in 2003 claimed that women's football had nothing to do with football at all; it is 'a strain on the eyes. . . . How painful it is to have to watch this sort of game in slow motion – the women going into a sliding tackle with their strapping legs. And pulling at each others' jerseys, which just about cover what's left of their womanhood' (*TAZ*, 27 September 2003, http://www.taz.de/pt/2003/09/27/a0180.nf/text.ges,1). By belittling the players' skills and casting aspersions on their femininity, Merkel restores order to the hierarchy of the sexes, that football underpins. That Merkel is not alone in his opinions is shown by the comments made about women's football in the various internet chat rooms, which range from 'Nobody gives a damn about women's football' to 'Women are scared of the ball'. In Germany, where football is part of the culture, women's football remains a kind of subversive culture that provokes emotional opposition.

A further question continues to be whether women should play football like men or rather a separate form of women's football. But there is still no consensus today about the extent to which the men's game differs from that of the women and whether it is necessary or even desirable for women to play the game in exactly the same way as it is played by men.

After the official recognition of women's football in 1970, special rules were drawn up first of all to ensure a 'women's style of play'. Football played by women was required to be a 'very elegant game, pleasing to watch. They should not be rough and stubborn when fighting for the ball since that does not suit them at all' (*WFV-Sport*, 11, 10 June 1971). To put women's football in an appropriate framework, instructions for training and playing were published, for example, in *WFV-Sport*, the journal of the West-German Football Federation, where it was emphasised again and again that female players could not and should not emulate their male counterparts: 'It is here that the training of techniques, especially those of kicking the ball, differs from the men's training. The ball is not to be kicked with the same force and intensity that men use, for example when shooting at the goal or clearing. [The women] will play or pass the ball to each other' (*WFV-Sport*, 11, June 1971). Elsewhere it stated: 'Women, of course, are not like Günter Netzer or Fritz Walter. All the same, they, too, can learn this sophisticated shot' (*WFV-Sport*, 20, 21 October 1971; Naul 1989).

Slowly but surely, women's football developed into a sport which was to be taken seriously, improving continuously as the players who had trained consistently from their childhood gradually grew into the women's teams. Today there is no question about the tactical skills of top-level women players. Nevertheless, women agree that they could not and should not emulate male players. 'It's just the man–woman rivalry that pushes them.

And that's exactly what we don't want in football', said Birgit Prinz, one of the best women players, in an interview (http://www.stern.de/sport-motor/sportwelt?id=518842&p=2&nv=ct_cb). The DFB and the *Bundesliga* clubs are trying to establish women's football as a brand of its own, in which emphasis is placed on women's skills. According to the manager of the Frankfurt Women's Football Club, there is 'more playing and less fouling' (Morbach 2001: 7). In spite of all the statements that have been made, women are aware that they are measured according to male standards and that the constant comparisons always include a judgement. The highest praise that can be given to a woman is that she plays like a man – for example, Oliver Kahn. That this is belittling is all the more evident when the tables are turned and the Bayern Munich and German national side's goalkeeper Oliver Kahn is described as a second Silke Rottenberg.

As a rule, the comparisons are unfavourable for the women; for instance, when it is pointed out that women would not have a chance even against third-rate men's teams (http://www.politikforum.de/forum/archive/9/2003/11/4/39343). Even though the *Berliner Zeitung* criticised the comparisons made between men's and women's football, it stayed within the discourse of gender difference: 'The men are head and shoulders above the women players, which invites comparisons with the weaker sex. That the women simply don't stand up to such a comparison is self-evident. It may be true that the national team would have a hard time surviving in the men's regional league' (*Berliner Zeitung*, 13 October 2003, p. 31).

In *Anstoss*, the DFB's prestige magazine published in the run-up to the football World Cup in 2006, Klaus Theweleit, author of the cult book *Men's Fantasies* published in 1977 and professed football fan, wrote: 'Women's football is now in the ascendancy. . . . Technically speaking, the differences are not very great, and women handle the ball well. What is missing is strength and energy in running and tackling' (*Anstoss*, 1, 2004, p. 23). And even if a supporter of women's football like Daniel Cohn-Bendit claims that the women's style of play is more aesthetic since in men's football many of the sequences of passes are spoiled because of the increased tempo of the game, this implies – whether intended or not – that women's football is the 'other' version of football (*Anstoss*, 1, 2004, p. 19).

Like no other area of our society, sport serves to generate differences and make them visible – and this includes gender differences. This is also true of football which, although modifying existing gendered images and scripts by integrating women, still perpetuates dichotomous patterns of perception and judgement through its emphasis on gender differences. As already pointed out in various contexts, football is one of the sports in which gender discourses flare up but which also may change. The question is whether – and, if so, to what extent – the women football players themselves are involved in deconstructing gender.

Doing gender – the perspectives of the players

The players – biographies and attitudes

In the interviews conducted as part of the project 'Sport in Women's Lives' (Pfister 1999) as well as the biographies published on the web pages of the German *Bundesliga* players show typical patterns with regard to their biographies, their socialisation and their self-awareness. Most of the players learned football on the streets or in parks as children, often spurred on and given lessons by fathers or brothers, but sometimes also against their parents' will. For the project, ten top-level players and ten players at the 'sport for all' level described how they became committed football players. Seventeen of the twenty players interviewed, mentioned the importance of 'boys on the street' or brothers for their football careers. A recurrent theme in all the accounts is that the girls were accepted as footballers by the boys because they were as good as or even better than many of the boys. They were often the only girls allowed to play with the boys and were accepted as 'mates'. One player reported that she fitted in so well with the boys that 'there were many who didn't even know that I was a girl!' (Pfister 1999: 102). Almost unanimously, these were girls who defined themselves as 'tomboys'. One respondent's comment was typical: 'I was a part of the gang; in a way I was a boy'. Another player mentioned having similar feelings: 'I always wanted to be a boy because girls were not allowed to climb trees, be a member of a gang, play Cowboys and Indians, play soccer and be involved in all these exciting adventures'.

Not only the biographies but also the attitudes, experiences and motivations of the soccer players showed many similarities. They all derived a tremendous amount of pleasure from playing the game; they enjoyed a feeling of control, enjoyed the excitement of 'being physical' and enjoyed playing together. Probably the most frequently mentioned aspect of their experiences was the pleasure they gained from being together, their connectedness as women and as a team. 'If you play an individual sport you can only be glad for yourself. If you are in a team, it is a wonderful feeling when you have an important match and especially if you get a goal. It doesn't matter who scores the goal but, when the ball is in the net, we all throw ourselves on the ground and hug each other – this is great, this being and belonging together' (Pfister 1999: 143). Despite the male tradition and image of football, the women players seem to have created a female space in which they clearly enjoy sharing and supporting each other. These women share the meanings that they attach to the game and express very similar feelings of enjoyment. In addition, they present an 'active physicality' very similar to that discussed by Woodward (1996) in her study of women who do windsurfing, another male-dominated and male-defined sport. She argues that windsurfing involves entering a privileged masculine world and an active physicality which contravenes norms of feminine embodiment. Through windsurfing we challenge the oppressiveness of femininity and the

privileges of masculinity and push at the boundaries of gender (Woodward 1996: 30).

Playing football is connected with specific ideals of the body and movement. Here, there prevails a more functional attitude to the body in which it is not appearance that is important but rather exertion, sweating, endurance, strength, toughness and competition. Besides technical and tactical skills, competition means aggressive body contact – woman fighting against woman. According to statements made in the interview study mentioned above, the players love the running and the fighting, and the game with its challenges. They like competition because of its intensity – competition is the 'real game', since it is connected with the fascination, thrill and experience of success (Pfister 1999). Thus female soccer players seem to have developed a specific type of physicality which contradicts traditional female conceptions of body and movement.

Devising new concepts of femininity

According to Judith Lorber (1994, 2000), the gender order can be deconstructed, i.e. decoded and modified, when people cross the boundaries of the gender norms, refuse to assume traditional roles and, instead, devise new concepts beyond the duality of gender. This is possible, not least because gender is not a simple, one-dimensional construction but rather a process in which various dimensions and categories (e.g. biological gender, sexual orientation, gender identities and gender images) can combine to form different 'mixtures'. An individual, for example, may have female genes and be a lesbian, mother, nurse and football player. Lorber proposes that we write new 'scripts' and play new roles, combining and mixing male and female 'gender markers' such as clothes and movements. In many respects this is precisely what top-level women football players do. On the one hand, they challenge the ideologies of femininity prevailing in the dominant sports culture by intruding upon the male domain of football. On the other hand, the women change – at least to a certain degree and partly in a subversive way – traditional interpretations of masculinity and femininity by refusing to identify with the stereotypes, expectations and ideals of womanhood or to conform to conventional images of femininity in terms of appearance and behaviour. This is clearly revealed in the interviews conducted as part of the project 'Sport in Women's Lives' (Pfister 1999). Irrespective of their sexual orientation, all the women interviewed were critical of the prevailing ideals of beauty and femininity, but all also agreed that they were women and, moreover, happy to be women. The majority of them, though, also described how they had acquired female identities in lengthy and ambivalent processes. 'I always played with the boys and I wished dearly to be one of them. All these girls – they were so boring', reported one of the players (Pfister 1999). Some of the women related how greatly they were in conflict with the expectations of their

social surroundings and how they eventually reconciled themselves to being women – women with their own definition of womanhood. 'Today I'm so glad I'm a woman. I'm free to decide what to wear and how to behave. Sometimes I even use lipstick', declared one player in her interview (Pfister 1999). Many of the women admitted to having multiple, multi-layered or variable gender constructions, without passing a negative judgement on it or experiencing it as something problematic. On the contrary, they seem to be able to cope effortlessly with multi-dimensional and changing gender identities and images. They adjusted their appearance, their behaviour and their speech to the social context and to the people with whom they interacted. Several of the players interviewed described themselves as 'powerful' and self-assured – attributes that they considered entirely positive – and did not feel threatened by gender stereotypes which gave these attributes a masculine connotation. One of the German women interviewed described herself as a 'mixture of gentleness and steel'. The fact that they did not fit into either gender category had no negative consequences for them; on the contrary, they seemed to enjoy playing with gender stereotypes and regarded 'gender play' as a sport.

Football plays an important role in the construction and enactment of gender, since it transforms the body and behaviour. Maria expressed this as follows: 'When a woman plays a competitive sport, she will never look like a mannequin. The body builds muscles, and you can argue whether this is feminine, but I think it looks good' (Pfister 1999). Anna affirmed: 'I've learned to be tough, to fight. On a football pitch you can't be just a nice girl' (Pfister 1999). At the same time, the women – even those who regarded 'masculinization' on the football field as something positive – were well aware that muscular bodies and aggressive behaviour in everyday life, which is marked by gender duality, are not always judged favourably. Judith Butler (1990) coined the term 'gender troublemakers' to denote individuals who, actively opposing the prevailing gender order, redefine gender and enact gender differently. Several of the women players we interviewed seem to be such 'gender troublemakers', developing – at least to a certain degree – femininities which deviated from the socially accepted ideals but without acting in a 'typically male' fashion, feeling like men or renouncing their womanhood. Their reports suggest a disintegration of the extreme polarities of masculinity and femininity. In an article entitled 'Using Gender to Undo Gender', Judith Lorber (2000) observed that it was astonishing how 'the more things change, the more they stay the same'. When one considers both the lack of attention paid to women's sports, especially women's football, by the mass media, and the gender hierarchies existing in sports organisations all over the world, one cannot but agree with Lorber's observation. The alternative gender constructions of women football players can, though, be interpreted as a first step in a general direction which, according to Lorber, ought to lead to a resolution of gender differences that have for too long been deeply established in a patriarchal culture.

Notes

1 Parts of this chapter have been published in: *Football Studies* 4 (2001): 41–58; F. Hong and J.A. Mangan (eds) (2004) *Soccer, Women, Sexual Liberation: Kicking off a New Era*, London: Frank Cass; D. Jütting (ed.) (2004) *Lokal-globale Fußballkultur*, Munich/Berlin: Waxmann.
2 Unfavourable comments on football in other countries are to be found, for example, in an article in *Sport und Gesundheit* (1938), 9: 18; see also Marschik 2003; Meier 2004.
3 See the typed report of Hans Hansen in the name of the board of consultants of the DFB (15 November 1969). This paper contains an overview of the decisions of the DFB concerning women's football and the proposal for a resolution on behalf of the acceptance of women's football. A copy of this paper was sent to me by Liselott Diem (letter from 25 July 1978). Cf. Ratzeburg and Biese 1995.
4 *WFV-Sport*, 7, 11 April 1957: see also *Sport im Spiegel*, 14 June 1957; this is a manuscript in the Carl-und-Liselott-Diem Archive at the German Sports University Cologne, Liselott-Diem-Collection File 334.
5 'Best team' competitions were not officially recognised as championships; they neither led to prizes nor awards, nor did they entitle those selected to take part in international contests. The players were thus deprived of the privileges connected with 'official' championships.
6 http://fifaworldcup.yahoo.com/03/en/031013/1/duq.html (accessed 27 September 2005); see also the other comments on this webpage.
7 *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 14 May 1995, p. 18; *Der Spiegel*, 45, 1995, p. 191; *Berliner Zeitung*, 237, 11/12 October 2003, p. 3, about the players of Turbine Potsdam.
8 See e.g. the discussion in the webpage of the top player Ariane Hingst: http://www.ariane-hingst.de/gaestebuch.php (accessed 27 September 2005).

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