Defining the Boundaries of the Nation: Nazi Soccer Policy in the Third Reich

Andrew D'Anieri
Colby College

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Soccer is often portrayed as an instrument of inclusion in the world, breaking down barriers between people and reminding us of our common humanity. This was not the case of soccer in Nazi Germany. On the contrary, soccer became a tool of division between individuals, political groups, and ethnicities. In a regime that emphasized the primacy of the German nation and persecuted Jews for their supposed "racial" inferiority, soccer seems an unlikely source of exclusionary nation-building. And yet, the Nazi establishment used the popularity of soccer to develop animosity between ethnic and national groups outside its concept of the German nation in an effort to further unify the German state.

A number of scholars have examined the Nazi party's interest in both domestic and international soccer. Among these scholars is David Imhoof, whose work has examined the ways in which Nazification changed sporting culture in the German city of Gottingen. Udo Merkel has taken a sociological perspective in writing about how the German soccer federation accepted the Nazis' attempts to mold the sport in the image of the party. Kevin Simpson and William Bowman have each described Nazi soccer policy as reflective of the Nazi party's expansionist foreign policy in Central Europe.

These scholars have provided valuable insights into the historical importance of soccer in Nazi Germany. But to fully understand the centrality of soccer in the Third Reich, one must adopt a holistic view of the ways in which the Nazi party used soccer to further their nationalist agenda. Soccer became a means of defining the German nation along parameters described by the Nazi party, which in turn carried an inherent political character as a means of nation-building.[1] Because it was the most popular sport at the time, the Nazis infiltrated and restructured both domestic and international soccer in Germany. Thus, this paper will consider the work of scholars who have focused exclusively on soccer in Nazi Germany either at home or abroad. In addition, it will draw upon a range of English-language primary source documents to more clearly define the boundaries of soccer as a means of nation-building in Nazi Germany.

This contribution will examine the Nazi influence on and use of soccer in the process of *Gleichschaltung*, the annexation of Austria, and foreign relations with England.[2] It will track the historical experience of the Nazi soccer intervention in each of these three cases to demonstrate that the Nazis were interested in developing national unity through exclusionary measures at home and abroad. In short, soccer represented another avenue through which the Third Reich could sow divisions between a superior Greater Germany, supposedly nefarious Jews, and their historic rival, Great Britain. In this way, soccer in Nazi Germany came to embody the Third Reich's domestic *Gleichschaltung*, its hyper-nationalist ideology, and its deceptively confrontational foreign policy.

[1] Peter J. Beck, *Scoring For Britain: International Football and International Politics 1900-1939* (London, UK: Frank Cass Publishers, 1999), 177.

[2] The German word *Gleichschaltung* translates most closely to English as "coordination." In the context of Nazi Germany, *Gleichschaltung* refers to Hitler's plan to subordinate all sectors of German public life under the Nazi regime.

Gleichschaltung in Domestic Soccer

Adolf Hitler's totalitarian ambitions rested upon his ability to unify German society, first under the Nazi state and subsequently under his own authority. After becoming chancellor in 1933, Hitler quickly set about purging political opponents and civil society organizations. Prominent among these were the Social Democratic Party and the Communist Party and their associated organizations. However, these parties were deeply entrenched in the Weimar Republic and their elimination would not be easy. Hitler's solution was to employ a process that came to be known as *Gleichschaltung*, which aimed to "coordinate" all aspects of German state and societal life under the Nazi party. In essence, this process represented the Nazification of German society. In turn, Hitler ordered the dissolution of opposition political parties and trade unions; there was to be only one Nazi institution in each aspect of society.[3] As will become clear, *Gleichschaltung* measures extended into the realm of local and national soccer organizations.[4]

In the 1920s under the Weimar Republic, the Social Democrats and the Communists had flourished, expanding their programming efforts beyond politics into German society. These included youth groups, workers' unions, and sports clubs. Each party's sport organizations promoted individual and team competition. Other more neutral organizations emphasized group exercise and inclusion, arguing that these furthered national unity more effectively than the divisive aspects of competition.[5] The popularity of these sports clubs made them hubs for a mass culture focused on physical fitness and competition, while their political backgrounds meant many of them were formed along party lines.

After World War I, the absence of military exercises allowed new members to join sports clubs. Along with the Republic's new policy of an eight-hour workday, middle class individuals now had the time and the means to participate in sports organizations. Chief among these sports was soccer, which had been imported from England in the early 1920s and became immensely popular throughout Germany.[6] Soccer could be played by a great number of people at once and contained a competitive edge that made it a popular spectator sport as well. The game was simple enough to be accessible to most socio-economic classes. The scalability of soccer also made it enjoyable in a variety of forms: as a pickup game in the park, in youth tournaments, or in grand stadiums.[7]

Cities and towns across Germany became consumed by the rising tide of soccer in the 1920s. The small city of Gottingen, which had a population of just 45,000 residents, contained six sports clubs devoted exclusively to soccer. Some of these had as many as 100 active members. While women were allowed to join sports clubs, they were largely barred from playing soccer. Crucially, most members of these soccer clubs belonged to the middle or lower-middle class, demographics most supportive of Nazi politics.[8] Indeed, soccer became an accessible avenue for the rising Nazi party to further cultivate and mobilize mass support.

The politicization of soccer clubs only intensified in the late 1920s, just as German political attitudes began to shift to the right. The unifying forces that bonded teammates together and the divisive nature of competitive team sports took on increasingly militant rhetoric. Soccer, among other sports, came to be seen as a substitute for military training. Nazi stormtroopers seized upon the sport as a way to frame their paramilitary activity as popular activity.[9] Membership in a soccer club could then be framed as a way to exercise a particular vision of German national identity. In

[3]Benjamin Sax and Dieter Kuntz, *Inside Hitler's Germany: A Documentary History of Life in the Third Reich* (Lexington, Massachusetts: D.C. Heath and Company, 1992), 125.
[4]David Imhoof, "The Game of Political Change: Sports in Gottingen during the Weimar and Nazi Eras," *German History* 27, no. 3: 394.
[5]Imhoof, "Game of Political Change," 374.
[6]Imhoof, 377.
[7]Imhoof, 378.
[8]Imhoof, 378.
[9]Imhoof, 377.

addition, police crackdowns on extremist parties of both the right and left made soccer an attractive outlet for political sentiments. As such, new clubs in the 1920s and early 1930s were often linked to workers' groups or leftist parties.[10] Soccer became a way for workers and middle class people to express their identities and their politics. The opportunity to play an enjoyable and widely popular game on a team aligned with one's personal politics must have been very appealing for men across Germany.

In the spring of 1933, Hitler began to tighten his grip on power in the Reichstag. The passage of the Enabling Act on March 24th gave Hitler's Nazi party the right to enact laws outside of the constitution, establishing the basis for his totalitarian regime. The dissolution of opposition political parties and social organizations would soon extend into the realm of soccer. Local and national soccer organizations less critical of National Socialism became co-opted into the Nazi regime.

Imhoof's study of sport clubs in Gottingen again provides an interesting case study for the ways in which *Gleichschaltung* affected local German soccer clubs. Sport Club 1905, a middle class soccer club based in Gottingen, flourished under the Nazi regime. It grew quickly to become one of the largest clubs in Germany and one of the region's most successful teams. Patronized by students, businessmen and soldiers, the club gained a rich following in the early 1930s. By 1933, it became affiliated with the Nazi-controlled *Deutscher Fussball-Bund* (DFB), the national soccer association that governed the sport in Germany, and began to incorporate Nazi ideas into the fabric of the club. Its directors became known as *Fuhrers*, club officials swore allegiance to Hitler, and the club "Aryanized" its statutes to correspond with Nazi racial ideology.[11] The 1905ers' conservative middle class history made the club an ideal selection for integration into Hitler's Nazified civil society. In turn, the club's size and success legitimized the Third Reich's sport policies by allowing the party to patronize a strong local team. Indeed, the story of the 1905ers in the Third Reich was one of cooperation and growth. The club embodied the ideal demographics of the Nazi party's *volkisch* nationalism, which allowed it to thrive as an extension of the state.[12]

This relatively smooth integration experience, however, was not always the norm. Just as *Gleichschaltung* had accepted Sport Club 1905 as a bulwark of German national unity, it used the same logic to dissolve working class, Social Democrat, and Communist clubs. The Nazis saw sport in part as a means to promote military preparations in anticipation of a second world war.[13] Opposition organizations in any aspect of German society would only impede this military planning.

Some communist workers' clubs attempted to avoid dissolution by applying for membership in the DFB. But given the DFB's submission to the Nazi party, these efforts were largely unsuccessful. The DFB often claimed that these clubs' political aims had "abused football," which ran counter to the association's stated goal of improving national unity. The Nazis outlawed religious soccer clubs in 1935 in a thinly veiled attempt to purge German soccer of Jewish teams or players.[14] Inherent in this promotion of nationalism is the reality that opposing political parties and Jews remained outside the Nazis' concept of the German nation. For working class individuals and Jews whose sources of physical activity and social identity aligned with a specific outlet for their political sentiments, this was a significant infringement on their public lives. After 1935, only Nazi-sponsored clubs and associations remained in Germany.

On a national level, *Gleichschaltung* grew to incorporate the DFB, which had claimed to be staunchly apolitical in the years of the Weimar Republic. In truth, the association acted in a more conservative manner, initially refusing to be drawn to the extreme right or left. Though club

[10]Imhoof, "Game of Political Change," 378-379.
[11]Imhoof, 387.
[12]Imhoof, 387.
[13]Udo Merkel, "The Hidden Social and Political History of the German Football Association (DFB), 1900-50," *Soccer and Society* 1, no. 2 (Summer 2000): 182.
[14]Merkel, "History of the DFB," 182.

football grew exponentially in the years following World War I, the German national team faced a de facto ban from international matches because the victors of the war refused to play them. As a result, the German teams of the 1920s played most of their matches against lesser teams, such as their former allies Austria, Hungary, Finland, and neutral Switzerland.[15] Worse yet, the national team could not compete in the first World Cup in 1930. Perhaps as a consequence of this ban, the DFB began to subscribe to the myth that Germany had been "stabbed in the back" in their World War I defeat by weak politicians and communists.

In turn, the DFB began to remove the mask concealing its conservatism. Sociologist Udo Merkel notes that the DFB remained loyal to the Wilhelmine Empire that had preceded the Weimar Republic. Inherent in this loyalty was the DFB leaders' support for a strong, centralized government based on German nationalism, an allegiance that remained at odds with Weimar democracy. When the Weimar government changed the German flag's colors to black, red, and gold, the DFB opted to keep the black-white-red tricolor of the German Empire for a number of years. In Merkel's estimation, the DFB hoped that its commitment to German unity would encourage the use of soccer as a means to bridge class differences in an increasingly fragmented German society.[16]

Such an overtly nationalist ideology made the DFB a logical ally for the Nazi party in 1933. The DFB's affinity for Wilhelmine Germany aligned perfectly with the National Socialist rhetoric that the Weimar government had betrayed Germany's history of political centralization.[17] In Hitler's eyes, the weak liberal democracy that the Weimar government presided over represented a departure from German tradition and culture. It followed that the DFB's proclivity for a nationalist central government and the Nazis' desire to make the Third Reich a cult of Hitler would make for ideological bedfellows. Such was its historical conservatism, Merkel writes that in comparison to working class or religious sporting organizations, "the DFB got away lightly."[18]

The survival of the DFB centered on its willingness to be reshaped by the Nazi organizational mold. Little of the association's apolitical veneer remained in 1933 and its conservative bent made the DFB amenable to Nazi restructuring. The DFB continued to represent Germany's soccer interests abroad, particularly within the world governing body, FIFA. But its domestic responsibilities largely fell to the new Specialist Office for Football, one of 21 departments within the national-socialist office for sports. The Nazis also made the DFB more hierarchical, modeled on the government's *fuhrerprinzip*, so that leaders held total authority over their subordinates and answered only to their superiors. The former director of the DFB, Felix Lindemann, retained his position in the department for football; he became a member of the Nazi party in 1937.[19]

Perhaps the most significant act of Nazi restructuring within the DFB was the decision in 1934 to integrate all youth soccer programs into the Hitler Youth. Unsurprisingly, the DFB and the Nazi party held very similar ideas about youth development in sport. Both sides saw the melding of soccer with Nazi-style discipline as essential to shaping the next generation of deferential young men loyal to the Hitler state. The Nazis completed the merger in 1936 when no independent youth soccer clubs remained.[20] Once subsumed within the Hitler Youth, youth soccer in Germany became decidedly less focused on soccer itself and more on sport as a means of physical fitness. Training now included hiking, marching, shooting, and other outdoor exercises as the regime sought to use sport more generally to develop military skills.[21] Thus, youth soccer was no longer an end in itself;

[15] Merkel, "History of the DFB," 178.
[16] Merkel, 178.
[17] Sax and Kuntz, *Inside Hitler's Germany*, 14. The Nazi party frequently railed against the inefficiency and political weakness of the Weimar government. As Germany's only attempt at a democratic government at the time, Weimar's political failures provided plenty of fodder for Hitler's authoritarian rhetoric.
[18] Merkel, 182.
[19] Merkel, 183.
[20] Merkel, 183.
[21] Merkel, 183.

it had become a tool of the Nazis' military complex.

The knock-on effects of integration into the Hitler Youth meant that young Jewish athletes had no teams for which to play. In 1933, the DFB had encouraged clubs to purge their Jewish and communist members. For his part, Linnemann advocated for the exclusion of Jews from all soccer clubs and for the investigation of the religious backgrounds of new members.[22] Of course, racial policies of this ilk were commonplace in other aspects of German society in the 1930s: the Nuremburg Laws kept Jews out of political life and the 1935 boycott of Jewish businesses stripped them of their livelihoods.[23] Yet the policing of soccer to decide who could participate in this leisure time activity represented a far-reaching attempt to exacerbate differences between individuals. Denying Jews access to a sport robbed them of a piece of their collective identity tied to religious soccer clubs. German Jews had worked hard to establish Jewish sports clubs as a means of cultivating their shared identity.[24] Though none of their soccer teams enjoyed enough success to become famous, these German Jewish clubs had been a place where Jews could both play a sport they enjoyed and revel in their religious identity. Without access to organized soccer, many Jews also lost an aspect of their community life that tied soccer and religion together.

For the Nazis, *Gleichschaltung* within the realm of soccer stood out as remarkably successful at both the local and national levels. Nazi soccer policy thwarted opposition political groups in their attempts to organize around a popular social and physical activity. It pivoted the remaining clubs toward the Nazi party, bringing another aspect of civil society under its control. On a national scale, the DFB submitted to a Nazi takeover based on shared beliefs in German nationalism and remade the DFB in the image of the party leadership structure. It co-opted youth soccer into the Hitler Youth, ensuring that young people would positively correlate Nazi ideals with soccer.

But perhaps most importantly, Nazi soccer policy defined who was in the German *volk* and who was relegated to its periphery. Participation in soccer became a privilege to be enjoyed only by those organizations sponsored specifically by the Nazi regime. In this way, the Nazis became gatekeepers to the most popular leisure activity in Germany. The Nazi state held a tremendous amount of power over how citizens spent their time. This division between those allowed inside the realm of German soccer and those kept outside of it simplified the identities of individuals and groups alike. Those whom the Nazis allowed to play soccer were accepted; those whom they did not were pushed further from mainstream German society.

Nazi Racial Exclusion in European Soccer

One of Hitler's most significant ideas was his concept of *lebensraum*, or the idea that the German nation needed more physical space if it was to thrive in Europe. He coupled *lebensraum* with fiery nationalist rhetoric about the dislocation of Germans living outside of Germany's borders. Significant minorities of ethnic Germans did live in other European countries, particularly Austria and the Czech *Sudetenland*.[25] As Nazi Germany increased its rearmament efforts in the mid 1930s, the country required more industrial resources like steel and iron. Hermann Goering, Hitler's second-in-command, advocated for the invasion of Austria and its iron reserves to stimulate German production efforts. As a country dominated by German-speakers, Goering saw the annexation of Austria as a means to carry out pan-German nationalism. To Hitler, Austria represented a largely Aryan nation similar to his concept of an ideal Germany.[26]

The incorporation of Austria would allow Hitler to continue his quest for *lebensraum*, provide

[22]Merkel, "History of the DFB," 185.
[23]Sax and Kuntz, *Inside Hitler's Germany*, 405, 408.
[24]William D. Bowman, "Hakoah Vienna and the International Nature of Interwar Austrian Sports," *Central European History* 44, no. 4 (December 2011): 642.
[25]Sax and Kuntz, 341.
[26]Ian Kershaw, *Hitler 1936-1945: Nemesis* (New York, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000), 67.

further raw materials for the war effort, and bring ethnic Germans into a Greater Germany. Thus on March 12th, 1938, German troops crossed the southern border into Austria and with no resistance, annexed Austria into Nazi Germany. Beyond Nazi military power, the state's soccer policy also became a means of co-opting Germanic Austrians into greater Germany and of excluding Jews living in Austria. In this way, soccer became a tool for the exercise of German hegemony as the Nazi party attempted to implement its nationalist goals.

Austria had grown into a continental soccer power in the early 1930s, thanks in large part to the growth and popularity of Vienna's "coffeehouse" club teams. The coffeehouse had been a staple meeting place of the Viennese intelligentsia since the city expelled the Ottomans in the late seventeenth century. Here, a complex soccer culture developed among the liberal bourgeoisie, the middle class, and the working class. These coffeehouses became tiny epicenters of soccer fanaticism, each with its own favorite team and diehard supporters.[27] Unlike Germany where soccer clubs grew out of political parties and class status, soccer fandom in Austria transcended class lines. Soccer also grew primarily out of the urban center of Vienna. Whereas in Germany soccer had become popular in both large cities and small towns, Vienna remained the heart of Austrian soccer culture. Because most clubs began in Vienna, their associated coffeehouses became the primary link of identity between clubs and their supporters.

But soccer clubs also identified along religious lines in Vienna. Amid deep anti-Semitism in Austria, Zionists founded the Viennese club Hakoah Wien in 1909. Proudly wearing a Star of David on their blue and white kits, Hakoah rose to the country's top division, and even won the league in 1925.[28] Similar to the local Jewish clubs in Germany, Hakoah acted as a refuge for persecuted Jews. Attracted by higher wages and a dynamic Jewish community, soccer players from Budapest and Prague joined the club throughout the 1920s.[29] Thousands turned out to matches to express their pride and revel in their identity without fear of harassment. Hakoah's success even exposed Jewish stereotypes as untrue. In 1924, the German sporting newspaper *Fussball* commented that the team's sterling performances in Leipzig and Berlin "helped do away with the fairy tale about the physical inferiority of the Jews."[30] Anti-Semitism simmered just below the surface of German public life in the 1920s. Such a positive declaration about Hakoah's admirable performances represented a significant departure from public discourse about Jews. Though such a view would not have been nearly as common in Nazi Germany, Hakoah's participation and success in soccer certainly mitigated anti-Semitism in a sporting context.

The Austrians were also exceptionally good at soccer. They played with a free flowing, attacking style based on technique and creativity. Possibly reflecting the influence of the creative intelligentsia who dominated the coffeehouse soccer culture, the national *Wunderteam* featured fluid movement and dynamic passing and lost just three of its thirty-one matches between 1931 and 1934. Led by one of Europe's best forwards in Matthias Sindelar, the Austrian national team was widely viewed as one of the continent's top sides. Sindelar's attacking genius inspired Austria's free-flowing, high-scoring style that would eventually become the basis for modern soccer. This style was imitated across Europe, although the Austrians remained the masters, soundly beating powerhouses like Scotland, England and Germany.[31] After invading Austria, the Nazis set about subordinating the talents of the highly successful *Wunderteam* under Nazi organization. Forcing the most entertaining team on the continent to play under the auspices of German control would have been a tremendous show of strength for the Nazi regime.

[27]Kevin Simpson, *Soccer Under the Swastika: Stories of Survival and Resistance During the Holocaust* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishing Group, 2016), 112.
[28]Bowman, "Hakoah Vienna," 653.
[29]Bowman, 666.
[30]Bowman, 655.
[31]Simpson, *Soccer Under the Swastika*, 113.

The Nazi annexation, and the ensuing enforcement of its hyper-nationalist ideology, produced dramatic changes in the structure of Austrian soccer that had profound effects on the country's national consciousness. Almost immediately after the annexation, the Nazi regime set about restructuring Austrian soccer organizations just as it had done at home. The party banned independent soccer clubs, transferred administrative duties to Nazi bureaucrats, fused youth associations with the Hitler Youth, and sacked Jewish board members at top-level clubs. The Nazis even abolished Austria's national soccer association and assigned first division clubs to one of Germany's twenty-one regional leagues.[32] Such rapid coercive measures represented an affront to Austrian soccer as a whole and further buried Austria's sovereignty under the oppressive force of Hitler's expansionist Germany.

But Austrian soccer refused to take these changes lying down. The arrival of German troops sparked a mass emigration of players, coaches, and even journalists.[33] Those who stayed to endure the Nazi restructuring actively resisted their invaders. The Nazis scheduled a reconciliation match between Germany and Austria in Vienna just three weeks after the annexation. The match was a clear attempt at nationalist propaganda seeking to unify Austria under the authority of the Nazi party; prominent Nazi party officials attended the match and giant swastikas adorned the stadium.[34] Sindelar led the Austrian team out in their traditional red-white-red kit, determined to show their disapproval of the regime. Sindelar scored a late goal and the Austrians ran out 2-0 winners, defying the Nazis' hopes for a tame 1-1 tie. After the second goal, the home crowd erupted into chants of "Österreich, Österreich!" or "Austria, Austria!" According to legend, Sindelar even danced in front of the directors' box filled with Nazi elites.[35] The match became a display of dissenting Austrian nationalism in response to the Nazi annexation, much to the displeasure of Nazi party officials.

A week later, however, an image of Sindelar appeared in Vienna's Nazi newspaper next to a supposedly handwritten endorsement of Hitler and Germany.[36] Despite his defiance of Nazi policy, Sindelar became another tool through which the regime could spread pro-Nazi propaganda. Indeed, Austrians' affinity for soccer provided an obvious channel for such propaganda. The game's popularity in Austria and the social culture by which it was surrounded made it easy for Nazi messaging to reach broad swaths of society. But the Nazis had little control over the matches themselves, and Austrian clubs routinely defeated their German counterparts in the eighteen months after annexation.

Promoting the unity of a greater German nation through soccer proved to be a difficult task for Nazi officials. In the weeks following the reconciliation match, Nazi authorities instructed Lindemann, still president of the DFB, to build a team that represented the Teutonic brotherhood of the recently enlarged German state to compete in that summer's World Cup in France. The supposed reunification of the German people after the annexation heaped pressure on Nazi ideology. If Hitler's Aryan race truly was superior to all others, then surely a combined squad of two of Europe's strongest soccer playing nations should become world champions. Lindemann himself articulated the stress of using this mixed team to convey German unity: "a visible expression of our solidarity with the Austrians who have come back to the Reich has to be presented. The Fuhrer demands a 6:5 or 5:6 ratio. History expects this of us!"[37] Hitler, too, expected a successful, balanced German-Austrian team, for the legitimacy of his racial ideology was now under threat. Yet the divisions within the team along national lines made Germany destined for failure that summer. The final squad of twenty-two players included nine Austrians and thirteen Germans, many of

[32]Simpson, *Soccer Under the Swastika*, 115.
[33]Simpson, 115.
[34]Simpson, 118.
[35]Simpson, 119.
[36]Simpson, 119.
[37]Simpson, 120.

whom played for rival club sides. This divided squad, nominally united under Hitler, suffered an embarrassing first round loss to lowly Switzerland.[38]

Austrian dissent continued in the realm of club soccer throughout the war. Austrian crowds became notorious among Nazi officials for their unruly antics and fervent support of their teams. German powerhouse Schalke's 1940 defeat of Austrian upstart Admira provoked riots in the streets of Vienna, fed by anti-German anger. Months later, Rapid Vienna avenged Admira's loss by securing a hard-fought 4-3 victory over Schalke to claim the 1941 German club championship.[39] The win stoked feelings of Austrian national pride and thousands of fans mobbed the team at the Vienna train station.[40] Just like international soccer, club matches became places to protest against the violation of Austrian sovereignty and the abuses of the Nazi party.

Those sentiments dampened as most of the Rapid Vienna squad was sent to the eastern front just weeks later. Scholars disagree about whether or not the Nazi party sought to punish the Rapid players for their victory. It was common for soccer players to be called to serve in reserve forces because the Nazi leadership thought that athletes made the best soldiers.[41] The facts remain cloudy at best. Even the Greater German national team lost players to the war, such was the army's need for new bodies.[42] It seems reasonable to assume that the Nazi leadership did deliberately select Austrian soccer players to serve in battle. Their selection, however, was based more on their fitness for war rather than as a means of punishment for success at club level.

In contrast to the outbursts of distinctly Austrian pride, the dissolution of Hakoah Wien deprived Viennese Jews of their own source of dignity. The team had been on its way back to the top division when the Nazi invasion stopped this progress in its tracks. The party immediately repossessed its ground and confiscated its gear. Players scattered and the team disbanded.[43] Perhaps most insidiously, Hakoah's match results were purged from the record books. League opponents who had already played the club that season were awarded 3-0 wins, the equivalent of a forfeit.[44] It was as if the team had never existed or had been consigned to the past, never to return again. Given the importance of the club to Viennese Jews and Jews across Europe, the erasure of Hakoah represented a direct assault on Jewish identity. This was the ghettoization of Jewish soccer: the Nazis eliminated Hakoah from public life, ransacked the club's resources, and stripped its members of any positive expressions of Jewish identity. Much like the physical ghettos that the Nazis forced Eastern European Jews into, the ghettoization of Hakoah aimed to keep Jews on the periphery of society. Six ex-Hakoah players were murdered in the Holocaust, the ultimate erasure of Jewish athletic excellence.[45]

Enemy England: Nazi Foreign Policy in International Soccer

By 1935, the Third Reich had successfully consolidated German soccer under a strictly Nazified framework. Club soccer remained popular for those who were allowed to play, especially among the youth. Yet Germany needed to test its national team on the world stage if it was to be considered a top-tier soccer nation. Germany had been forced to play smaller nations for years due to its effective ban against allied countries. That changed when the German and English soccer associations agreed to a friendly match to be played on December 4th, 1935.

[38]"1938 World Cup in France: Germany," FIFA, accessed November 11, 2017, http://www.fifa.com/worldcup/archive/france1938/teams/team=43948/matches.html.
[39]David Forster and Georg Spitaler, "Viennese Football and the German *Wehrmacht* - Between 'Duty' and Evasion," *Historical Social Research* 40, no. 4 (2015): 314.
[40]Simpson, *Soccer Under the Swastika*, 121-122.
[41]Forster and Spitaler, "Between 'Duty' and Evasion," 315.
[42]Forster and Spitaler, 316.
[43]Bowman, "Hakoah Vienna," 656.
[44]Simpson, 115.
[45]Simpson, 117.

That spring, Great Britain and Germany had signed the controversial Anglo-German Naval Agreement. The treaty allowed Germany to construct a navy 35% the size of the British navy, along with a submarine fleet equal to that of the British.[46] This bilateral agreement violated the rearmament terms of the Treaty of Versailles, which had been agreed upon by a number of Allied countries. Britain had left its neighbors in the lurch by unilaterally agreeing to Nazi Germany's rearmament. This represented one of the British government's first steps in its hopes of appeasing Hitler. The British Parliament reasoned that if they granted Germany the right to some semblance of a navy, it would be enough to appease Hitler. For the *Fuhrer*, the treaty represented a major diplomatic victory, calling it "the happiest day of his life."[47] At the time, the agreement represented either a first step towards an alliance with Britain, or that Hitler had found the soft underbelly of the Allied powers that he could manipulate for his own ends.

This precarious moment in foreign relations provided the backdrop for the exhibition match. The English soccer association (FA) had reached out to the DFB to invite the Germans to play in London in the hopes of assuring peaceful relations with the German Reich. Much to the chagrin of the English political establishment, the match proved to be much more than a meeting between two traditional European powers. Despite the Nazi government's friendly overtures toward Britain, the Nazis' true intent was to display their superiority on the pitch. For Hitler, the match represented a propaganda opportunity too good to pass up.[48] In his mind, the match was a chance to enter the heart of one of Germany's great World War I adversaries and strive for victory over them. If the Germans defeated their former enemy, the Nazis could show just how far the German nation had come under Nazi leadership. It was an opportunity to manufacture a moment of national pride in a decidedly international context.

While Parliament seemed willing to accept relations with Hitler in foreign policy, the *Fuhrer*'s hyper-nationalism and virulent anti-Semitism made many Britons uneasy about the benefits of the match. On October 4th, the *New York Times* ran a story alleging that Nazi crowds had beaten a Polish Jewish soccer player to death during a match. The newspaper reported that the player, Edmund Baumgartner, had been killed by an "infuriated Nazi crowd at Ratibor in German Upper Silesia."[49] The news made its way to England, where leftist newspapers seized on the story as a "demonstration of German fascism," and vowed to protest the match.[50] In fact, some sections of society even worried that the match would legitimize such acts of Nazi fascism.

On October 16th, the German Embassy in London called the British Foreign Office in the hopes that they would help spread the "true facts" about the alleged soccer killing. It was outside the jurisdiction of the Foreign Office to influence domestic newspapers, so they passed the message on to the British Home Office, which oversaw domestic security and the rule of law. In a wide interpretation of its powers, the Home Office concluded that it could influence the spread of information that might cause unrest at home. At that, the Home Office began to circulate information to the media that news of the killing had been inaccurate.[51] However, there is little evidence to suggest that the British press published any articles propagating this kind of disinformation about the killing. *The London Times*, one of England's most popular newspapers at the time, did not write any articles that attempted to recharacterize the soccer killing with a more pro-German bent.

Nevertheless, the German government in London had actively attempted to alter the political discourse in England around the anti-Jewish killing at a soccer match by Nazi sympathizers. The

[46]Ian Kershaw, *Hitler 1889-1936: Hubris* (New York, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998), 556.
[47]Kershaw, *Hitler: Hubris*, 558.
[48]Beck, *Scoring For Britain*, 175.
[49]"Sportsmen Aroused by Beating to Death of Jewish Soccer Player by Nazi Crowd," *The New York Times*, October 4, 1935.
[50]Brian Stoddart, "Sport, Cultural Politics and International Relations: England versus Germany, 1935," *Soccer and Society* 7, no. 1 (January 2000): 34.
[51]Stoddart, "England versus Germany," 35.

British government naively agreed to help the Germans separate soccer and politics in the court of public opinion. Was the Home Office so scared of upsetting Germany that it did the bidding of the Nazis in an attempt to cover up reporting of an anti-Semitic murder in a sporting context? Or could it be that the British government truly viewed politics and sport as entirely separate entities? Stoddart writes that the Home Office worried about antagonizing the Germans by either refusing to influence media coverage of the killing or by cancelling the match altogether.[52] While the British certainly did not want to provoke the Germans, it seems more likely that the Home Office's willingness to help subvert stories of the killing came from their naïve belief that politics were entirely divorced from sport. Referring to the match with Germany, Home Secretary Sir John Simon declared it vital for Britain to maintain "a [British] tradition that this sporting fixture is carried through without any regard to politics at all."[53] Such refusal to affix any political significance to the match stood in direct contrast to the attitudes of the German government. By asking the British government to influence newspapers' reporting, the German embassy acknowledged the potential for the killing to tie Nazi ideology to the upcoming match. The embassy tried to cover up an atrocity permitted under Nazism. In any case, the German government had successfully deceived their British counterparts into taking an apolitical stance on a sporting issue that carried clear political overtones.

Articles from the *London Times* in the lead up to the match show continued disagreement between government officials and anti-fascist protest groups, particularly trade unions, about the meaning and merits of the match. On November 28th, 1935, the *Times* reported that the General Council of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) asked Simon to ban the match on the grounds that, "the presence in London of a large contingent of Nazis would be interpreted as a gesture of sympathy by the Government with a movement whose aims and methods have evoked the strongest condemnation from every section of public opinion in the country."[54] The TUC conjured images of thousands of German Nazi supporters striding through the streets of London waving swastikas.

Just two days later, the newspaper ran a letter to the editor written by Leslie Tucker, the chairman of the Anglo-Japanese Judo Club, who had traveled to Germany for competition the prior week. Tucker lambasted the TUC's complaint as bad press for England, a country who supposedly practiced excellent sportsmanship. He recalled the reception that the judo team experienced in Germany: "everywhere we went the greatest enthusiasm was shown...the British National Anthem was played before every contest, with the whole crowd standing at the salute...British victory was received with thunderous applause."[55] Tucker saw no reason why the English should not treat the German soccer team with the same appreciation that the Germans had shown the English judo team. His observations point to a desire to treat the Nazis as a fellow European power worthy of respect. With no nationalist propaganda agenda, it is easy to see how the English adopted a welcoming approach to the German national team.

In contrast, the Nazi establishment certainly did not see themselves as linked in some way to the British. Sport in Nazi Germany was political by definition, a fact emphasized by Hitler and numerous party writers. Nazi publisher Bruno Malitz wrote in his 1933 book *The Physical Exercises in the National Socialist Idea* that, "National Socialism can look at sport only from the point of view of the unity of the nation...used as a weapon for the genuine building of a nation."[56] Kurt Munch echoed this sentiment in his 1935 manual on National Socialist education: "The consciousness of sport is to fulfill the German mission in the world, and the pride of the sportsman [is] in being

[52]Stoddart, "England versus Germany," 35.
[53]Beck, *Scoring for Britain*, 174.
[54]"T.U.C. and German Players: Home Secretary Asked to Ban Match," *The London Times*, November 28, 1935.
[55]"T.U.C. and German Players," *The London Times*, November 30, 1935.
[56]Beck, 177.

allowed to fight under the swastika."[57] Nazi control of soccer sought to further the unity of a strictly German nation. Though the Nazis might have taken pride in the respect they garnered from foreign sporting nations, their first goal was the promotion of their own nation. Thus, the German political establishment did not lament hurting the feelings of European countries or worry about their perception abroad. Quite to the contrary, the competition inherent in international soccer only sharpened the contours of the German nation against the rest of the world.

Back in Britain, Simon ignored the TUC's complaints and English soccer elites welcomed the German team at the airport in London. The TUC did, however, manage to secure a meeting with Simon the day that the Germans arrived in London. *The Times* wrote that Simon listened to the Congress' concerns but stated plainly that the game had, "no political significance whatever."[58] Interestingly, the same article included similar quotes from the German team's coaches. The article documented a Dr. Xandry, the DFB's managing director, as saying, "the players had come over for the game alone." The team's head coach insisted that the trip had, "nothing to do with the German Government and the players had no message from Herr Hitler."[59]

It is curious that both sides would go through such pains to assure British citizens that the game would not be politically charged, particularly in the case of the Germans. The Nazi party's rhetoric regarding sport stated plainly that political neutrality was impossible for German athletes; their performances were always tied to politics. Given such pointed nationalist discourse, it seems highly unlikely that the Nazi government viewed a soccer match with one of the preeminent liberal powers in Europe as merely a sporting contest. No, the Germans were trying to deceive the British, and they succeeded. This points to the adversarial, yet deceptive nature of German foreign policy within the realm of international soccer. Whereas the British went to great lengths to accommodate their guests and appease the Nazi regime, the Germans sought to deceive their hosts into thinking that the match held minimal political importance in Germany. In reality, the match represented a huge propaganda opportunity for the regime. It was a chance to test the superiority of the German nation against one of the world's most powerful states. Pitting Germany against England, the birthplace of soccer, implied that German greatness had returned, that it could compete on the same playing field with any nation in Europe.

Beginning in the late 1930s and into the early 1940s, the Nazis attempted to revolutionize soccer tactics in explicit contrast with England. Much of Hitler's rhetoric during the rise of National Socialism championed the revolutionary character of the Nazi movement. In that same vein, a Nazi regional supervisor of sport named Karl Oberhuber set out to fundamentally change the way Germany and the world played soccer. Most clubs and national teams, including Germany, in the 1930s tended to play some variation of the W-M formation. Conceived in Britain by the famous Arsenal manager Herbert Chapman, the W-M formation was relatively defensive in nature.[60] Meant to look like the letters W and M on the field, the formation was split into two parts. The attack consisted of three strikers, with two inside forwards behind them, making the points of a "W". In defense, two center halfbacks sat just in front of three fullbacks, forming the shape of an "M". One of Oberhuber's employees in the Bavarian Ministry of the Interior derided the strategy as a "thick wall" that produced dull, defensive soccer.[61] Not only was the W-M formation conceived of by their British rivals, the tactic went against Oberhuber's conception of sport linked to the military experience. So, he set out to create the near-antithesis of the W-M formation.

[57] Beck, *Scoring for Britain*, 177.
[58] "German Football Team: Arrival In England. Trade Unionists At Home Office," *The London Times*, December 3, 1935.
[59] "Arrival in England," *The London Times*, December 3, 1935.
[60] Markwart Herzog, "German Blitzkrieg Football Against the English 'Wall Tactic': the Football System Dispute in the German Empire 1939-1941," *International Journal of the History of Sport* 31, no. 12 (August 2014): 1492.
[61] Herzog, "German Blitzkrieg Football," 1492.

Drawing on his time in the German military, Oberhuber advocated for aggressive, attacking soccer. His system drew upon the free-scoring tactics of the 1920s, as well as Germany military success in the invasion of Poland. This combination of athletic and military origins has led scholars to refer to such tactics as *Blitzkrieg* strategy. Oberhuber's formation added the two inside forwards to the traditional three-man strikeforce and pushed the defensive-minded center halves into the attack.[62] In his conception, teams would attack with six or seven players, producing goals and lightning-quick counterattacks. Oberhuber drew directly from military strategy, claiming that his soccer strategy modeled Hitler's "unprecedented attacks and in an ingenious manner, as no one would have thought possible."[63] In revolutionizing soccer tactics, Oberhuber aimed to emulate Hitler's innovative military strategy.

Inherent in Oberhuber's attacking strategy was a hatred for the W-M formation. The W-M had become so widespread that it proved difficult for his tactic to break into the mainstream. And so Oberhuber resorted to ridiculing the W-M system as foreign, English, pacifistic, or Jewish.[64] By 1939, the British had entered the war and stood out as the Germans' biggest enemy, while the Nazis considered the Jews to be Germany's most significant internal enemy. Thus, Oberhuber's insults suggest that he viewed the W-M system as the enemy of his *Blitzkreig* tactics, just as Nazi ideology regarded the British and the Jews as enemies of the German people. Not even soccer strategy could escape infiltration from the Nazis' divisive militarized rhetoric. Through Oberhuber's propagation of his *Blitzkreig* system, soccer tactics became another means of separating Germany from foreign threats to the *Volk*.

Conclusion

The Nazi government seized upon soccer as a means of reinforcing imagined boundaries of the German nation. As in other spheres of society, *Gleichschaltung* homogenized the German soccer landscape under exclusively Nazi sponsors. This meant that Jews and political opponents could not play organized soccer, losing a piece of their identity in the process. The annexation of Austria led the DFB to attempt to co-opt Austrian soccer into the German soccer organization. The party believed that integration in soccer would promote the unity of a greater German brotherhood as the *Altreich* subsumed Austrian sovereignty. Though this integration certainly did redraw the lines of the German nation, and nearly wiped out any record of Jewish soccer clubs, it mostly failed in its efforts to make many Austrians feel German. Finally, German soccer played an essential role in Nazi foreign policy, allowing the Nazi government to manipulate matches with foreign countries for their own propaganda purposes.

This all speaks to the singularity of soccer as a force to emphasize differences between peoples and unity among members of the nation. Nazi Germany weaponized soccer by using it to segregate ethnic groups and to politicize individuals. In other words, if creating a division between the German nation and all other people was the Nazis' goal, then its soccer policy was an essential instrument in achieving a such division.

Sport in general too often receives criticism for being a mere means of escapism from the realities of political and social life. Pundits, academics, and ordinary individuals often dismiss sport as a source of entertainment or distraction. This paper has used the lens of soccer in Nazi Germany to show that sports—in their organization, their hierarchy, their supporters' culture, the rhetoric surrounding them, and the action of athletic competition itself—can have real effects on the lives of individuals and groups. As this paper has argued, sport can become a tool for sowing division as well as a force for unity. In essence, the ways in which individuals and groups organize, discuss, and consume sports can define the boundaries of both personal and collective identity. Far from

[62]Herzog, "German Blitzkrieg Football," 1492.
[63]Herzog, 1492.
[64]Herzog, 1492.

the realm of fantasy, sports can mold cultures and shape the topography of history.

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