
A CONTRIBUTION TO ONE OF THE MYTHS OF THE FOUNDING OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY BY ANALYSING PARTICULAR DAILY AND WEEKLY NEWSPAPERS

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10.2.1.2.6 Die deutsche Nationalmannschaft im Spiegel englischer, französischer, österreichischer und schweizerischer Medien ................................................. 152
10.2.2 Der Verlauf des Turniers...................................................................... 160
10.2.2.1 England aus englischer Sicht.............................................................. 160
10.2.2.2 Frankreich aus französischer Sicht...................................................... 165
10.2.2.3 Österreich aus österreichischer Sicht .................................................. 168
10.2.2.4 Die Schweiz aus schweizerischer Sicht .............................................. 174
10.2.2.5 Die deutsche Nationalmannschaft .................................................... 179
10.2.2.5.1 Die Vorrunde.................................................................................. 179
10.2.2.5.2 Das Viertelfinale ............................................................................ 193
10.2.2.5.3 Das Halbfinale................................................................................ 199
10.2.2.5.4 Das Finale...................................................................................... 211
10.2.3 Gesamtfazit des WM-Turniers .............................................................. 226
10.2.3.1 Die englische Mannschaft aus englischem Blickwinkel ...................... 226
10.2.3.2 Die französische Mannschaft aus französischem Blickwinkel .......... 229
10.2.3.3 Die österreichische Mannschaft aus österreichischem Blickwinkel .... 231
10.2.3.4 Die Schweizer Mannschaft aus Schweizer Blickwinkel ..................... 233
10.2.3.5 Die mediale Rezeption des deutschen Turnierverlaufes .................... 234
10.2.3.6 Allgemeines WM-Fazit ...................................................................... 241
10.3 Die Rezeption der über den Sport hinausgehenden Bedeutungsdimensionen.... 245
10.3.1 Nationale Stereotypen in der Berichterstattung ...................................... 245
10.3.1.1 Allgemeine Tendenzen....................................................................... 245
10.3.1.2 Über Deutschland.............................................................................. 246
10.3.2 Querschlüsse zwischen Sport und anderen Systemen ............................ 251
10.3.2.1 Querschlüsse zwischen Sport und Wirtschaft .................................... 251
10.3.2.2 Querschlüsse zwischen Sport und Politik ........................................... 257
10.3.2.3 Querschlüsse zwischen dem gesellschaftlichen Leben in Deutschland und der WM ................................................................. 267
10.3.3 Angst vor neuem deutschen Selbstbewusstsein und Nationalismus? ....... 269
10.3.3.1 Die mediale Rezeption deutschen Jubels ............................................ 270
10.3.3.2 Die mediale Rezeption nationalistischer Auswüchse ......................... 276
11 Fazit............................................................................................................. 282
12 Literaturverzeichnis .................................................................................... 289
13 Anhang......................................................................................................... 303
Zusammenfassung:

The „miracle of Berne“ („Wunder von Bern“), which means the highly surprising victory of the Western German football team at the world cup 1954 in Switzerland, has become a fixed term in German historiography. Beyond the event in sports the circumstances around the world cup final at the fourth of July 1954 between the German team and the huge favorite Hungary, who had been unbeaten in four years, have created a myth around the formation of the German Federal Republic.

This thesis claims to widen up the German view, which has already been part of much research, and by integrating the international perspective by analysing contemporary daily and weekly newspapers from England, France, Austria and Switzerland during the tournament. Because of the situation at the outset of the tournament in 1954 – the second world cup after World War II – some scepticism towards Germany can be expected from the side of these four countries. Only nine years after the war, that Germany had begun, this new Germany now already triumphed at the global competition in the most popular sport of the world. In Germany this victory has mostly been interpreted as superhuman, represented by eleven modest and unknown players who succeeded mainly by their highly developed comradeship, their will and their manager Sepp Herberger.

But analysing international press shows that this German perception of the “miracle of Berne” goes a lot too far in the mythological sense. In England, France, Austria and Switzerland the perception of the event mostly does not go beyond aspects of sports. The international press rather uses the German victory in football to show how far the German political system, economy and society had already developed – without combining this perspective with sports. The myth of the team that had no chance to succeed in any way during the tournament and became world champion out of nothing furthermore cannot be maintained after analysing 18 newspapers from four european countries. Instead even before the beginning of the world cup the German team was regarded as one of the “dark horses” for the world cup title. Additionally the players around Fritz Walter were far away from unknown in the international perspective, which can be read in many articles that mainly deal with the German team before the first kick-off of the tournament. Manager Herberger furthermore was regarded as one of the most clever strategists and tactical experts in world football, who was also able to get his teams in the best physical shape possible.

This thesis therefore tries to add a more rational approach to the highly mythological view of the “miracle of Berne” in Germany. Through one footballmatch, it appears, the rise of the new
German state to wealth and worldwide respect has been symbolised over decades by the team of 1954. The international perspective shows that this is only partially right.