ABSTRACT

While scholars have widely discussed the cultural, economic, and political influence of the United States on Europe in general and Germany in particular, the realm of sports has received surprisingly little attention. This study ties in with the scholarly debate about Americanization and / or globalization that started in the first half the 1990s. It examines the presentation of American football in England from the 1890s through World War II as well as in Germany following the war to the present day. The study discusses what non-Americans wrote about football and what their countrymen and –women read about it. The study draws on English and German newspapers and magazines, particularly the London Times and the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung. It also examines the role American military, radio, television, and movies played in the diffusion of American football. In the case of Germany, the researcher draws on extensive qualitative interviews with several of the “founding fathers” of American football in Germany as well as his own experiences in the sport.

The work demonstrates that American football arrived in Germany on a field that had been prepared by a three-hundred-year process of imagining Amerika. The author uses this context to explain why football has been relatively popular in Germany compared to
other European countries. The study also explores football’s failure to get established in Germany during the post-World War II era, and describes how Germans finally formed their own clubs and leagues in the late 1970s. Using selected illustrations, this study describes (1) how German *Amerikabilder*—images, ideas, and symbols associated with America—have been constructed in and around football in Germany and (2) how these constructs reflect a number of heterostereotypes Germans have cultivated over centuries. As part of this process, the press presented football as a violent American game and entertainment spectacle. The study closes with an epilogue that shifts the focus from what was written about football to the meanings spectators, players, and coaches brought to the sport.
DEDICATION

To my parents, Loretta and Friedrich Dzikus, and my wife, Nichole.
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I wish to thank Dr. Melvin L. Adelman for his generous support that has gone well beyond the call of an academic adviser. He is a Doktorvater in the best sense of the word. This dissertation would not be finished without his warm patience and continued intellectual challenge.

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The management of the Frankfurt Galaxy, Düsseldorf Rhein Fire, World League of American Football (NFL Europe), and Hamburg Blue Devils kindly provided me with information about their organizations.
VITA

February 01, 1970...................Born - Hamburg, Federal Republic of Germany

1989...............................Abitur, Gymnasium Eppendorf, Hamburg, Germany

1998.................................M.A. Education, The Ohio State University

1994–1995.........................Graduate School Fellowship,
                           The Ohio State University

1995–1996 and

1997–present.....................Graduate Teaching and Administrative Assistant,
                           The Ohio State University

PUBLICATIONS

Dzikus, Lars. “American Football in West Germany: Cultural Transformation,
Adaptation, and Resistance,” In Turnen and Sport: Transatlantic Transfers, ed. Annette

Dzikus, Lars. “American Football, Deutschland und der Unternehmer: Amerika in
unseren Köpfen und Stadien” [American Football, Germany, and the Entrepreneur:
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FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Education
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Just a few years ago I used to associate American football, which I knew about solely from Soviet press publications, only with brutality and violence. I also knew, from stories by its supporters, that coaches in this sport have helped to train astronauts.

The prejudices that had amassed over the years were dispelled during the very first game I saw. Frankly, when offensive and defensive lines clash this is a thrilling sight for the spectator.

—Vladimir Salivon, 1990

1 Salivon described his impressions of American football in a monthly magazine on sports in the Soviet Union. Founded in 1963, the magazine was put out by the Pravda in Moscow and published in English, French, German, Hungarian, Russian, and Spanish. According to the source, first efforts to form American football teams in the USSR started early in 1989. Vladimir Salivon, “American Football in the USSR,” Sport: USSR and World Arena, June 1990, 50. According to a football magazine that was published on the occasion of the first international game of the Moscow Bears in Berlin, American football promoter Tom Kelly had contacted Soviet officials about organizing a team in Moscow as early as 1979. His plans to take several players of his semi-pro team Merrillville (Indiana) Steelers to Moscow as player-coaches were reportedly crushed by the international crisis surrounding the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December of that year. Ten years later, in July 1989, Eduard Taturyan, Secretary-General of the Soviet Rugby Federation, reportedly contacted Kelly in Hong Kong informing him that the Soviet Sports Ministry had approved the organization of an American Football Federation “with a five year plan that called for 100 teams, 8-12 by the summer.” “Amer-Russian Partners in Development of Gridiron in the USSR,” Gridiron Diplomat: American Football Magazin, 17 September 1989, 5.
How I Came to this Study

My interest in this study was sparked on a visit to London, England in 1993. Browsing in *Sports Pages*, a bookstore dedicated to popular and scholarly works on sports, I was leisurely flipping through a copy of *The Sports Process* by Eric Dunning, Joseph Maguire, and Robert Pearton. As a student in physical education I was at least marginally interested in the history of sports, but one headline in this book immediately caught my attention, and raised my blood pressure: “American Football, British Society, and Global Sport Development.” *American football*—the mentioning of those two words alone were enough to stop me in my tracks. Finding this article was the beginning of my scholarly interest in American football.  

At the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the formation of the British Association for American Studies in 1980, British Americanist Malcolm Bradbury reflected on his own role in writing and inventing America. He wrote,

> My preoccupation with the image of America, and later the fact of it, arose, as of course they must, out of my own personal biography—from my particular mental set, my own tastes and curiosities, my own motives, desire for identity, expectation and luck.  

Following Bradbury’s example, I am encouraged to reflect on how my background informs my own writing of America. Before I considered studying the history of American football in Germany, I had already played the game for a lower division team

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in Germany for four years. Football had captured my imagination, provided new athletic challenges, and catalyzed my social life. During the 1980s, the sport had gained a significant following among the young “in-crowd” of Hamburg, Germany. Part of football’s fascination for me, and based on our conversations also for my peers, was that it was new, different, and American. 4

As a youth growing up in Germany, many influences had prepared my enthusiasm for football. An array of American impressions filled my childhood memories, from the cherished Slush Puppy drink at the corner store on my way home from grade school, to Elvis Presley and James Dean being my first music idols, and my favorite television shows, Dallas and Dynasty. The kids in school admired my extensive collection of DC and Marvel comics, complemented by a fleet of Star Wars and GI Joe toys. While sports took up most of my days as a youngster, it interestingly was the part of my life that seemed least touched by American popular culture. Soccer and track and field occupied my time and energy. It was not until my mid teenage years that I became aware of football. As it turned out, the producers of the local football games certainly knew how to tap into my appetite for American flavored food, music, and sports.

In order to put the American influence on my childhood in perspective, and to lay out my personal perspective on the subject, I believe it is valuable to note that I am the son of

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4 Throughout this study, I use “American football” and “football” synonymously. This reflects the common practice of using both terms interchangeably by participants, spectators, and the media in Germany since the 1970s. For clarity, I refer to association football as soccer. To avoid repetitiveness, I use “German football” at times to replace “football in Germany.” Also reflecting the dominant practice in West Germany, I refer to the United States of America as both as “United States” and “America.” However, Germans at times will refer to people from the United States as US-Amerikaner rather than simply Amerikaner. They may also use the term Nordamerikaner to describe people from North America including people from Canada and the United States, but rarely including Mexicans. I am not aware that Amerikaner is commonly used to describe Canadians and/or Mexicans.
a German father and an American mother. As a sub-theme of this study brings out, mixed
German-American heritage had an impact on a number of the football pioneers in
Germany. In my case, my mother had a curious love relationship with the country of her
birth that also rubbed off on me. Born of mixed parents herself in 1934 Jersey City, her
mother brought her to Germany before the start of World War II. My mother never
visited the United States again, and maintained little contact with her father’s side of the
family. However, for the rest of her life she refused to apply for German citizenship,
which meant considerable for her hassle with local authorities. Instead she took
significant pride in being an American, which expressed itself in the display of
Americana in our household. It is from her that I “inherited” my predisposition to
American popular culture. This is illustrated in a picture from my childhood in which I
pose in a Superman costume my mother had made for me. The image shows me running
in front of the Manhattan skyline that covered our living room as wallpaper. In the words
of Bradbury, “mine was a Europeanized America, to a considerable degree a New York
one.”

Given my obvious fascination with American life-style, it was no surprise gridiron
football quickly caught my attention. While the extent of Americana in my childhood was
not representative of German kids growing up in the 1970s and 80s, my experience
certainly had many shared elements with those around me. This common ground was
enough to later make me wonder how much of my story was an extension of the German
experience with America at large.

5 Bradbury, “How I Invented America,” 127.
On that day in London in 1993, discovering the work of Maguire on American football inspired me to reflect on my own experience and history with American popular culture, as well as that of Germany. To know that someone seriously studied the cultural impact of American football in Europe, and to know that there were others interested in reading about it, simply fascinated me. Maguire’s study left me wanting to know more about the details and nuances of how American football spread in Europe, especially at the grassroots level. I wanted to know the stories of those people who had been involved in the process. I also wanted to understand better the history of influence American popular culture has had on Germans, particularly in sports.

Upon returning from my trip to London, I was surprised that I could not find an equivalent to Maguire’s study that examined the arrival of football in Germany. While much has been written on the influence of the United States on other areas of German culture, German scholars had contributed little to the emerging literature in sport studies on globalization and Americanization. Browsing through that bookstore in England allowed me to imagine that I could study American and German culture, the history of sport in general, and more specifically, explore the history of American football in Germany. This work is the result of those efforts.

**Overview**

My study examines the presentation of American football in England and Germany during a period that starts with early references in local newspapers in the 1890s and extents to the present day. During this time, I trace the diffusion of football from the United States across the Atlantic starting with England, where American football found
its first European port of entry, and I follow the game to Germany, where football has had the most enduring success in Europe to this date. Since I found that American football has followed the path of the American military, I cover the development in England through both World Wars before moving the focus to Germany.6

I explore how American football was introduced or presented to English and German audiences including newspaper readers, radio listeners, and spectators. I refer to presenting football in the sense of “to bring a movie, play, or other form of entertainment to the public.” To present can also mean “to come into being or happen.” Therefore, I refer to “the presentation of American football” as I describe how the sport made its first public appearances in front of English and German audiences, both in print and in flesh. I use the phrase in the sense of presentation as “a performance, exhibition, or demonstration put before an audience,” “an occasion when somebody is first presented into society,” and “the manner in which something is shown, expressed, or laid out for other people to see.”7

Furthermore, this study is about the representation of America as part of the broader presentation of American football abroad. Particularly in studying the game’s presentation in Germany, I find that some features of American football were—at times

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6 As I will discuss, Joseph Maguire has already examined American football’s more recent history in England. See for example, Joseph A. Maguire, “More Than a Sporting Touchdown: The Making of American Football in England 1982 - 1990,” *Sociology of Sport Journal* 7 (1990): 213-37. Limiting the analysis on the presentation of football in England to only one paper and the period through World War II not only followed the logic of tracing the diffusion of the game by American military to Germany, but also allowed to keep the present project manageable. Future research on football in England will certainly expand through the remainder of the twentieth century and add additional sources.

7 I have taken these definitions from the electronic version of the *Encarta World English Dictionary* (1999), developed for Microsoft by Bloomsbury Publishing.
knowingly, at times unwittingly—depicted to symbolize or stand for particular aspects of American culture and society. To represent can mean “to portray or present an image of somebody or something as being something in particular.” In that sense, I examine to what extent the presentation of American football reflected commonly held ideas of America. I describe how non-Americans saw American football and through it America. Primarily, I discuss what local journalists wrote about football and what their countrymen and–women read about it. Thus, my sources are mainly English and German newspapers and magazines, which also reference radio and television programs, as well as movies. In the case of Germany, I also draw on extensive interviews and on-going correspondence with several of the “founding fathers” of American football in that country, as well as my own involvement in the game in Germany. In summary, I trace the presentation of American football and, within that, basic patterns of the representation of America.8

Although my main interest is in American football in Germany, I decided to devote a sizable portion of this study to the initial arrival of football in England as described in the pages of the Times. The chapter on the presentation of football in England until 1945 not only provides an important addition to Maguire’s work on “The Making of American Football in England 1982-1990,” but it also allows us to understand the presentation of the game in Germany against the backdrop of how football coverage and the game itself reached Europe in the first place. The historical ties between the United Kingdom and the United States, the gridiron’s roots in England’s association and rugby football, and prior professional baseball tours to the British Isles provided a unique context to the Times’s

8 Ibid.
presentation of football. Despite the different historical settings, a number of common themes emerge from the analysis of the presentation of football in England during the first and in Germany during the latter part of the twentieth century. First, albeit in different periods, both English and German journalists commonly framed gridiron football as “other” or particularly American. Second, in both cases, the emphasis on the game’s violence, common in early accounts, waned as coverage of local exhibitions replaced second-hand reports from America. And finally, in England as in Germany, the initial diffusion of the game was facilitated by American military presence, the broader influence of the American entertainment industry, and general advancements in communication technologies.⁹

As mentioned, the heart of this study is about the presentation of American football in Germany. Providing specific examples, I show how it has reflected a host of century-old popular images associated with Amerika—the United States and its culture imagined by Germans. As my analysis demonstrates, American football arrived in Germany on a field that had been prepared by a three-hundred-year process of imagining Amerika from the time the first German families embarked on their journey to the new Promised Land in 1683.¹⁰ This context is important to understanding why football has been relatively popular in Germany compared to other European countries. Using selected illustrations, this study describes (1) how German Amerikabilder—images,

⁹ Maguire, “More Than a Sporting Touchdown.”

ideas, and symbols associated with America—have been constructed in and around football in Germany and (2) how these constructs reflect a number of heterostereotypes Germans have cultivated over centuries. Heterostereotypes consist of images that members of a culture have about a different culture. I use the term Amerika as the catchword for a range of German heterostereotypes about the United States. 11 Amerika is not a monolith, but rather represents a whole spectrum of images marked by historical changes and continuities, and also competing notions held by Germans at any given time. However, research on Amerikabilder has found a few recurrent themes that appear to have remarkable staying power. My study shows how Amerika has been constructed around the gridiron in Germany. 12

I explore the presentation of American football to Germany in the context of these traditional Amerikabilder and regard it as a result of bilateral processes shaped by American and German actors resulting in an amalgam of intended and unintended consequences. The development of football in Germany with its structures, ideas, and images has been a hybrid of strategic plans and “cultural accidents.” I find that the two major themes or narratives running through the pages of the press were the presentation

11 In the late 1960s and early 1970s, black activists used the term Amerika—and its variation Amerikkka including the initial letters of the Ku Klux Klan—to express their views of American society as being racist and fascist. It is not in this sense that I apply the term Amerika in this study. On the use homo- and heterostereotypes see: Peter Freese, “America” Dream or Nightmare? Reflections on a Composite Image, 3rd ed. (Essen: Verlag Die Blaue Eule, 1994), 14, 22-3, 35, 44.

of American football as a violent game and as an entertainment spectacle or “party,” with
the latter gradually replacing the former. This shift in the presentation was neither a
linear, nor a complete process. Rather, I describe the two narratives as ideal types, which
continually reemerged in slight variations and wove through the tapestry of the accounts I
discuss.

The examination of American football in Germany is particularly significant for
several reasons. Most importantly, while scholars have widely discussed the cultural,
economic, and political influence of the United States on Europe in general and Germany
in particular, the realm of sports has received surprisingly little attention. For example, in
1991–92, the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities and Social
Sciences (NIAS) sponsored a comprehensive study on the reception of American mass
culture in Europe. It is still one of the most extensive projects on the topic to this day.
Accidentally, the project coincided with the arrival of the World League of American
Football. Although the institute found that “Germany’s experience of long-term
occupation and re-education by the United States after World War II gave it a particularly
complex and intense relationship with American mass culture,” it neither addressed this
latest American influx nor sport in general.13

Mass Culture,” in Cultural Transmissions and Receptions: American Mass Culture in Europe, ed. Rob
Already in 1991, Arnd Krüger observed that “The reciprocal relationship between the United States and
Germany has been described quite frequently in general terms, although, very rarely for sports.” Arnd
Krüger, “‘We Are Sure to Have Found the True Reason for the American Superiority in Sports’: The
Reciprocal Relationship Between the United States and Germany in Physical Culture and Sport,” in Turnen
and Sport: The Cross-Cultural Exchange, ed. Roland Naul (New York: Waxmann, 1991), 51. For works on
American influence on various aspects of life in Germany, see: Celia Applegate and Pamela Maxine Potter,
eds., Music and German National Identity (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Detlef Junker,
Discussing American football’s overall cultural insignificance in Europe Maarten van Bottenburg mentions Germany as the notable exception, but he provides no detailed analysis for this anomaly. I argue that the historical relationship between Germany and the United States and the German perception of America provide an important context for the presentation of American football in this country. The development of the game in Germany is embedded in the history of the broader American influence on Germany, especially given the American-led “re-education” of West Germany after 1945. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, this influence has provoked considerable resistance by those who feel a loss of Kultur or “authentic” German high culture. At the same time, several studies have shown that many Germans have been particularly open to adopt selected aspects of American business practices and youth cultures into their lives. This background is critical for understanding the reception of football in Germany.  

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Chapter two discusses the American influence on Germany in greater detail. For one of the most conservative voices against Germany’s Americanization during the 1990s, see for example the former Der Stern editor-in-chief Rolf Winter, Little America: Die Amerikanisierung der deutschen Republik (Hamburg: Rasch und Röhring, 1995). For studies of and commentaries on the German reception of American models, see for example: Tamara Domentat, Coca-Cola, Jazz und AFN—Berlin und die Amerikaner (Berlin: Schwarzkopf & Schwarzkopf, 1995); Kaspar Maase, BRAVO Amerika: Erkundung zur Jugendkultur der Bundesrepublik in den Fünfziger Jahren (Hamburg: Junius Verlag, 1992); Mary Nolan, Visions of Modernity: American Business and the Modernization of Germany (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).
Germany is an important case study since the sport has been more successful as a spectator and a participant sport in Germany than in other European countries. Germans were among the first in Europe to establish clubs, national leagues, and federations in the late 1970s. Although Finns and Italians also formed organizations at the time and football interest flourished in England during the 1980s, Germans provided the most sustained support for the game. Due to the instability of football’s early organizations in Germany and Europe, figures documenting the development of the game at the grassroots level are hard to come by. Reliable membership statistics for the American Football Verband Deutschland (AFVD) are not available prior to its joining the German sports federation (Deutscher Sportsbund, DSB) in 1993. Overall, American football’s limited growth as a participation sport has done little to improve the game’s status as a Randsportart (a sport

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that appears only in the margins of the mainstream media). In 1994, the AFVD counted 17,869 members, which ranked only 44th in size among the DSB’s 56 sport federations and its 23 million members. However, during the 1990s more people played organized American football in Germany than in any other European country. Scattered evidence indicates that in 1988 there were over 600 American football clubs in 13 European countries, 106 of which were in Germany. According to Guttmann, by 1990 the number of registered teams in Germany (170) had surpassed those in Great Britain (152) and Italy (114). In 1991, the World League estimated that 13,000 Germans played organized American football in 150 adult teams. During the 1990s, membership in the AFVD peaked with 21,812 members in 1995. For 1996, the European Federation of American Football recorded a total of 1,025 teams with 74,190 members in its 14 federations.\(^\text{16}\)

Compared to their European neighbors, Germans have been more interested in American football not only as a participant sport, but also as a spectator sport and consumer product. During the 1990s, Germany surpassed Britain as the most receptive market for National Football League (NFL) products abroad. As late as 1987, James Connelly, the NFL’s international marketing director, called the United Kingdom “by far our leading and most successful market.” However, by 1994, Germany was the NFL’s

premier export country. This development has also been reflected in the NFL’s most ambitious international project. In July of 1989, twenty-six NFL team owners founded a new football league. Its name revealed the owners’ global ambition: The World League of American Football. According to the media guide, it was to be “the dawning of a new era in professional sports”:

> Never in history has a major sports league risen above the boundaries of countries, languages, cultures and time zones to operate on a weekly basis on two separate continents. …Based in five countries on two continents, the World League represents the first major step toward the globalization of American football.18

During the first season in 1991, six teams were located in the United States, and one each in Canada, England, Spain, and Germany. After only two seasons, lack of interest in the league in North America caused a two-year hiatus. When it came back in 1995, the World League had shrunk to six teams, all positioned in Europe. Amsterdam, Glasgow, and Düsseldorf joined previous teams in Barcelona, Frankfurt, and London. In 1998 the league was renamed National Football League Europe League (NFLE). Despite this rebranding, the American-owned enterprise continues to struggle to capture the imagination of European sports fans.19

In November 2004, for the second year in a row, the NFLE had to move one of its unsuccessful European outposts to Germany. In the fall of 2003 the Cologne Centurions


had replaced the Barcelona Dragons. And after the 2004 season the Scottish Claymores made room for the Hamburg Sea Devils. Thus five of the league’s six teams are currently stationed in Germany. It appears that the NFLE is retreating to the only European market where the acceptance of its product has been decent. The recent developments have led one German journalist to ask, why American football works in Germany, even though it has failed in the rest of the world. I believe an historical perspective will help to analyze the presentation of the sport and to uncover the roots of the gridiron’s success and failure in Germany.  

**The Broader Scholarly Context**

In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 public discourse in the United States turned amongst other themes to the question of “Why do they hate us?” Elsewhere, the events sparked interest in other countries about the nature of their own relationship to the United States and the ways the United States impacts their own societies and cultures. Historically, popular responses to American cultural influence abroad have ranged from infatuation to hatred.

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Reactions to 9/11 also rejuvenated scholarly discourse about Americanization. In 2002, Ziauddin Sardar and Merryl Davies referred to the United States as a hyperpower, “—a nation so powerful that it affects the lives of people everywhere.” They launched a stern warning against the unforeseen consequences of Americanization. Many of the costs of Americanization would be intangible but costly “alterations to cherished traditional values and lifeways, undermining of the unquantifiable worth of long-established identities with their sensibilities and refinements.” They also stress that the choices people make in this matter carry unintended, and often undesired consequences. Such warning should be motivation enough to describe and analyze to what extend American influences have “undermined” European lifeways in the realm of sport, and to examine the processes of cultural transformation. For example, a recent innovation in German sporting culture has been the practice of professional teams and their organizations moving from one city to another, a practice in North America known as “moving franchises.” In 1999, the long established EV Landshut sold its license for the premier hockey league, Deutschen Eishockey Liga (DEL), to the American Anschutz Entertainment Group (AEG). AEG proceeded to move the team to Munich under the new nickname Barons. Here the organization was unable to generate enough business, which led to another move, this time to Hamburg to play in the newly opened Color Line Arena. The team is now known as Freezers. Overall this new practice was surprisingly little contested in the league and federation, and has received sparse public criticism.  

In 1992, sociologists Hans Lobmeyer and Ludwig Weidinger assessed that commercialism was the dominant factor in the American sports scene. They briefly mentioned the recent emergence of assimilation of American commercial characteristics in German sports, and listed the FC Bayern München soccer organization, and the tennis Davis Cup organized by Jon Tiriac as examples of such tendencies. Yet they too warned about the undesired consequences of adopting American practices by stating, “it is questionable if each new appearance can and should be unhesitatingly integrated into the European sports system.” Compared to other arenas such as education, music, literature, twentieth century scholarship on sport had surprisingly little to say about the American influences on German sports, especially regarding the last quarter of the century.23

In the 1990s, Joseph Maguire, Bruce Kidd, and Allen Guttmann defined distinctive positions within the scholarly debate on Americanization. My research has been informed by, but not limited to, Maguire’s research and the insights of the figurational or process-sociological theory he applies. In contrast to his work on American football in England, I choose a more detailed historical approach with stronger emphasis on grassroots development and the agency of the cultural actors who shaped football locally. Based on the works of Norbert Elias, figurational sociology examines the multiple networks of interdependence that both constrain and enable the action of people. Rejecting notions of a single dominating causal factor, this perspective’s premise is that the development of

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sports is best explained as multi-causal, multi-directional, long-term structured processes. It finds that globalization processes involve a blend between intended and unintended practices. Without over-estimating the sovereignty of the consumer, it acknowledges the ability of cultures to resist, reinterpret, and recycle foreign influences within the confines of unequal power relations. Researchers employing this theory have steered clear of false dichotomies such as homogeneity / heterogeneity as mutually exclusive categories. Instead they have found that globalization processes are characterized simultaneously by diminishing contrasts and increasing variety in cultural forms. Sport sociologists have convincingly used figurational theory to investigate the economic dynamics of cultural production and its ability to structure public discourse by promoting specific cultural forms over others.24

Maguire rejects the idea of capital as the single, dominating causal factor. His approach differs from Bruce Kidd’s on the importance of American capital in the global processes. Nevertheless, he regards Kidd’s work as an important reminder of the power

realities in provision and production of sports consumption. On the other hand, Kidd acknowledges that commodification of sports has occurred in many countries. However, he criticizes state-subsidized American-based cartels for flooding the Canadian market with American-focused spectacles, images, and souvenirs that determine the dominant meanings and forms of activities, and thus, erode local autonomy. Thus, Kidd uses the term Americanization to denaturalize the particularity of certain sporting ideas that, in his opinion, began as an explicitly American set of practices. Among these he names team sports production in its corporate form with highly developed player market, cartelization, single-city monopolies, and movable franchises.25

Allen Guttmann uses the term cultural diffusion to explain the emergence of American football in Europe. He uses this concept as an alternative to cultural hegemony and imperialism. According to Guttmann, these theories imply an often inaccurate intentionality. His position is that the economic model might apply to the expansion of the NFL in Europe and the American take-over of hockey but it should not be used to explain all cases of cultural diffusion. Agreeing with Maguire and Guttmann, I don’t believe that the phenomenon of American football in England or Germany can be explained only in terms of American economic expansion. Instead, I regard the diffusion and presentation of football abroad as the result of “push and pull” processes, in which

American and multinational business interests provide a push, while local actors like entrepreneurs, journalists, spectators, and players actively pull and shape.  

In the past, scholarly debates on Americanization have often centered on the profit-driven spread of sports and associated products through measures of market expansion by American based companies. This obviously is an important part of the overall picture. However, I argue this limited perspective overlooks two critical aspects: First, many “American” sports were initially appropriated by local people for non-commercial purposes in the “host” culture. Secondly, local entrepreneurs have been actively involved in the commodification of gridiron football. As Guttmann observed, “Those who adopt a sport are often the eager initiators of a transaction of which the ‘donors’ are scarcely aware.”

I find my position reflected in more recent studies on sport in Australia and New Zealand. Steven Jackson and David Andrews find that rather than simply implying an

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26 For his assessment of American football in Europe, Guttmann mostly relies on Maguire’s research, but he also provides a critical response to Maguire’s work. Guttmann, “Sports Diffusion,” 185-190; Guttmann, Games and Empires, 112, 179. Influenced by Marx, the theory of cultural imperialism criticizes American cultural penetration for inevitably leading to the spread of capitalist values and exploitation. Lee Artz and Ben Ortega Murphy define hegemony as “the process of moral, philosophical, and political leadership that a social group attains only with the active consent of other important social groups.” Lee Artz and Bren Ortega Murphy, Cultural Hegemony in the United States (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 2000), 1. For a historical discussion of Britain and the United States as hegemonies see Patrick Karl O’Brien and Armand Cleese, Two Hegemonies: Britain 1846-1914 and the United States 1941-2001 (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002).


imposition of an American flavored global culture, it is important to acknowledge that products like the NBA in New Zealand are often transformed and resisted as well as desired and demanded. Furthermore, John Nauright’s and Murray Phillips’ work on Australia’s rugby league organization demonstrated the role of local entrepreneurs who consciously borrowed from examples from the United States and England to challenge traditional models of public ownership.28

Framework, Methods and Resources

As a framework for my research I draw on the tradition of cultural history, the discipline most receptive to the insights of anthropology. As Miri Rubin explains, cultural history “highlights and treats as fundamental to human interaction, the conditions of communication, the terms of representation, the interaction between structures and meaning—narrative, discourses—and the ways in which individuals and groups use them and thus express themselves.” By drawing out meaning from written sources and self-description this approach helps to reconstruct actions of historical agents as they themselves interpreted them. All of this leads to a reading of football in Germany from the inside and a history of the sport from the point of view of the producers (e.g.,

Field Observations

In ethnographic terms, my authority as a reader of football in Germany as text rests in my own extended participation and observations in the field. Yet, my personal relationship to the cultural phenomenon is significantly different from that of a traditional ethnographer. Typically, the researcher spends substantial time in the field to minimize “the distance as the investigator’s observational role shifts from that of an ‘outsider’ to that of an ‘insider’.” My shift of perspective was one from a participant towards that of an observer by first taking an academic perspective and then by moving from my native Germany to the United States.  

I had been actively involved in the American football community in Germany as a player, cheerleader, and consultant. Between 1989 and 1994, I played for the HSV Tigers, HSV Blizzards, and Hamburg Grey Devils in the fourth and third division of German football. In 1993 and 1994, I was a member of the nationally ranked Blue Angels cheerleading team, who I also coached briefly in 1996. Between 1994 and 1996, I gained...
further insights in the cheerleading and football business as a consultant and head-instructor for Varsity Spirit Corporation, a leader in the American cheerleading industry that had identified Germany as the anchor for its market expansion into Europe. Through my association with the Blue Angels cheerleaders, I worked closely with the Hamburg Blue Devils marketing agency, Gernert Medien Beratung, in the summers of 1996 and 1997. For the same organization, I worked as a consultant in the year 2000 hosting the Notre Dame Alumni football team in Hamburg. Thus, I shared and observed first-hand the experiences of players, coaches, cheerleaders, managers, and fans at various levels of football in Germany for an extended period.

Since 1993, I increasingly developed an academic interest in the subject as I begun to collect information on the beginnings of football in Germany in the form of tape-recorded interviews and written sources. Since the fall of 1994, living in the United States as a graduate student has facilitated my transition from participant to observer of the German sports scene. At the same time, I was able to gain first-hand experiences in American sports. In addition to participating in Ohio State’s cheerleading program for two years, I have worked with several German professional soccer teams during their stays in the United States. Linda Colley points out that “understanding British empire requires a comprehensive and clear-sighted understanding of the British themselves.” Accordingly, understanding American influence on German sports necessitates a comprehensive understanding of the American culture and American sports. Having lived, studied, and
participated in American sports and their market expansion gives me a unique perspective as insider and observer.31

**Qualitative Interviewing**

As a second method I relied on qualitative interviewing to explore the shared meanings and structures that pioneers of American football in Germany developed. It allowed me to understand experiences and reconstruct events in which I did not participate, and check and adjust my understanding of events that I observed or participated in first-hand or read about. The information gathered from in-depth interviews helps to explain how and why the football was created and describe how participants interpret their own experiences and involvement in football.32

Herbert Rubin and Irene Rubin distinguish between topical and cultural interviews. While emphasizing aspects of topical studies, I also included insights from cultural interview styles in my study. In a topical interview the researcher asks “about the stages of a process, contributing causes to an outcome, the roles of different actors, or parts of a concept.” Interviews related to topical studies focus on particular events or processes, and explore what, when, how, and why they occurred. Cultural interviews focus on norms, values, and understandings of a group. The researcher asks questions seeking information about shared meanings which members of a group construct, and “the kinds of activities


that group members typically do, and the reasons why they do them.” Since my goal was to explore both structure and meaning of American football in Germany, both the interviews and the resulting report are a blend of both topical and cultural styles.33

Including aspects of cultural interviewing allows me to add to the scholarly discussion of the Americanization the voices of the actual historical actors, the cultural producers and consumers of American football. They were the ones who, within specific historical contexts and power relationships, shaped and witnessed how this sport came to Germany and how this new cultural form and the host culture have mutually influenced each other. Adding their voices means more than drawing on them as sources. When possible it means these actors describe in their own words their motivation to be involved in football as players, coaches, managers, or sponsors. Selected quotes illustrate their own interpretation of events and processes in the development of football in Germany, and how they reflect on the relevance of the American origin and image of the sport for their interest.34

33 Ibid., 28, 31, 196, 206.

34 For the broader research on football in Germany, I conducted semi-structured interviews with forty-four individuals, both face-to-face and via telephone. The interviews lasted between thirty minutes and several hours. I selected my interview partners to facilitate a description of American football in Germany, its history and culture as it was experienced and shaped by individuals from three groups: (1) those who founded teams, clubs, leagues, and federations, (2) those who participated as players and coaches, and (3) observers and commentators who reported about football in the media, and thus participated in constructing public images and understandings of football. The three groups were not mutually exclusive, but often overlapped as one person may have acted in multiple functions at the same time or may have moved from one role to another during their careers. In ethnographic terms, I chose my interview partners by means of purposeful or judgmental sampling, where “ethnographers rely on their judgment to select the most appropriate members of the subculture or unit based on the research question.” David Fetterman, *Ethnography: Step by Step* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1998), 33.
Interpretation of Written Sources

The third and main method I relied on for my analysis of the presentation of American football was the interpretation of written sources. As I discuss further in chapter two, I follow the lead of Michael Oriard who applied Clifford Geertz’ model of sport as cultural text in his interpretation of American football in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries through contemporary popular journalism. As my study brings out, in Germany as it had in America a century earlier, football started out as a game to be played not watched. However, in Germany most people, including the original players, gained their first impressions of the game through the media. In America, Oriard observes, the game turned into a public spectacle within ten years. Much of its development was connected to the “golden age of print” as newspapers covered the games and thus, as Oriard argues, created football as a spectacle.35

Like Oriard, I regard football as cultural expression with a plurality of meanings. Football in Germany is a text with multiple authors and readings. Oriard proposes to read the “primary text” (the game itself, as played on the field) through “secondary texts” (the interpretations of the game in popular journalism). His approach differs from Geertz’s classic model in that he assumes that no single narrative represents football’s diverse audience. Oriard regards text-centered and reader-centered theories as two poles within the discourse in cultural studies. The first interprets cultural expressions as allegories that

symbolically represent the social order. Oriard criticizes this approach for ignoring the diversity of the audience. Thus Oriard favors a reader-centered approach, which finds that meaning is negotiated between texts and readers. Sharing this assumption, I approached my sources looking for a multiplicity of contested meanings. However, I also expected that my own reading of the sources would confirm Timothy Spears’s critique of Oriard’s work that, “In spite of his argument that football lacks a ‘single master narrative’ … the evidence in this book suggests that some football stories remain more compelling than others.”

Oriard argues that football tells a story that is read differently by different groups and individuals. Key to Oriard’s study is the notion that many of those readings from the turn of the century have been preserved in the pages of the contemporary press. Oriard claims that this approach brings us at least close to the varied and changing readings of the actual audience, but he is also aware that the secondary texts of newspaper articles do not simply represent the interpretation of the audience. In journalistic articles we read football as already interpreted. Newspapers follow their own agenda and often form symbiotic alliances with other sport producers. Consequently, newspapers both influence and reflect the experience of their readers. However, I agree with Oriard’s notion that they are “to some degree representative of their interested readers.”


37 Oriard, Reading Football, 3, 13-4, 16-17.
Thus, the dilemma of this interpretive approach to the meaning of football in Germany lies in the relative and limited power of “owners” and “consumers” to determine the meaning of the cultural product. We have to take into account “both the (limited) power of these texts to determine readers’ beliefs, and the (limited) power of the readers to resist that coercive power.” Still, Oriard is certainly right to state that even the most powerful and “most self-interested owners have necessarily responded to the desires, or assumed desires, of the fans, the audience they have needed to retain or enlarge.”

When it comes to interpreting the available narratives, the range of media involved in this process makes an important difference for the analytical power of Oriard’s framework. While a limited number of newspapers and weeklies produced the narratives of college football in the 1880s, the German public received its clues about football from a variety of sources including scenes in American movies and television shows, infrequent articles in newspapers and magazines, occasional games on German television in the late 1970s, and, in certain parts of the country, coverage on the American Forces Network (AFN). For a few, other impressions came from personal visits to the United States or accounts from visitors. It is safe to say that football hardly registered on the radar screen of the general public in Germany during most of the 1970s and 1980s, the period when football took root in Germany. Those who did take an interest could have based their first impressions on the wider range of sources than were available to

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38 Ibid., 13, 19, 106, 117-20.
Americans a century earlier. For my own study, no single source of information approaches the significance the press had for Oriard’s analysis in Reading Football.

Two factors help to compensate for the lack of a comparatively definitive source: First, the limited number of cultural agents who shaped the narratives; and second, still existing primary sources, for example, the opportunity to engage in real conversations with those who wrote and read the primary text of football. Especially in the 1970s, sources from which to gain an understanding of football—and thus also the range of pre-constructed narratives—were reasonably limited in Germany. While Oriard’s attempt “to read football’s cultural narratives over the shoulders of its contemporary interpreters” is limited to his interpretation of the press, I was able to come one step closer to the original text by listening to players and coaches reflect on their own experiences.39

My description and analysis of the presentation of football are based on primary written sources including articles from newspapers and magazines published between the 1890s and the present day from a variety of sources including the libraries at the Ohio State University and the Universität Hamburg, commercial archive services, annual paper clipping reports provided by football organizations, and material provided by interview partners and by individuals who responded to messages I posted on football web sites in Germany and ads placed in the leading German football magazine, Huddle. For the assessment of the presentation of American football in the Times of London, Ohio State’s digital archive of the paper from 1785 to 1985 was most helpful.

39 Ibid., 20.
Scope and Boundaries of the Study

My discussion of the presentation of American football in England is limited to accounts in the *Times*. Naturally, this selection makes a full assessment of the presentation of American football in England impossible and brings with it certain biases. However, the paper certainly remained one of the most influential opinion leaders in England during the first half of the twentieth century, and, as such, is an invaluable source for this study.

According to Alfred Grant, the *Times* was peerless among British newspapers in mid-nineteenth century England with a circulation of about 65,000: “Public opinion, as expressed in *The Times*, was the view of every law-abiding, money-making, church-going, beef-eating member of the gentry and aristocracy, i.e., the ruling class of England.” However, by the turn of the century, the *Times* lost in popularity as, according to Harold Herd, it “continued to give the public a heavy overdose of politics every day and to neglect almost entirely the lighter interests of life.” By the time Lord Northcliffe became proprietor in 1908, circulation had dropped to 38,000. Under new leadership, the paper underwent a renaissance and sales topped at 318,000 at the out break of World War II. Therefore, the *Times*’s presentation of American football would certainly been noted by many of its contemporaries.40

In the case of Germany, the scope of this study is limited to West Germany, because of my specific research interest in American football in the context of the

Americanization debate. Unless specified differently, throughout this study I refer to Germany to mean West Germany before and after the unification of 1990. This use of the term “Germany” may legitimately be challenged, as a comprehensive history of football in Germany would necessarily include the beginning and subsequent spread of the sport in the former German Democratic Republic. However, given the unique historical background, I am convinced that the complexities of “Americanization” processes in the former German Democratic Republic call for a separate study.41

Other boundaries were imposed on the study by the availability of sources especially interview partners and official records from the foundation period of oldest clubs. When I inquired about such documents as minutes from board meetings, membership lists, contracts with coaches or stadiums, or financial records, I typically received a sympathetic “Sorry, but….” Most files appear to have found their way to the recycling bin. Organizational turmoil and quick turnover in leadership positions characterized many clubs during the late 1970s and early 1980s, and files did not always make the transition from one treasurer to the newly elect. For example, when I contacted the club in Bremerhaven, the long-standing president had just recently given up his position but

recalled a “box with old stuff” which he had inherited from his predecessor. Unfortunately the new president was unable to locate the box I had hoped to examine. In other cases, those who held elected positions for extended periods of time had to choose between keeping old files and making room with boxes with children’s clothes as they transitioned into their thirties and forties. However, the main reason for the lack of record keeping may lie in the relatively young age of the football pioneers in Germany and consequent inexperience in acting as club officials. The vast majority were simply interested in playing football, not in institutional aspects of governing a club or archiving documents. Fortunately, individuals were more likely to have kept paper clippings and pictures, which they shared with me generously.

Finding and contacting interview partners who were directly involved in the foundation of teams and clubs was also challenging. Despite, or because of, the fact that all Germans must register with their local residents’ registration office, Datenschutz and privacy are taken very seriously, which turned my work often into that of an detective. In some cases, I have simply not been able to track down individuals, others chose not to respond to messages, and a few were not interested in participating in the study even when I reached them. Still others had already passed away, as it was the case with the co-founders of the Bremerhaven Seahawks. For me, this served as a sobering reminder of how important and timely this research was. The result was that the source quantity and quality differed from case to case.

Fortunately, most people I contacted turned out to be eager to share their stories and responded favorably. For some of these men in their late 40s and early 50s my interest
seemed to come as a welcomed chance to remember past days and friends; an opportune time in their lives to reflect on their young adult lives. Their personal interest in seeing this study evolve and succeed was truly humbling, for many took much time out of their busy days to see me, and some even invited me to dinner in their houses and to stay the night. In those cases, it was easy to see how important football had once been their lives.

**Roadmap of Chapters**

I divide my narrative into four segments. Chapter two introduces the concepts of *Amerikabilder* and auto- and heterostereotypes, which I use to lay out the historical and cultural context that prepared the field for the arrival of American football in Europe. As this study focuses mainly on the presentation of American football in Germany, I discuss the major themes and historical patterns of cultural production and presentation of American popular culture in Germany. I describe how the German reception of the gridiron was imbedded in other long-term processes of selling American culture and visions of America.

Chapter three analyzes the presentation of American football in England, football’s “first down” in Europe, through the pages of the London *Times* from the 1890s through World War II. This chapter discusses the role technological advancements in wire services and radio played in the diffusion of football. Further, it shows that the coverage of the annual Thanksgiving Day game in America pre-dated a later focus on the NFL’s Super Bowl. I will also present what British readers learned about football’s violence. During this period, the first actual games were brought to England by the American
military, and the radio featured first football broadcasts from overseas. Finally, I discuss how America’s movie industry transported football images across the Atlantic.

Chapter four returns the focus to Germany. As American troops entered Germany, so did football begin its slow diffusion to this country. I explore football’s failure to get established in the post-War era, and how Germans finally formed their own clubs and leagues in the late 1970s. This serves as a background to my discussion of “Gridiron Amerika” in the public press including the presentation of football as a violent American game and entertainment spectacle.

The final chapter is an epilogue that begins to shift the focus from “the paper to the people,” in other words: from what was written about football, “the paper,” to the spectators, players, and coaches, who functioned both as authors and audience.

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CHAPTER 2

AMERIKABILDER AND STEREOTYPES

The presentation of American football in Germany has built upon a host of century-old popular images associated with Amerika—the United States and its culture imagined by Germans.¹ A vast array of people, including entrepreneurs, club officials, players, coaches, spectators, and journalists, have participated in a process that Malcolm Bradbury has called “the ancient business of constructing their America”:

Inventing America is one of the oldest and most classical of European fictional enterprises; it certainly antedates the discovery of America itself, a discovery which has never entirely obstructed the business of fantasizing about it. The New

¹ For discussions on Amerikabilder as well as German and European images of the United States, see for example: Theresa Hammond Mayer, American Paradise: German Travel Literature From Duden to Kisch (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1980); Hugh Honor, The New Golden Land: European Images of America (New York: Pantheon, 1975); Claus Leggewie, Amerikas Welt: die USA in unseren Köpfen (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 2000); David B. Morris, “Auf dem Weg zur Reife: Amerikabilder in der westdeutschen Öffentlichkeit,” in Die USA und Deutschland im Zeitalter des Kalten Krieges 1945-1990: Ein Handbuch, ed. Detlef Junker (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2001), 761-774; Alexander Ritter, ed., Deutschlands literarisches Amerikabild (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1977). In the late 1960s and early 1970s, black activists used the term Amerika—and its variation Amerikkka including the initial letters of the Ku Klux Klan—to express their views of American society as being racist and fascist. It is not in this sense that I apply the term Amerika in this study.
World has long served as a convenient image, myth or abstraction with which to feed the mind, whether one actually goes there or does not. It is a myth which many inside America have in some fashioned lived, and many outside it have pleasantly indulged. It is a myth that the generations perpetually revise, and so, of course, do separate and various individuals.2

Thus, American football arrived in Germany on a field that had been prepared by a three-hundred-year process of mythologizing America; dating back to the immigration of the first organized group of Germans to America in 1683.3 The reception of the gridiron in Germany was therefore imbedded in other long-term processes of selling American culture and visions of America. A review of the major themes and historical patterns of cultural production, presentation, and reception of America and its culture will help to frame the emergence and consequent development of American football in Germany.

In his study of the construction of the composite image of “America” in literary texts, Peter Freese finds that “From the very discovery, America became the country upon which the European imagination projected its cherished dream of a paradise on earth.” Working in a sub-field of comparative literary scholarship called imagology, Freese distinguishes between the concepts of auto- and heterostereotypes. The former consist of images that members of a culture have of themselves. These may include “a combination of national foundation myths and collective hopes and aspirations.” In the case of the United States, they make up the “American Dream” and its historical variations as immigrants to America and Americans themselves have constructed them. On the other


hand, heterostereotypes consist of images that members of a culture have about others. Thus, I use *Amerika* as the catchword for German heterostereotypes of the United States, its people, and their culture. According to Freese, “Germans, when they talk about the ‘American Dream,’ inadvertently talk about their *Amerikabild* and thus about themselves. … they usually say more about themselves than about the real ‘America.’”

I refer to *Amerika* as a diverse collection of imagined constructs based on stories told about America and, in this case, stories told about American football. Germans and/or Americans may construct these images and ideas, but they are always received and interpreted by Germans within their specific contexts. My understanding of the images and ideas that make up *Amerika* resembles the way Toby Miller and others define myths. They are neither complete illusions about nor exact replicas of America and its complex culture, “but partial truths that accentuate some versions of reality and marginalize or omit others.”

The idea that German *Amerikabilder*—images, ideas, and symbols Germans associate with America—tell more about the Germans who construct them, than the American culture they seem to describe, first surfaced in the 1920s in the works of writers like Hildegard Myerwas. By 1931, the Dutch historian Visser’t Hooft commented that Europe “will be more influenced by its own picture of America than by America itself.” He found two different common assessments of America’s influence on European life. There

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was the technical and economic perspective of those in the industry who “study
American methods and who advocate rationalization” and the cultural perspective of
those “who would resist Americanization because they see in it an attack upon the
elements of European life which they value most.”

In 1993, the NIAS reported in its statement on the reception of American mass
culture in Europe:

American rap songs on the radio, situation comedies on television, fast-food
restaurants, films, fads, styles of dress and deportment, and, just as importantly,
forms of management, advertising and public relations, together provide a dense
cultural terrain, a realm of creolisation and adaptations, of selective borrowing
and creative transformation, that demands scholarly investigation. The
phenomenon of American mass culture in Europe presents in diverse and complex
form problems that have become central to cultural studies: questions of cultural
innovation, representation, transmission, and reception.

The NIAS found that American goods, behavioral practices, images, and implicit
ideologies transported to Europe typically undergo a process of selective appropriation,
as new cultural practices are being incorporated into existing traditions. Selective
appropriation refers to the ability to actively choose, adapt, and adopt cultural forms and
products to meet the specific conditions and needs of the host culture. This view follows
Christopher Bigsby’s conviction that American popular culture abroad changes both

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6 Freese, Dream or Nightmare, 44. Hildegard Myerwas, Nord-Amerika im Urteil des Deutschen Schrifttums
bis zur Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts. Eine Untersuchung über Kürnberger’s “Amerika-Müden” (Hamburg:
Friedrichsen, de Gruyter & Co., 1929). Hooft quoted in Frank Trommler, “The Rise and Fall of
Americanism in Germany,” in America and the Germans: An Assessment of a Three-Hundred-Year
333.

Mass Culture,” in Cultural Transmissions and Receptions: American Mass Culture in Europe, ed. Rob
meaning and structure when it becomes adapted, absorbed and mediated by its host cultures.8

American images undoubtedly have left a mark on the collective imagination of Europeans. Rob Kroes describes how “America has replicated itself into icons, clichés of itself which leave their imprint everywhere, on T-shirts, in commercial images, in our heads.” He emphasizes that Europeans are capable of giving American images new meanings independent of the original. Cut off from their original source, they have developed into “a free-floating visual lingua franca,” according to Kroes. Like a language removed from the parent country’s grammatical gatekeepers, American images and practices undergo a process of creolization.9

In its broadest sense, the term creolization describes the socio-linguistic process of transformation a language may undergo as the result of selective appropriation by language communities in cultures different from the language’s origin. It may include changes in grammar, syntax, semantics, and the blending and rearranging of elements from various languages. Because of the shared vocabulary, resulting Creoles may resemble their parent language(s); however, they are “in most cases different enough from any of the languages of the original contact situation to be considered ‘new’ languages.”10

8 Ibid., 326, 328, 331.

9 Kroes’s use of the concept of creolization is based on the work of Swedish cultural anthropologist Ulf Hannerz. Rob Kroes, “Americanisation: What are We Talking About?,” ibid., 304-5, 315.

The various studies gathered by the NIAS identified armed forces, corporations, universities, governmental programs, and tourism as key institutions in the transmission of American “ideas, myths, and models” to Europe. Studies have not only identified abstract agencies but also individual agents of cultural transmission and transformation. For example, the NIAS report states that companies from the United States often used American employees of European descent to spearhead their market expansion in the old World. At a larger scale, “no industry had greater impact in Europe than Hollywood…molding attributes, expectations and priorities in direction consonant with the patterns of American life.” Governmental initiatives also became increasingly instrumental in America’s political and cultural offensive, especially after World War II. Among these were the Marshall Plan and the United States Information Agency (USIS) with its Fulbright Program and Amerika Häuser in Germany. However, an “even more direct transmission of American mass culture was constituted by the extensive array of United States military bases.” Richard Pells points out that the transmission of American culture was often the result of informal initiatives rather than governmental programs. 11

The NIAS identified political, economic, and cultural contexts, as well as gender, subcultures, and ethnic minorities as important variables that influence the complex processes involved in the reception of American mass culture in the different European countries. The respective historical contexts are especially relevant in the case of Great Britain and West Germany, two countries that have been particularly receptive for American popular culture. While shared history and common language have made the

former a premier market for America’s cultural industries, “Germany’s experience of long-term occupation and re-education by the United States after World War II gave it a particularly complex and intense relationship with American mass culture.” As discussed in chapter one, it is therefore no surprise that England became the NFL’s first commercial bridgehead in the 1980s, while in the 1990s it found its most reliable customer base in Germany. 12

Although European Amerikabilder have varied over time, research has identified a few recurrent themes and conventions in the discourse. In terms of negative perceptions, the NIAS found that “America is seen as a society and culture remaining on the surface, lacking Europe’s heights and depths, its soul and warmth, its inner authenticity,” and “irredeemably avaricious, materialistic, frantic, violent, culturally sterile, standardised, vulgar.” Especially in the second half of the twentieth century, the omnipresence of American images, symbols and stories in media and popular culture has challenged the “cultural sovereignty and sense of identity” of European countries. 13 In terms of positive perceptions, European generations have marveled at America’s youthfulness, its innovations and economic success stories. While German Amerikabilder have followed this general European pattern, they have been marked by the particularly intense

12 In its final assessment of the reception of American mass culture in Europe, the NIAS detected “strong tendencies towards globalization and regionalization.” Standard dichotomies of global versus local or nation versus nation neither effectively address the growing significance of trans- and multinational networks of information and communication nor the active participation of “local” business networks in the production of American popular culture in Europe. Instead the institute called for the adoption of a new transnational “postimperial” model, which could account for an, in theory, “infinite number of local experiences of and responses to something globally shared.” NIAS, “Questions of Cultural Exchange,” 330-332.

13 Ibid., 322-23, 325; Pells, “American Culture,” 69.
American influence during post-World War II occupation and the subsequent integration into the Western alliance.

A number of scholars have described the German Amerikabild as a Janus head with opposite poles reaching from dream to nightmare, from glorification to condemnation. On the other hand, Bernd Ostendorf has cautioned that such research rests on a false dichotomy, which does not adequately reflect the complexity of historical processes. In light of such criticism, it is important to keep in mind that “‘America’ has been an image and a symbol, rather than a real country, for most Europeans.”

**Preparing the Field: Imagining Amerika**

What we Europeans dislike the most about the Americans are usually three things: that they don’t have poetry, they love money, and they don’t abolish negro slavery despite their principals of freedom and equality.

_Augsburger Allgemeine Zeitung_ (1837)

The above quotation stems from a German correspondent of a leading newspaper of the day in Germany. According to this account, lack of _Kultur_, greed, and hypocrisy were

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15 The author went on to reconsider the first two notions. The relative lack of poetry could be excused: “since they still fight with nature they can’t serenade her yet.” Slavery, however, could not be rationalized. Mebold, “Über die Lage der Vereinigten Staaten,” Augsburger Allgemeine Zeitung 1837. My translation. Reprinted in: Sommer et al., eds., Was die Deutschen, 63.
three common stereotypes Germans harbored about Americans in the nineteenth century. These notions became firmly woven into the tapestry of how Germans have viewed America. Kaspar Maase asserts that the basic stereotypes appearing in the German imagination of America in the late twentieth century were already formalized by 1850. He identifies two major positions. In the early twentieth century, the educated middle class felt threatened by what it perceived as a leveling effect of the commercial orientation in American society deficient of real Kultur. On the other hand, the impression of the lower classes was characterized by a fundamentally hopeful attitude about the quality of life in the United States, a notion inherited from the previous century. Before we will further look at the construction and interpretation of Amerikabilder in and around American football, we will take a deeper look into the history of the German perception of America and the influence of the United States on Germany in general, and its popular culture and sport in particular.

**Amerika before World War II**

Educated elites in Germany have had a history of praising German Kultur and its high esteem for intellectual and artistic work for its inner value sake. The roots of the

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16 Kaspar Maase, *BRAVO Amerika: Erkundung zur Jugendkultur der Bundesrepublik in den Fünfziger Jahren* (Hamburg: Junius Verlag, 1992), 45. For an excellent source of what German immigrants and correspondents reported about America to newspapers in Germany during the period from 1828 to 1865, see: Sommer et al., eds., *Was die Deutschen*.

17 For the sake of organization, I have divided this survey in two parts with World War II as a partition. This division is somewhat arbitrary and certainly should not suggest that German Amerikabilder were constant and homogenous in either the time before or after World War II. However, the war, the ensuing occupation, and the division of Germany certainly had a fundamental impact on Germans and their Amerikabilder.
antithesis between Zivilisation and Kultur reach as far back as Emmanuel Kant (1724-1804), the German philosopher and founder of critical idealism, and Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835), the reformer of Prussia’s educational system.\textsuperscript{18} Since the late eighteenth century, various forms of Romanticism in art and poetry expressed sentiments against the ideas of the Enlightenment juxtaposing fate, destiny, intuition, faith, and tradition, on one side, against natural law, reason, logic, and progress, on the other.\textsuperscript{19}

At various points in history, German cultural critics have shared an aversion to liberalism, which they blamed to be the principle demise of modern society and the source of such evils as materialism, democracy, and lack of political leadership. All of these were seen as products of western Zivilisation. While it was believed that the character of Kultur was permanent, the qualities of western Zivilisation were seen as transitory.\textsuperscript{20}

Niels Werber convincingly demonstrates that major elements of twenty-first century German critique of the United States go back to ideas that originated as early as the eighteenth and nineteenth century, particularly those of German scholars Georg Friedrich Hegel and Johann Gottfried Herder. Weber tracks “das deutsche Amerika” as Hegel’s


\textsuperscript{19} The work of the Romantic painter and avid nationalist Casper David Friedrich is an example for the effective use of symbols of Germanic mythology of nature, and veneration of the sacred forest. The Romantics tried hard to trace Teutonic symbolism back to Roman Times. Friedrich’s \textit{Traveler Overlooking a Sea of Fog} and \textit{The Cross and Cathedral in the Mountain}, painted around 1812, suggested a religious theme of resurrection were an expression of resistance against Napoleonic domination, and anticipation of Germany’s national renewal of a mythical past. “Schama’s Landscape: Symbolism a Romantic Vision,” \textit{Times Magazine}, 8 April 1995, 13.

\textsuperscript{20} Stern, The Politics of Cultural Despair, xiii, 196.
geopolitical legacy in the fictional writings of such writers as Charles Sealsfield, formerly known as Carl Postl (*Das Kajütenbuch*, 1841), Ferdinand Kürnberger (*Amerikamüde*, 1855), and Gustav Freytag (*Soll und Haben*, 1855). He finds that “These authors and interpreters of Herder and Hegel have shaped die Gestalt deutscher Amerikabilder so enduringly that you can still detect their traces in the German mass media today.” Thus, modern depictions of America would often be variations of century old clichés.²¹

In Hegel’s brief but influential treatment of America during his *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, a lecture series he presented regularly between 1822 and 1831 and which eventually was published in 1840, the German philosopher presented the world as principally divided into new and old. America’s original inhabitants, inferior in every sense, were bound to yield to the arriving Europeans. Liberated from the confinements and traditions of the old world Europeans moved in ready to conquer the open space of the new world.²² But this open space was also seen as a stumbling block for

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²² In the 1840s, two articles in a leading German newspaper expressed this sentiment: “The discovery and European settlement of America was more important for the entire humanity than all colonies of India. No thousand-year old civilization was found there, no population through which one had to force a trench, no obstacle to a direct European cultivation, and it seems as if fate really kept this boundless continent in reserve to reveal it at the moment when the European civilization had advanced enough to bear fruit from it. Hundred ideas had matured in Europe, but could not gain ground amongst the cultures already spread.” My translation. Francis Grund, “Briefe über Auswanderung und Colonisation,” *Augsburger Allgemeine Zeitung* 1842.
America’s new owners. Already in the eighteenth century, Herder had identified the vastness of America’s landscape as the reason for the absence of a *Hochkultur* in America. And as Werber describes Hegel’s conviction that the accomplishments of the old world were rooted in the density of the European continent, it becomes obvious that for those who stayed in Europe, the new world’s open space served as an explanation for America’s lack of *Kultur* and *Ordnung*.²³

Thus, when he wrote in his 1995 *Little America: Die Amerikansierung der deutschen Republik*, Rolf Winter’s critique of America’s interpretation of liberty was indeed part of a longer tradition:

*America, far from being an example of order for the world, is in reality a case study for liberalism’s inability for order and uncontrolled capitalism. …The United States has never known a restricted, disciplined…, an individual *Freiheit* [liberty] that is *kultiviert* [cultivated], namely limited by the needs for freedom, protection, and respect of the entire *Gesellschaft* [society]. …Most of all, the excess of the ‘Wild West’…has decisively contributed to what, in America, one understands as liberty. In the American understanding it wasn’t chaos developing into a *freiheitlich-gesitteten Ordnung* [liberal-civilized order] but chaotic order that was declared to be liberty.*²⁴

“*The same restless entrepreneurial spirit, unconcerned with success, is also expressed in the new settlements. What no European takes on, the American commonly takes on quickly and without hesitation. If he erred in the ground or the climate and worked a couple of years in vain, he simply moves one hundred miles further west with his slender wife and his five to six blond-haired little ones: it is a failed endeavor, nothing more It is not the desire for money that drives the American toward the west, but love for the most unlimited freedom.*” My translation. Francis Grund, “Ueber Literatur und Kunst in den Vereinigten Staaten,” *Augsburger Allgemeine Zeitung* 1845. Both articles reprinted in: Sommer et al., eds., *Was die Deutschen*, 37-8.


²⁴ Despite the similarities between Winter’s critique of America and traditional German criticism of *Zivilisation*, Winter explicitly rejects the notion that Germans can boast of their beloved *Kultur* while pointing the finger at America’s lack of culture. He denies a wide-spread existence of such a *Kultur* in German society since it allowed national socialism to flourish: “If there was a German Kultur that would deserve such a title, it would have made Hitler and Americanization impossible; but it exists as little as
In his book *The Civilizing Process*, originally published in German in 1937/39, Norbert Elias offered an excellent discussion of the sociogenesis of the antithesis of *Kultur* and *Zivilisation* and their German usage. Elias’ insightful understanding of these concepts and their eventual relation to the reception of American football in Germany justify a longer introduction. Elias clarified the varying meanings the word “civilization” had in different Western nations. At the time referring to England and France as part of “the West,” he wrote that by the term “civilization”

> Western society seeks to describe what constitutes its special character and what it is proud of: the level of *its* technology, the nature of *its* manners, the development of *its* scientific knowledge or view of the world…. [It] sums up in a single term their pride in the significance of their own nations for the progress of the West and of mankind. But in German usage, *Zivilisation* means something which is indeed useful, but nevertheless only a value of the second rank, comprising only the outer appearance of human beings, the surface of human existence. The word through which Germans interpret themselves, which more than any other expresses their pride in their own achievement and their own being is *Kultur*.

Elias traced the development of the antithesis of *Kultur* and *Zivilisation* back to the relationship between middle class and court nobility in eighteenth century Germany. The specific political and economic context had caused the middle-class intelligentsia to

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embrace a world of thoughts and feelings, and most of all writing “as the most important outlet. Here…the young middle-class generation counterposed its new dreams and oppositional ideas, and with them the German language, to the courtly ideals.” Elias found in the works of the German literary movement of the second half of the eighteenth century “the love of nature and freedom, the solitary exaltation, the surrender to the excitement of one’s heart, unhindered by ‘cold reason.’” Analyzing the works of the German literary movement, Elias wrote that by the late eighteenth century, “everywhere among the middle-class youth one finds vague dreams of a new united Germany, of a ‘natural’ life—‘natural’ as opposed to the ‘unnatural’ life of court society.” A perceived dichotomy emerged between the middle-class intelligentsia and the nobility described in “pairs of opposites” like depth/superficiality, honesty/falsity, and true virtue/outward politeness.27

Later, this dichotomy became part of how Germans defined themselves in opposition to other peoples:

With the slow rise of the German bourgeoisie from a second-rank class to the bearer of German national consciousness, and finally—very late and conditionally—to the ruling class, from a class which was first obliged to perceive or legitimize itself primarily by contrasting itself to the courtly aristocratic upper class, and then by defining itself against competing nations, the antithesis between Kultur and Zivilisation, with all its accompanying meanings, changes in significance and function: from primarily social it becomes a primarily national antithesis.28

27 Ibid., 18, 29.

28 Ibid., 30-31.
Elias convincingly explains how and why the social element declined and the national element increased in this antithesis and thus moved from an inner-German contraposition between the vanguard intelligentsia and an aristocracy, which was largely influenced by French language and customs, to an international contrast between characteristics attributed to different countries. Thus, the twin set of *Zivilisation* und *Kultur* became part of German auto- and hetero-stereotypes, or what Elias calls “an expression of the German self-image”:\textsuperscript{29}

the concept of *Kultur* mirrors self-consciousness of a nation which had constantly to seek out and constitute its boundaries anew, in a political as well as spiritual sense, and again and again had to ask itself: “What is our identity?” …For centuries the question “What is really German” has not been laid to rest. One answer to this question—one among others—lies in a particular aspect of the concept of *Kultur*.\textsuperscript{30}

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the question of German identity was also the backdrop to the discourse about American influence on German life. Humanistic ideals of mental differentiation, character development, and creativity were regarded as uniquely European and absent from America’s mass culture. The American mechanical masses supposedly preferred instrumental rationality that legitimated the production of material goods and the attainment of visible success. German culture, by contrast, was allegedly built on the creative use of leisure, while America was seen as emphasizing action, speed, and functionalism, whether at work or play.\textsuperscript{31}

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 29-30, 34.

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 5-6.

Tracing the German usage of the terms *Americanization* and *Americanism*, Frank Trommler found that both “contained a strong element of ambiguity, tilting more toward the negative than the positive.” Opinions about America tended to be especially polarized in the recovery period following World War I. During that time, the lines were drawn according to one’s perception and assessment of the changes brought about by “modern life.” According to Trommler, America became a scapegoat for Europe’s “difficulty in coping with the alienating effects of modernization.” This insecurity played a particular role in the German perception of America in the 1920s.

The 1920s in Germany was a period full of ambivalence toward America and its popular culture. Germans cultivated abundant images and fantasies about America as the ultimate symbol of modernity and progress. Technological progress, industrial rationalization, efficiency, and discipline became popular associations with the American economic sphere. For some, reports of copious consumption and material abundance reinforced ideas about “the land of unlimited opportunities.” Others found evidence for their notions about American standardization, vulgarity, and materialism. For them, American modernity compared unfavorably to Germany’s culture, refinement, and idealism.

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32 Trommler, “Rise and Fall,” 332.
33 Ibid., 333-4, 338.
The 1920s were also a period in which many young Germans appropriated American popular culture to form identities that allowed them to set themselves apart from the history and culture of a previous generation. Their behavior and attitudes alarmed many of Weimar’s cultural gate keepers who felt that Germany’s classical culture was “overrun with foreign influences, cheap entertainment music, and other perceived degeneracies…” In their study of the relationship of music and German national identity, Celia Applegate and Pamela Potter find that conservative cultural critics of the 1920s deplored the “spread of such destructive elements as jazz and other American grotesqueries. … ‘Negro dance bands’ and American films flourished, while German opera and theater languished.” Like the fictional German emigrants in Ferdinand Kürnberger’s 1855 novel Der Amerikamüde, many German youngsters would later become disillusioned with America or their dream of it. In this sense, the 1920s solidified a pattern for other generations of young Germans who sought to symbolically align themselves with American images.35

Following World War I, the intellectual elite tried to affirm Germany’s self-perception as a Kulturnation in contrast to America. The political Right saw Germany’s traditional Kultur under attack by Weimar’s modernization with its industrial rationalization and democratization. They saw America as the source of such pitfalls as rampant materialism and mechanization. However, engineers and businessmen often regarded the American economic miracle as a model for Germany’s economy. Trommler notes that it was no coincidence that the term Wirtschaftswunder, used as a reference to

the United States in the 1920s, reemerged after World War II when Germans applied it to describe their own economic recovery. Trommler’s interpretation of German travelogue covers of the 1920s shows how images like New York’s skyscrapers and American transcontinental trains functioned as symbols of modernity and basic ingredients of the ambivalent image.  

Weimar Germany looked towards the United States for a vision of its own future, as Germans attempted to revitalize their own economy and build a new social order. As a model of modernity, America was subject of a broad and pluralistic public debate. Mary Nolan finds that Germans imitated economic Americanism ambivalently and incompletely during this period. The political situation of the 1920s was marked by the loss in the Great War and a revolution of 1918/19 that produced a new but weak democracy. At the time, Germans were generally disappointed in their political and military leadership. Even worse, their already ambivalent sense of national identity was shattered. The Weimar Republic was divided by splintering political parties and class conflicts that usually overshadowed national interest. The inflation of 1923 and the Great Depression six years later finished the young Republic. German society once again was denied harmony and unification.

36 Trommler, “Rise and Fall,” 335-337.
37 Nolan, Visions of Modernity, 9.
38 Holger H. Herwig, Hammer or Anvil?: Modern Germany 1648-Present (Lexington, MA: Heath, 1994), 228.
In this atmosphere, Germans of all classes, sexes, and political convictions looked to America for inspiration. Public debates in Germany focused on America’s advanced technology, unprecedented economic prosperity, high wages, brisk work pace, and dizzying consumption patterns, as well as the new, seemingly emancipated woman. Economically and culturally, Americanization impacted the Weimar Republic like no other European country during this period. The United States’ economic success story raised hope for Germany to develop economically and industrially in spite of the Treaty of Versailles and its consequences.39

As more visitors from Germany traveled to the United States to collect first hand information, the public debate expanded. Industrialists, engineers, union leaders, and university professors returned with a variety of opinions and questions, but most marveled at what appeared to be a very homogenous society—an ideal attractive to many Germans who shared an unrealized goal of national unity and non-conflict in their own country. As many German observers projected their own hopes on the United States, they commented on the apparent uniformity in American society. This uniformity presented itself mostly in consumer products and social interaction. First, relatively high wages, national mail order catalogs, advertising, and credit buying expanded markets both geographically and socially. Second, Germans who were used to a very hierarchical social system found little formal distinction between working and middle class, employer and employee, and the roles of men and women. Uniformity and standardization of consumerism were both condemned and admired. For instance, to overcome claims of

39 Maase, BRAVO, 47; Nolan, Visions of Modernity, 3-5.
oppressive uniformity and monotony in the United States, German Social Democrats and trade unions studied the variety of available products to disprove standardization.⁴⁰

Rationalization of the work process became an integral part of the vision of modern Germany, but it meant different things to different people. German industrialists favored Tayloristic efficiency with improved technology and fewer laborers, while hoping to avoid the leveling effects of mass production. On the other hand, Social Democrats feared a dehumanizing work process, but appreciated higher wages with more discretionary income and more consumption power. Marked with such conflicting feelings, Germans did not simply copy from the American role model. Instead Nolan finds, “A desire for slavish imitation was as rare among those studying the American economy as it was among those inspired by American architecture, music, and movies. But America did provide a working version of modernity from which Germans could pick and choose different elements as they strove to imagine not an ideal future, but at least an updated and improved one.” Nolan emphasizes that the German response to economic Americanism, “should be understood in terms of negotiation and contestation … not the imposition of a hegemonic economic and cultural model by Americans.”⁴¹

American models were also contested and negotiated in the burgeoning realm of mass culture, where German conservative voices struggled to be heard. The political left and right of Weimar’s writers and artists neither reached the masses nor embraced the new republic. Those who may have hoped to invigorate the working class “attracted mainly


⁴¹ Ibid., 9, 10, 12.
fellow intellectuals and enlightened bourgeois audiences.”\footnote{42} Next to Henry Ford’s best-selling autobiography, jazz, comics, and movies were among the American imports. Hollywood’s images especially reinforced the legends of prosperity, happiness, and youth of Americans.\footnote{43}

Anton Kaes’s study of the cinema in the United States and Germany from the 1880s to the 1920s examines the historical and social function of the emerging mass culture in both societies. While American cinema initially played a pivotal role in the acculturation and Americanization of the immigrant working class, it quickly expanded its audience to the prosperous middle class and catered its business to the entertainment needs of the urban masses. In comparison, German cinema cultivated a literary emphasis with strong ties to the theater. While this artistic orientation evolved into the German Expressionist avant-garde film in the 1920s, a growing population of German white-collar workers of the expanding middle class embraced the stories that were told about America on the silver screen. American movies and their depictions of vast consumption and material abundance “created the images and fantasies about the New World that were crucial in shaping the German assessment of modernity.”\footnote{44}

According to Kaes, Germany’s avant-garde originally also approved of American mass culture as an expression of modern folk culture and “a vehicle for the radical

\footnote{42} Herwig, \textit{Hammer}, 251.

\footnote{43} Maase, \textit{BRAVO}, 56.

modernization and democratization of both German culture and life. It stood not only for Charlie Chaplin and the movies, for jazz, the Charleston, boxing, and spectator sports; it represented above all modernity and the ideal of living in the present.”\textsuperscript{45} Much like a later generation of young German rock and roll fans in the 1950s, the avant-garde of the early 1920s appropriated American popular culture to distance themselves from the old political order, authoritarian rule, and traditional elite culture. Kaes concludes that in the early-1920s “American jazz signified being up to date and culturally modern.” Despite the growing influence of American popular culture at the onset of the twentieth century, at the time there was little to suggest that American sport would take on similar meanings by the third-quarter of the century.\textsuperscript{46}

During the second half of the 1920s, German ambivalence toward American popular culture came to light, as German intellectual elites became disillusioned with America. American mass culture, once seen as an expression of democracy and equality, became increasingly loathed for its standardization and uniformity. Leftist German intellectuals now feared that further Americanization would cost Germany’s cultural identity. By 1931, \textit{Der Große Herder} defined \textit{Amerikanismus} as a term either referring to uncritical enthusiasm for America or similarly uncritical condemnation of America. According to this popular reference book, the term emerged following the war as a result of America’s overwhelming economic strength, and a growing anxiety concerning the decline of Germany’s \textit{Geistesleben}. The text listed sportization (\textit{Versportlichung}) among the

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 323.

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 325.
perceived threats next to “Massenzivilization, Kulturfeminismus, Mechanisierung und Veräußerlichung.” By the early 1930s, a general cultural despair among Germans contributed significantly to a milieu ripe for exploitation.47

In his study of the rise of Germanic ideology, historian Fritz Stern illustrates that the conservative revolution of the 1930s was not simply a spontaneous or reactionary opposition to the Treaty of Versailles or the turmoil of the Weimar Republic, but rather the reformulation under more favorable historic conditions of a nineteenth-century ideology. A desperate yearning for an imaginary past marked nineteenth and early twentieth century German nationalism. By the time of the Weimar Republic, generations of cultural critics had longed for the restoration of a mythical Germanic legacy. This notion of Deutschum, developed during the Romanticism of the late eighteenth, early nineteenth century, referred to a German spirit, a heroic essence of Germanism associated with a nostalgic recollection of an earlier, uncorrupted Germany.48

The conviction that only a non-German conspiracy could have dissolved the ancient unity of the German people poured gasoline on the flames of anti-Semitism. Germans longed for leadership that would transcend politics and unite Germans once and for all against all enemies from within and without. By the 1930s, the imaginary past of German greatness and the destiny of its resurrection had been so well preserved that the German

47 Kaes reports, “By the mid-1920s… a noticeable shift in the image of America took place. It no longer connoted the mass culture of jazz, sports, and cinema (as in the early Weimar years); rather, it generally became associated with technology and industrial rationalization. Americanism in the economic sphere meant efficiency, discipline, and control.” Ibid., 326, 328. Der Große Herder: Nachschlagewerk für Wissen und Leben, vol. 1 (Freiburg: Herder & Co., 1931). Quoted in: Freese, Dream or Nightmare, 65.

people passionately believed to have found the embodiment of that leadership in their *Führer.*\(^4^9\) Under the Nazis, the notion that the United States was a country void of any real culture found additional nourishment. As in other realms of popular culture, American influence on German sport significantly diminished under Nazi rule. With America’s entry in World War II, Joseph Goebbels ordered the production of propaganda materials designed to convince the German youth “that the uncritical exceptions of certain American standards, for example, jazz music, means a loss of culture.”\(^5^0\)

**Post-World War II Amerika**

The following survey of post-World War II *Amerika* explores the experience of those young Germans whose children may have later been involved in establishing the first long-term football organizations in Germany. After the German atrocities of the Holocaust and the devastation of World War II, the majority of West Germans accepted the political and cultural integration into the West without much resistance. Instead of pursuing a thorough denazification of their country, West Germans quickly channeled their energies toward re-industrialization and consumption. For Helmuth Karasek the 1950s were “a time of collective denial” in West Germany. According to Ralph Willet, American icons of consumer culture played a significant role in the process: “Images symbolizing the USA’s material wealth encouraged and reassured those who found

\(^4^9\) Ibid., xi-xiii, 183.

affluence and economic boom the solutions to individual and national difficulties.”

Among these American icons were Lucky Strike, Coca-Cola, and, most of all, rock and roll. 51

American cigarettes embodied an orientation toward the west, long before the Hamburg-based Reemtsma group marketed its cigarette brand West with slogans like “Let’s go West” (1980) and “Test the West” (1987). A Lucky Strike, for example, had both real and symbolic value. In a time when people had lost all possessions and everything had to be “organized”, a Lucky Strike was the currency on the black market.

Since then, such American items have become icons and status symbols with a larger-than-life image. 52

Similar to Lucky Strike, Coca-Cola played a major role in the way Germans experienced America. The American president Woodrow Wilson allegedly once called Coca-Cola “the essence of American capitalism.” The soft drink had been produced in Germany since 1929. Its production during the war came to a hold only due to shortage of supplies. True to the spirit of the respective times, Coke’s advertising campaign changed from one that was imbedded in German culture before the war, to one that


increasingly used American style and content from the 1950s onward. This is little surprising considering the growing popularity of the “American Dream.” At a 1948 international conference in Atlantic City, the following slogans were displayed: “Coca-Cola helps show the world the friendliness of American ways”, “As American as Independence Day”, and “When you have a Coke, listen to the Voice of America.” According to Willett, the US government actively supported and used Coca-Cola as “the principle commercial symbol of a thoroughly propagandized American way of life.” The government, he writes, assisted and financed bottling plants that supplied the American troops at the front lines and the ‘new markets.’ Even in the 1990s, the company was well aware of its mission to spread the American way of life. In a 1991 interview a Coke executive declared, “We always have to carry proudly the fact that Coca-Cola is the symbol of American free enterprise.”

If the taste of American cigarettes and soft drinks left marks on the collective memory of the post-war generation, rock and roll provided an enduring soundtrack for their rebellion. As it had been the case with jazz in the 1920s, it was once again the young generation that adopted American music with special fervor as a means to forge a break from a dark past. Embracing rock and roll became an act of what Trommler calls “generational opposition against the prevailing tradition culture and every day life.”


late 1950s marked a high point of this symbolic association with American popular culture. From studies about the production and consumption of commercial music in post-war Germany, noticeable patterns emerge about the ways West Germans have appropriated American popular culture.55

Various observations on post-War popular music in Germany reveal complex twin-processes of “Americanizing” German popular culture on the one hand, and “Germanizing” American originals on the other. Amid a steady influx of Anglo-American influences, consumers and producers of popular music devised ambivalent and diverse strategies in shaping a new musical identity in post-war Germany. Some consciously broke with the Nazi past by turning to American jazz and rock and roll, and later British beat—either in the English original or German adaptations. Others found refuge in more traditional German-language genres like Schlager- and volkstümliche music. According to Edward Larkey, Schlagermusik was “distinguishable from Anglo-American-influenced rock or pop tunes by their cadence, rhythms, harmonies, and instrumentation.” Volkstümliche music had its roots in regional folk music like that stereotypically associated with Bavarian folk culture. Songs of both genres emphasized sentimentalized ideas about the German Heimat (homeland). Frequently, Schlager lyrics also “reflected the optimism of the Wirtschaftswunder (economic miracle) in Germany…[and] expressed the wish to travel to exotic places (Italy, the South Seas, or the American West), and extirpated unpleasant thoughts of Nazi past.” Despite the

55 Trommler, “Rise and Fall,” 341.
enduring popularity of these genres, nothing was as powerful in forging a new identity for the German youth as American rock and roll.\textsuperscript{56}

Kaspar Maase examines the arrival of rock and roll in West Germany during the second half of the 1950s in the context of an adolescent male working-class struggle for autonomy and self-expression. As an example, he provides a reading of public reactions to Elvis Presley’s transformation “from a moral threat into an exemplary soldier” during his military service in the West Germany, which started on October 1\textsuperscript{st} 1958. At the time, pictures of a sternly saluting Presley were the cause of much debate among German youngsters. For the fans of the King, Presley’s reported adoption of military mannerisms made it seem as if their American hero was becoming German by adopting the least favorable characteristics associated with being German. In the broader context of resistance against German rearmament, coverage of Elvis as an obedient soldier clashed with the informal manners and casual appearance German youngsters had made part of their constructed image of both American GIs and rock and roll stars alike.\textsuperscript{57}

In post-war West Germany, obedience to authority was not part of the symbolic language that made the American way of life an attractive source for adolescent self-expression. Instead, rock and roll concerts set the stage for symbolic and real confrontations of groups of young working-class men with the authority and order maintained by the propertied and educated classes, as in the clashes between rock and roll fans and student ushers that interrupted Bill Haley and the Comets in Hamburg’s Ernst-

\textsuperscript{56} Larkey, “Postwar German,” 235, 237, 248.

\textsuperscript{57} Maase, “Halbstarke,” 152-153.
Merck Halle on October 27, 1958. In their embodied revolt against cultural norms—“a body in opposition to all demands of cleanliness, reason, self control”—German Teddy Boys selectively adopted expressions of vulgarity and coolness from their American role models. Maase points out that in this appropriation of rock and roll, these young men merged elements of American culture with features of their own German working-class ethos: “Rock’n’roll and motorbikes provided opportunities to display the language of masculinity: physical strength and dexterity, a devotion to rhythm and velocity, the mastery of machines.”

Maase concludes that the German working-class rock’n’rollers of the 1950s became “the avant-garde of innovation…[who]…strengthened their positions by the symbolic alliance with ‘America’. This was the constellation of social and cultural actors which shaped the experience of the West Germans in the 1950s and has left its mark in the collective memory.” The depth of this mark on the collective memory becomes evident when two decades later young American football players interpret their role in German sports as being the avantgarde of innovation against “resistance and the snobbery of the traditional cultural elites” of soccer.

As German youngsters symbolically aligned themselves with Amerika, German producers of commercial entertainment also appropriated American images. In their assessment of music and German national identity, Celia Applegate and Pamela Potter

58 Ibid., 156, 162.
find that German composers of the 1950s tried to distance themselves from “any association, even a stylistic one, with the music of Germany’s past.” Larkey’s work offers a detailed description of the selective cultural adaptation of American rock and roll by the German music industry after World War II. In the rock and roll genre, the process of cultural transformation at times led to curious products and an “outrageous mixture of English and German.” For example, the title of the Big Bopper’s “Chantilly Lace” was transformed into “Ich liebe You” in a German cover by Rudi Büttner.

Larkey points out that the German recording industry modernized the image of traditional German music genres of Schlager and volkstümliche music by frequently blending English words such as “baby,” “darling,” “girls,” or “teenager” with German lyrics. He also found a whole list of German artists who aimed at positive image transfers by dropping their German names for Anglo-American pseudonyms, such as Manfred Nidl-Petz who became Freddy Quinn. Surinam-born Ernst Bjelke turned into Bruce Low; Harald Schubring’s stage name was Ted Herold; Gerd Höllerich was better known as Roy Black; and Tony Marshall was the alias of Herbert Anton Hilger. Another telling phenomenon for cultural transformation of the German music scene was the popularity of former British and American servicemen turned chart toppers in Germany. Chris


61 Edward Larkey, “Postwar German Popular Music: Americanization, the Cold War, and the Post-Nazi Heimat,” Ibid., 238-239.
Howland, Bill Ramsey, and Gus Backus all celebrated sustained careers by singing in German with trademark Anglo-American accents.\(^62\)

The practice of “Germanizing” new musical imports by using German lyrics was by no means embraced by all. As the English beat movement swept over Germany, many of its German fans were turned off by German attempts to mimic rock and roll originals. Bands like *The Rivers* from Hamburg, *The Crowds* from Frankfurt, *The Tornados* from Blankenese, and *The Germans* from Bremen played the majority of their sets of cover songs and original numbers in English. For fans and artists alike, the symbolism of English language was of pivotal importance. When sixteen-year old Achim Reichel founded *The Rattles* in 1960, the language of choice was clear from the beginning: “It can only be English. …The English texts gave one the feeling to be in the midst of it all. Each generation resents the world of the parents; that’s still the same today. …We used to go…see English bands and asked about lyrics we didn’t understand. The answer was often: ‘It doesn’t matter; the feeling has to be right.’” For Reichel, British beat, American rock and roll and blue jeans were part of his self-definition: “I had my sister send me jeans from the USA—and I was the absolute greatest in our street with those. We thought

\(^62\) Ibid., 239. Other name changes included Surinam-born Ernst Bjelke, who turned into Bruce Low; Harald Schubring’s stage name Ted Herold, Gerd Höllerich better known as Roy Black; and Tony Marshall’s alias of Herbert Anton Hilger. Bill Ramsey’s career may be a prime example for GI’s who became successful entertainers in Germany. Born in 1931, he grew up as a jazz enthusiast in Cincinnati. During the Korean War he enlisted in the Air Force and was stationed in Frankfurt, Germany, where he worked for AFN-Frankfurt as Chief Producer and built a reputation as a talented jazz musician. After his discharge, Ramsey first remained in Germany, and later went back to the United States at the end of 1955 before returning to Germany for good in 1957. After switching to light-hearted pop songs in German, he eventually became well-known recording and film star in Germany with an active career to the present day. Virtually unknown in his native country, Ramsey “has recorded 50 singles, 30 LP’s & CD’s, hosted various musical and children’s TV shows, appeared in countless TV and radio broadcasts and managed to act in 28 German, Austrian and Swiss films.” In 1984 Ramsey became a German citizen. Bill Ramsey, *Biography* (Bill Ramsey, 2005, accessed 26 February 2005); available from http://www.ramsey.de.
James Dean was great, and I was looking for a red lumberjack [coat] where you could put up the collar.”

English as the language of choice for German performers has certainly not been uncontested. Although Anglo-American popular music continued to dominate the German charts throughout the rest of the twentieth century, over the decades local performers did succeed in synthesizing Anglo-American influences with the German vernacular that spoke the language—both literally and metaphorically—of generations of young Germans. In the 1980s and 1990s, at a time when the adaptation of American football in Germany in many ways followed the previous path of American rock and roll, music of the Neue Deutsche Welle (New German Wave) and Sprechgesang presented distinctively German adaptations of new wave and hip hop and what one observer called “a fusion of distinctly German and globally popular idioms.”

For Larkey, this unique synthesis “of German language lyrics with Anglo-American-influenced music helped establish a new German musical identity by using language to help distinguish Germanic music from the English-based. The switch to German lyrics has transformed globally distributed music like hip-hop, punk, rock and roll, and other

63 Singing in English not only appealed to German Rattles fans but also facilitated four successful tours of the band in England. Peter Wagner, Pop 2000: 50 Jahre Popmusik und Jugendkultur in Deutschland (Hamburg: Ideal, 1999), 36, 42, 43, 46.

64 Applegate and Potter, “Germans,” 30. Neue Deutsche Welle (NDW), according to Larkey, “is the commercial outgrowth of the British and American punk movement in the German speaking countries in the late 1970s.” Whereas its Anglo-American ancestors had their roots in proletarian youth cultures, NDW artists and fans came from predominantly middle-class backgrounds. Performed in German, NDW “reintroduced colloquial speech and subcultural idioms into lyrics … distinguishing them from their Schlager cousins in their openness, anxiety, and sensitivity, as well as their irony, parody, and satire.” Larkey, “Postwar German,” 239, 240-1.
Anglo-American styles into something socially, ethnically, and territorially German.” However, despite this renaissance of German lyrics, most of the songs in the German charts continue to be performed in English.65

Given this precedent in the German music industry to adopt Anglo-American stage names and the predominance of English o, it does not surprise that most of Germany’s football teams chose to go by names that identified the American origin of their game and which set their organizations apart from traditional German sports clubs. Among the first teams formed in 1979 and 1980 were the Ansbach Grizzlies, Munich Cowboys, Cologne Crocodiles, Hamburg Vikings, and Solingen Steelers. Teams that preferred German nicknames like the Frankfurt Löwen, Düsseldorf Panther, or Berlin Bären were the exception from the rule.66

Like their musical counterparts, the founders of these clubs may have hoped to increase their team’s popular appeal through association with an American image. At other times, they simply copied the name of their favorite NFL team, especially if they could find a way to relate it to their city or region. For example, the name Seahawks appealed to the club members in the seaport of Bremerhaven for its maritime theme.67 Angelo Leichtenstern, co-founder of the Munich Cowboys in 1979, explains the rationale for picking his team’s nickname as follows:

65 Larkey, “Postwar German,” 249.
66 For more information on the formation of early football clubs in Germany, see chapter four.
I was thinking about what would be easy for Germans. First of all, I thought Texas and Bavaria are somewhat independent states. That was a good fit. The [Dallas] Cowboys were my football team anyway. … It as an American sport and thus we took an American name. However, [it had to be] one that everyone could pronounce easily.  

However, easiness of pronunciation was not always a main concern. Original football terminology beat out German translations, even when use of American expressions caused considerable difficulties in explaining the game to journalists, spectators, and even players. German football pioneers decided to integrate American terms like touchdown, quarterback, and wide-receiver into their lingo and slowly also into their country’s sports vernacular. The use of these American terms is comparable with the practice of blending Anlgo-American words into German song lyrics. 

The example of Tanner D. Knox shows that even the singing GIs who turned into local celebrities had their counterparts on the gridiron in Germany. Stationed in Germany, Tanner became involved as a player and coach in the formation of Germany’s first American football club, the Frankfurt Löwen, in 1977. At the time, he had already enjoyed an extended playing career as quarterback and linebacker for US Army and Air Force teams in Europe in the 1970s as well as a short stint with the University of Southern Mississippi as a linebacker/kicker. In 1979, the 29-year-old MP staff sergeant also helped with the organization of the inaugural Bundesliga season, while starting a coaching career that included time at the helm of the Hanau Hawks, Cologne Crocodiles, 

68 Angelo Leichtenstern, translated phone interview by author, tape recording, Munich, Germany, 16 July 2002.
and Bad Homburg Falken. Married to a German and retired from the military since 1990, Tanner coaches in Germany to the present day. 69

In the realm of music, the struggle over American influence on German culture particularly marked the early decades of the Federal Republic. As Holger Herwig notes, the intellectual elite of post-war Germany deplored the fascination with American artifacts, fearing a generation of cultural emptiness with little interest for the literary and political process. Given the political activism of the late 1960s such pessimism was hardly warranted, Herwig concludes.70

Maase even understands the Americanization of the post-war generation as a prerequisite for the resistance of following generations. He describes vulgarization, coolness, and commercial attitude as part of the appropriation of an imagined “American way of life” that helped to develop an autonomous youth identity and shifted symbolic balances of power between generations and sexes, between citizens and government. This was especially true for young working men in Germany for whom rising income and less working hours meant access to consumer products, leisure activities, and role models made in America. The very essence of what constitutes culture was contested when commercial success and not “higher values” determined what was popular and

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70 Herwig, Hammer, 406.
acceptable. Therefore the position cultural gatekeepers of the intellectual elite and propertied classes had been challenged from below.\textsuperscript{71}

During the last quarter of the century, the American grip on West Germany also became less firm. Several scholars have commented on the emerging confidence Germany displayed in her dealings with the American partner. Willett detected a “new ‘soft’ cultural nationalism” in the early 1980s, which emerged most notably albeit not exclusively among the young and the left in West Germany as “a reaction against the hegemonic intrusion of ‘Yankee’ images, technology, and fashions.”\textsuperscript{72}

On the political level, Stern observed a sense of disenchantment in the German-American relationship in the 1980s, which more and more turned into an alliance among equal partners, each “with increasingly divergent interests and perceptions and mounting suspicions.” In Germany’s political discourse “it became ever more acceptable to speak of German interests, to emphasize German needs, and above all to speak with a new urgency about German-German relations.”\textsuperscript{73}

According to Trommler, in the 1980s the pendulum of the affinity of German youth to American culture had reversed its momentum from the 1950s: “A decade and many anti-Vietnam-War demonstrations later, the young generation came to formulate its emancipation in a distancing process from the United States while the older generation

\textsuperscript{71}Maase, \textit{BRAVO}, 66, 76-78, 237. Maase admits that more relaxed interaction and conduct alone do not empower a group to put through their interests. But he stresses the symbolic function of a pluralization of standards at a time of historic changes and establishment of new relations in society.

\textsuperscript{72}Willett, \textit{Americanization}, 14.

\textsuperscript{73}Fritz Stern, \textit{Dreams and Delusions: The Drama of German History} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 221, 228, 234.
became the defender of America.” However, even the anti-American protesters of the late 1960s as well as those of the late 1970s and early 1980s adopted many of their symbols of resistance from the American civil rights movement. After decades of exposure to American culture and politics, Germans had learned to pick and choose from American fashion and music trends to form their own identities and forms of generational opposition. 74

Maase asserts that the dynamics of the 1950s should not be misunderstood as a pattern for the “Americanization” of the generations that followed. The period after World War II was unique. Never since then has the appropriation of American imports been connected with such public controversy over lifestyle and morals. Nevertheless, it is not to take away from the exceptional clash between rock and roll and the establishment in post-War Germany to note that there are certain similarities in the way young Germans incorporated American music and fashion into their lifestyles in the 1950s and American football in the late 1970s and early 1980s. 75

Football: From American Auto-Stereotypes to German Hetero-Stereotypes

Almost exactly a century separated the formation of the Intercollegiate Football Association in 1876 and the founding of the first German football team. In many ways, Michael Oriard’s study of the formative years of college football in the United States has

74 Trommler, “Rise and Fall,” 342.

75 Maase, BRAVO, 195, 232.
influenced my reading of the emergence of football in Germany. Like Oriard, I also analyze both the narrative formula and the structure of football coverage in the media in words and images. Oriard describes how the popular press created college football as a popular spectacle, mostly during a twenty-year period between 1890 and 1910. At a time when the vast majority of Americans experienced football only through the popular press, those who wrote the games constructed the basic narrative formulas of the sport. Before the ages of radio and television, the daily newspaper had a unique authority to explain the sport, as large parts of the audience had never seen a game in person. Oriard finds that journalists not only mediated the game itself but also its social context including spectators and pre-and post game festivities. Similarly, the German media had a key role in explaining the game and its cultural meanings to an audience of novices. By constructing certain preferred narratives, they shaped expectations and understandings. 76

A number of themes emerge from Oriard’s work on early college football, which I found reverberating in different forms in the role the media played in the development of football in Germany: Oriard shows that football and the press mutually benefited from their relationship. The sporting press in America did not begin with football, but the parallel growth in popularity of the two is striking. With the rivalry between Joseph Pulitzer’s New York World and William Randolph’s New York Journal football benefited from as much as it contributed to the newspaper revolution. In similar fashion, globally expanding communication- and information networks, as well as privatization and

deregulation of German radio and television in the 1980s and 1990s provided football with important opportunities for expansion. Walter LaFeber’s study on the global marketing of Michael Jordan and Nike products demonstrates that the information revolution during this period changed the world fundamentally. This revolution, driven by U.S. capital and transnational corporations, marked “the beginning of something different in world history.”

Albeit on a much smaller scale than in New York’s circulation war, my study shows that some football producers successfully seized this new context by taking advantage of expanding media outlets and rivaling journalists.

Although the press coverage of early college football advanced no single interpretation, a certain structural formula evolved that presented games in terms of athletic contest and social event. Oriard shows that the basic dual formula of accounts of social ritual and football action was already in place by 1876. Basically unaltered, the formula was later clarified and fleshed out, as well as copied by newspapers around the nation. A similar formula emerged in Germany when producers and journalists presented football not only as sport but equally if not more important as an entertainment event. This formula, which borrowed from American models, constituted a repositioning of sport on the German market. While the respective social dynamics were decisively different, a heightened attention to composition and behavior of the crowd marked the


78 Oriard, *Reading Football*, 58-60, 70, 89.
coverage of both college football in late nineteenth century and football in Germany in
the late twentieth century. 79

Finally, two more football narratives emerged during “the golden age of print,” which
fed directly into Germany’s double-headed Amerikabild: America as a model of
modernity on the one hand, and as a violent, cultureless society on the other. Among a
variety of alternative notions, Walter Camp’s sense of football as a model of industrial,
scientific and managerial order was clearly reflected in the writings of contemporary
journalists across the United States. From its roots in the Old World’s football and rugby,
Camp, “the chief author of American football,” formed the ultimate modern sport. In
Germany from the late 1970s forward, annual news about the entertainment spectacle of
the Super Bowl depicted football as a modern model for the German sports industry.
Their stories about the NFL’s larger-than-life economic portfolio added to the traditional
marvel about America’s materialism. 80

In similar fashion, the instrumentalized brutality of the gridiron seemed to confirm
the German image of America and it became an early theme in the coverage of football in
the German press. 81 As a narrative formula of football coverage, the pairing of manliness

79 Ibid., 101-03, 106.

80 Ibid., 37, 56. For an example of a journalistic account of the Super Bowl spectacle, see: Benedikt Fehr,
“Mehr als einhundert Millionen Menschen sehen den vierten Football-Triumph der Kalifornier: Joe
For an example of German American football “experts” presented the entertainment spectacle of the NFL
and saw it as a model for local amateur teams, see: Bowy, Kittner, and Rosenstein, American Football, 30-
1, 211.

81 See for example: Jürgen Petschull, “American Football—der härteste Sport der Welt. O Herr lass uns
36.
and violence had been part of American auto-stereotypes of the game from the beginning. Football’s perceived ability to instill a manly character in American boys became one of the chief justifications for its “necessary roughness.” The gridiron was literally seen as the (play) ground on which boys became men. In the midst of the public debate over brutal mass plays in football in 1894, the *New York Times* reported that the Honorable Charles Francis Adams, a Harvard graduate, Civil War general, and noted historian, expressed his conviction that football was a valuable means of building up character, a more potent influence in forming great nations and peoples than genius. He held that even death on the play ground was cheap if it educated boys in those characteristics that had made the Anglo-Saxon race pre- eminent in history.  

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In his review of the game’s early years in the popular press, Oriard finds no other adjective more often attached to football than “manly.” A telling observation indeed, since changing attitudes toward the body and proper masculinity were the underlying issues that allowed football contests to play such a symbolic place in American higher education. Oriard finds plenty of examples to support the notion that football’s success was rooted in rising anxieties regarding proper manhood; as he writes, “there had to be serious concern about ‘manliness’ to justify the game’s considerable violence.”  

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Visions of Modernity: A Legacy of Exporting and Receiving

American Sports

Beginning in the 1870s, a roughly sixty year period included the earliest efforts to expand markets for American sports abroad as well as the rise of consumer culture on both sides of the Atlantic. One does not have to strain Fernand Braudel’s “longue durée” to appreciate that it is only in the long view back that we can detect patterns and themes that have evolved historically. Together, they form the context of the current promotion and reception of American culture and sports abroad. What emerges is a legacy of exporting and receiving American sports and visions of modernity.

In March 2003, USA Today reported that Major League Baseball was considering playing regular-season games in Europe during upcoming seasons, moving forward the internationalization of America’s pastime. Los Angeles Dodgers outfielder Shawn Green was quoted, “That’s really the next big frontier—Europe… It’s really an untapped resource.” During a time when German individuals and organizations called for a boycott of American products as symbolic resistance to the American-led invasion of Iraq such reports could have raised concerns about alleged Americanization of yet another aspect of German culture: sport. On the same day, USA Today also reported that some voices within the NFL considered playing the entire 2003 season of the NFL Europe League in


85 I borrow the phrase “visions of modernity” from Mary Nolan. See Nolan, Visions of Modernity.
Florida amidst concerns about security and anti-American backlash, especially in
Germany. After some discussion, NFL owners eventually rejected such measures and
decided to play the games as scheduled. Globalizing American culture through sport is
certainly not unique to the late twentieth century. For example, Albert G. Spalding
preceded baseball’s latest search for new frontiers by well over a century. 86

Exploring foreign markets for American sports is at least as old as Spalding’s
barnstorming tour of England and Ireland in 1874. 87 That summer, players of the Bostons
and the Athletics of Philadelphia played a total of fourteen baseball exhibitions. At the
time still playing and according to himself “a mere stripling with very little experience in
business or observation of society,” Spalding agreed to play a series of cricket contests
with the locals in addition to the baseball exhibitions. While the Americans held their

86 Vic Carucci, NFL Europe Proceeds with Strong Consensus (2003, accessed 24 March 2003); available
Forbes, “War Might Shift NFL Europe to Fla.,” USA Today, 18 March 2003, 10C; Erik Kirschbaum,
Boycott of American Goods over Iraq War Gains (2003, accessed 25 March 2003); available from
s_dc_5. For a history of early baseball in England see: Daniel Bloyce, “Just Not Cricket’: Baseball in

87 According to Derek Benning and Daniel Bloyce, the Brooklyn Exelsior Club visit in 1860 “may well
have been the first time organized baseball was seen in Britain.” They cite the London Field, July 25, 1874
as a source for the game. However, the extensive research by Melvin Adelman on baseball in New York
during the period does not confirm that the Brooklyn Exelsior Club did undertake such a trip to England.
Derek Benning and Daniel Bloyce, “Baseball in Britain, 1874-1914,” in Physical Activity for Life: East and
West, South and North. The Proceedings of 9th Biennial Conference of International Society of
Comparative Physical Education and Sport, ed. Bohumil Svoboda and Antonin Rychtecky (Charles
University Prague: 1995), 397. For Adelman’s research, see: Melvin L. Adelman, A Sporting Time: New

Harry Wright encouraged Spalding to organize the 1874 tour of England. Wright, at the time with
the Boston Red Stockings, was “the British-born son of a cricket professional who had taken to the game of
baseball since moving to the United States,” Bloyce, “Baseball in England,” 208. In addition to the outings
in 1874 and 1888-89, Spalding staged a third English tour led by New York Giants’ John McGraw and
Chicago White Sox owner Charles Comiskey in 1913. Benning and Bloyce, “Baseball in Britain, 1874-
1914,” 400.
own in the cricket contests, it was a business decision he later regretted: “when I began to ‘work’ the newspapers, in my capacity as press agent, I found that the cricket end was altogether most attractive from their viewpoint.” However, not all promotion efforts were lost on the British. In July 1874, London’s The Field noted, “Before the end of the present month we shall have seen absolutely earnest on English shores the game of which we have heard so much as the national exercise of America.” Apparently, the “country gentleman’s” weekly bought into the hype spread by American enthusiasts and entrepreneurs as it continued, “Englishmen will, no doubt, soon dismiss any ideas to [base-ball’s] disadvantage when they have once seen it in full play.”

The paper praised primarily baseball’s superior entertainment value by stating, “It is an amusement that allows of no delays, that admits of no unequal division of labour, but keeps an interest unflagging until the finish.” Next to baseball’s entertaining aspects the article also marveled at the highly developed business practices of this American sport: “Its popularity is so great that the professional exponents of the art can command salaries at which those of our professional cricketers sink into positive insignificance; and a skillful pitcher like Cummings of Chicago or Spalding of the Bostons may count on remuneration equal to that of an agile danseuse or an operatic star.” Thus, this British account of baseball interestingly foreshadowed the themes that we will see dominating German accounts of football a century later: entertainment and business. However, in

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1874 baseball struck out with most of the British onlookers and the organizers of the four-week tour failed to recover their expenses.89

When fifteen years later baseball returned to London courtesy of Spalding’s world tour, the *Times* wrote, “America did much better at their second attempt.” However, the paper was not commenting on the second attempt to export America’s sport, but rather the play of the “All America” team against the “Chicago” team. On the road since late October, the Americans had already been to New Zealand, Australia, Ceylon, Egypt, Naples, Rome, Florence, and Paris. The Prince of Wales, the future King Edward, as well as cricket’s great Dr. W.G. Grace and Prince Albert, the Duke of Buccleuch and president of the Marylebone Club, were among those present for the first exhibition scheduled for London on a wet, foggy day on March 12, 1889 at the Kennington Oval. According to the *Times*, neither his Royal Highness nor the rest of the 6,000 onlookers were impressed by the American display, “The spectators appeared to take only a lukewarm interest in the play itself.” While the players’ fielding skills received praise from the paper’s writer, batting “was rather disappointing and failed altogether to arouse any general enthusiasm.” Chicago took the game seven to four, but for Spalding it had been a swing-and-a-miss.90

A.G. Spalding later conceded, “that efforts to introduce Base Ball to England have not met with the full success that American lovers of the game had hoped for and


90 “The American Baseball Players,” *Times (London)*, 13 March 1889, 11. Professional players were not the only ones baffling British audiences with their baseball skills in 1889. At the conclusion of a tour of American college players through England’s provinces on Thursday, September 6 in Lyton, a certain J. W. Spalding, on business in England according to *The Times*—and presumably A.G.’s younger brother—and his business partner James Walter joined the collegians. For an account of the tour see: “Baseball,” *Times (London)*, 6 September 1889, 8.
prophesied.” According to Spalding, “regular Base Ball clubs began to be organized in England” in 1903 primarily by “mining and factory men” in North and Midland counties. In 1911 he found that “the strongest supporters of the game in England are the large American business firms, such as the Messrs. Fuller, the great confectioners; Messrs. Dewar, of whisky fame; J. Earle, of the Remington Typewriter Co. …” 91

Baseball’s expansion efforts in 1889 had indeed sparked a temporary growth of the game in England both at the professional and amateur level. In October of that year, a first professional league, the National League of Baseball in Great Britain, was established under the leadership and with financial backing of Spalding as well as Newton Crane, chairman of the league, and Francis Ley, an owner of iron foundries in Derby, England and Cleveland in the United States. With Preston North End, Aston Villa, and Stoke, three of the league’s four teams had ties with established soccer clubs who looked for additional revenue. Derby Baseball Club, based on Ley’s pre-existing factory team, completed the lineup. The teams fielded mostly local players supported by a number of American expatriates, who happened to live and work in England and had taught the game to their English friends, as well as a few imported players from America. At the gate, the league appeared to be a success as over 5,000 spectators reportedly came to see Derby play Preston North End. However, quarrels among the clubs over the use of American players contributed to the league’s demise after only one season. Despite the collapse of the professional league, England saw a rise in amateur baseball clubs, which led to the formation of a governing body for the sport, the National Baseball Association, 91 Spalding, *National Game*, 253, 261, 383-4.
in 1891. Amateur baseball subsequently experienced considerable growth with interest peaking in England in the mid-1890s. After the turn of the century, English baseball went into decline despite several efforts to resurrect the game in England, most notably in the form of the London League, which played from 1906 through 1912. 92

Daniel Bloyce suggests that baseball’s failure to get firmly established in England was at least partially rooted in the rejection the game received in the English press. The lack of supportive press coverage may, in turn, have reflected the relationship of the United Kingdom with the United States, as “the English…began to build social barriers between themselves and the groups they colonized, and considered inferior.” In addition, baseball’s outward professionalism and advanced commercialization ran counter to the amateur ideology that dominated nineteenth century English sport. The American razzle-dazzle did not sit well with those who felt that baseball’s managers wanted to spread their game at the expense of cricket. 93 On June 16 1890 the Birmingham Daily Post commented,

> The baseball business is being ‘boomed’ with a vigour which is a little too obviously artificial of the average Englishman. …The phlegmatic Briton does not care to have a pastime which has a considerable amount of the advertising element about it foisted about him and it is more than probable that the baseball people will regret somewhat the rash expenditure of cash which is at present going on. … To the lovers of rattle, boisterousness, and hysterical excitement baseball may have attractions; but as a spectator game it is incomparably inferior to cricket and football. 94


94 Quoted in: Ibid.: 215. This English characterization of baseball as an “artificial” and over-promoted business is strikingly similar to the critique the NFL Europe League received one-hundred and nine years later in a German magazine. After the NFLE had replaced the Great Britain Monarchs with the Berlin Thunder, Der Spiegel wrote: “No sport has been sold more consistently as show: An American consortium
Despite the lukewarm reception baseball had received in England’s press, Spalding spun the 1888-89 world tour into a public relations masterpiece upon return to the United States in April. Since Spalding had assured that writers of the *New York Herald, New York Sun* and the *Chicago Inter-Ocean* joined the tour, Americans had followed the tales of baseball’s expansion and were eager to greet their heroes. “Welcome Home, Boys,” a banner exclaimed at Palmer’s Theatre, the site for a reception for the diamond’s traveling circus on April 6, 1889 in New York. While Spalding had failed in selling America’s game successfully to European markets, baseball’s enthusiasts found enough reason to celebrate their game. The occasion was used to dispel rumors about the sport’s English ancestry and proclaim baseball once and for all an American game. According to the *New York Clipper*, National League President Abraham G. Mills, “wanted it distinctly understood by his audience that patriotism and research had established the fact that the game...was American in its origin.” Actor DeWolf Hopper exclaimed in song, “They’ve played the world over before crowds and courts, They’ve shown effete Europe the noblest of sports, They’ve shown old foreigners how to have fun.” But already in 1889, exporting American sports was not only about entertainment but also about spreading American ideologies as *The Clipper* paraphrased Mills saying, “The boys were not only star baseball players, but they were, in every sense, representatives of American manhood

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wants to conquer the German market with an artificial league—its latest location: Berlin. …Sport matters to the Thunder only peripherally. They are a test-tube club, cloned by an American consortium that wants to open up the German market. Unscrupulously the crusaders make use of methods that are not even imaginable in the USA.” Jörg Winterfeld, “Wer Wind sätt,” *Spiegel*, 3 May 1999, 126.
Ralph Wilcox, arguing “the development of American capitalism and sport in the twentieth century best exemplifies the ‘sport for economic imperialism’ model,” called Spalding’s world tour, “a significant turning point in the utility of sport, as distinct economic motive began to supersede political expansion.” However, Mark Dyreson demonstrates that concerted US governmental and business efforts went hand in hand in advertising the “American way of life” by promoting American sports abroad. Dyreson tracks the practice of spreading American culture and commerce during the 1920s and 1930s. In an elaborate undertaking, the United States’ Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce collected specific information on sport and commerce to test markets abroad for American sporting goods in 1930.

According to Dyreson’s research, the United States Department of Commerce designed a “federal blueprint for selling American culture” through sports. From his study arise a number of important themes to understanding not only the diffusion of American sports in general, but also its presentation in England and Germany. Most importantly, it highlights the history of systematic political involvement in the spread of sports and linked business practices, ideas, and images that originated in the United States. This diffusion has neither been free flowing nor free from ideology, but directly

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and/or indirectly influenced by joined efforts of American government, business, and military. Dyreson’s analysis demonstrates the role of American military and corporations in spreading sports and practices popular in the United States. For example, United States Marines promoted baseball and tennis in Nicaragua, and the Standard Fruit Company pushed baseball and basketball among its workers in Honduras.\(^{97}\)

Dyreson finds that market expansion efforts for American sporting goods focused on golf, tennis, and swimming in the period of the 1920s and 1930s. While none of these sports are indigenous to the United States, this narrow approach reflected the bourgeois and leisure class background of American “commerce’s capitalist hucksters and State’s diplomatic corps” paired with a disregard for actual interests of the local people in the targeted markets.\(^{98}\)

Other themes that emerge from this research are that the parties involved in spreading American sporting culture have not always agreed on, or even sought, common objectives and strategies, and that the results of any efforts to penetrate foreign markets and cultures have by no means been fully controlled by them. As I will demonstrate, the study of American football shows that the initial emergence of American sports abroad was not always the result of strategic market expansion. However, the presence of American military personnel abroad and the omnipresence of American popular culture formed the essential backdrop and fertilizer for the emergence and growth of football in


\(^{98}\) Ibid.: 12-14.
England and Germany. In the latter case, they were the result of the American-dominated post-World War II occupation and ensuing Western integration of West Germany.

Resistance and limits to Americanization of sporting cultures abroad during the 1930s are similar to those encountered by American football in Germany during the last quarter of the century. Efforts to proliferate American products and sports always had to contend with local competitors as well as existing traditions and other cultural flows. British soccer, not American baseball, basketball or football, dominated the global sporting market in the 1930s; just it was the leading spectator sport in Germany during most of the century. In the 1930s, when faced with the option of catering sporting goods to the largest available target audience, namely players and fans of inexpensive soccer—at the time already the world’s most popular game—or trying to convert foreign customers to more exclusive American ways of sports, the gentlemen of the Departments of Commerce and State placed their chips on the latter.99

During most of the twentieth century, the impact of American sport on Germany appears to have been so insignificant that the subject has attracted little scholarly attention. In his 1991 review of the history of American influence on German sport, Arnd Krüger found a lack of academic studies on the reciprocal sporting relationship between the two countries. As studies of the German Turners in the United States have shown, the exchange in physical culture and sport between Germany and the United States has historically been a two-way street. While it appears that the relationship between German and American sport has been mostly shaped by American influences, Krüger maintains

that developments outside of Turnen did have some reciprocal influences. In the end, however, Krüger conceded that historically American influences on German sports outweighed the opposite, especially in the twentieth century.\(^{100}\)

By and large, American sport had no noticeable impact on Germany in the nineteenth century. For example, Krüger noted that despite the significant presence of American students in German university like Göttingen, there is no evidence that these young men established their own sports in the host towns. “The American way of sport” only gained in influence when American athletes impressed foreign observers with their success in international competitions after the turn of the century. Following the American triumph in track and field at the 1906 Olympic Festival in Athens, Carl Diem wrote in his diary: “Hurra, hurra Amerika Amerikaaaaa—…No event in which the Americans did not win the day. Their superiority was so complete that—together with their political and economic success—we Europeans should start to think.”\(^{101}\)

Diem’s newly found fascination with the sport system in the New World led to a six-week fact-finding tour of the United States organized by the American Athletic Union in 1913. The German track and field federation later hired German-born Alvin Kraenzlein, coach of Princeton University. The four-time Olympic gold medalist was the first in a number of American coaches to work for German track and field clubs. In Krüger’s

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\(^{100}\) Krüger, “We Are Sure,” 51-2, 69. For a recent study about the Turners and their impact on American physical education and sport see Annette Hofman, Aufstieg und Niedergang des deutschen Turnens in den USA (Schorndorf: Verlag Karl Hofmann, 2001).

assessment, Diem’s fact-finding tour brought an end to “the peculiarities of German physical education.”

As a growing numbers of Germans embraced modernity, both sports and Amerika became symbols and embodiments of modern life. For a long time however, Turnen, the particular German way of doing physical exercise, was an essential part of resisting the influence of Western Zivilisation. In a country struggling to find its national identity, this resistance was not only directed toward the United States. In physical culture it was also directed against archenemies England and France—the cradle of modern sports and the home of the founder of the modern Olympic Games, respectively. As Allen Guttmann describes it, the German Turner considered their activity as a uniquely Germanic way of promoting moral development and national community. Consequently, the Turner regarded modern sports as the antithesis of Turnen and resisted this cultural influx from the West. In 1934, Edmund Neuendorff, national leader of the Deutsche Turnerschaft, criticized England as “the classical land of materialism” and sports. “It is no accident,” he wrote, “that German Turnen was born in the land of Goethe and Schiller, Kant and Fichte, Beethoven and Wagner, nor is it an accident that sports originated in England, a land without music or metaphysics.”

102 Krüger, “We Are Sure,” 54, 55, 65.


During the period of stabilization in the second half of the 1920s, Germans developed a zest for life and pleasure, which contributed to a virtual explosion of sporting activity. Six-day bicycle races serve as an example of how Germans adopted and appropriated American models. These contests, which had originated in the United States in the late 1870s, enjoyed increasing popularity following their European début in Berlin in 1909. By the 1920s, Germans had added their own ingredients to the events and thus had turned the races into popular spectacles blending sport and entertainment. According to Krüger, “Music, variety shows, the continuous presence of the announcer, the upper class appeal through stylish evening dress, all contributed to the conversion of a high class but relatively unimportant sport show into a social event of the first order. To see and to be seen was the idea of the event.” Later in the century, it was this exact recipe that local and international entrepreneurs applied in their presentation of American football.105

In his review of American sport history, Benjamin Rader refers to the 1920s as “the age of sports heroes,” “the new age of mass consumption,” and the “Golden Age of boxing.”106 To a lesser degree the same can be said about Germany, where sports commercialized less rapidly than in the United States. Krüger finds one of the reasons for the slower commercialization of German boxing in the fact that professional promoters and managers were unable to exercise the same kind of influence on the process as they did in America, since “sports arenas in Germany are all owned and run by the cities, so a


possible deficit is covered by the taxpayer, while many of them in the United States are privately owned and have to be filled as often as possible to generate a profit.107 This specific context of public ownership of sport organizations, facilities, and television did not dramatically change until the 1990s. Despite this background, boxing was among the sports that developed a mass following in the Weimar Republic. The ring and its arena set the stage for the struggle with modernity.

 Appropriately, it was bouts between a German and an American boxer that produced one of Germany’s most prominent sport figures of the twentieth century, Max Schmeling. Explaining the phenomenon of Schmeling lasting popularity in Germany, Siegfried Gehrmann calls the boxer a “symbol of national resurrection.” After the defeat in the Great War and the national humiliation of the Versailles Treaty, Schmeling’s success in international competition took on important symbolic meanings for many Germans. Especially his bouts with American fighters captured the public imagination. On August 24, 1926 Schmeling won his first title as the German light heavyweight champion. Six years later he defeated the American Joe Monte, the “Bull from Boston,” in his first fight on American soil in Madison Square Garden. Schmeling’s success had a lasting impact and made boxing increasingly popular in Germany. Schmeling held boxing’s world heavyweight crown from 1930 and 1932 but is most remembered for his 1936 and 1938 fights against Joe Louis. Following the defeats in both World Wars, Schmeling’s athletic performance and charismatic personality undoubtedly took a special

107 Krüger, “We Are Sure,” 60.
place in the collective German psyche that lasted long beyond Schmeling’s last fight in 1948.108

Gehrmann uses the example of Schmeling to demonstrate that the attraction of sports in general and boxing in particular was not limited to the lower classes. Some evidence for this claim can be taken from Schmeling’s status in the upper echelons of social life. Coming from a simple family background, prize money had made him a wealthy man in the 1920s. This allowed the champion to become part of the respectable “Berlin society” made up by artists, physicians, actors, journalists, writers, scholars, but also racecar drivers. Athletes like Schmeling socialized with this group that dominated the headlines of the society pages.109 Further evidence for the far-reaching popularity of sports can be found in the works of some contemporary intellectuals. As a significant number of German intellectuals embraced American behaviorism during the 1920s, sports and the athlete became central symbols for their view of the world. America and sportsmen turned into models for modernization in Weimar Germany.110


110 Frank Becker called the phenomenon an “‘America’-derived movement... the United States being the paragon of a modern industrial society which had to be emulated and imitated in any way.” Frank Becker,
According to Wolfgang Rothe, Weimar’s literary culture was characterized by a gap between the public and journalistic attention given to sport and its rare use by well-known writers of the Hochliteratur (high literature), while sport was well represented in Weimar’s Trivialliteratur. Sport novels and plays were relatively rare during the explosive growth of sport in the 1920s, and only became popular after the Second World War. Rothe thus concludes that Weimar’s writers had an ambiguous relationship with sports.111

Frank Becker presents a different portrait as he shows that a significant portion of Weimar’s intellectual elite expressed a fascination with the sportsman as a prototypical modern man. For instance, the well-known art dealer Alfred Flechtheim published a periodical called Der Querschnitt (The Cross-Section). Catering to a cosmopolitan educated audience it was subtitled “Magazine for Art, Literature, and Boxing” in 1921. Elsewhere, the famous writer Bertholt Brecht collaborated with German heavyweight champion Paul Samson-Koerner for his Die Menschliche Kampfmaschine (The Human Fighting Machine) and used boxing terminology in several other pieces. Brecht was one of the most prominent sport enthusiasts among German-language authors of the 1920s. Originally, he criticized the view of sport as a means to an end, such as health. He even


wrote that great sport begins where health ends. Later he himself turned sports into a means, as a vehicle of working class consciousness and preparation for class struggle.112

Becker’s extensive research has revealed a number of similar original sources in which Weimar’s writers use sports and athletes as metaphors. At the same time, contemporary sports journals described an athlete’s body as a machine or factory. Influenced by American behaviouristic psychology, the sportsman was depicted as a perfect embodiment of the human being. German writers quickly fastened on to this analogy of the trained (conditioned) athlete, the rationalized “man as machine” with automatic responses to environmental stimuli. This portrayal also promoted an orientation toward the ideal of activity, and an emphasis on action and mastering obstacles that opposed reflection and meditation.113

Frank Becker uses discourse analysis for his examination of what he describes as a mutual borrowing of symbolic terminology between the realms of sports and economic production in Weimar Germany. During the period of stabilization after 1924, favor with America and euphoria for rationalization a la Taylor and Ford coincided with a boom of sports imported from England and the United States. Becker makes the compelling argument that Weimar’s discourse of sport and economy used the same means for the achievement of structurally identical goals. Terminology of record, specialization, and


competition conceptually related both the increase of productivity and improvement of athletic feats. Positive value statements symbolically linked sport images with accounts of rationalized production processes like the conveyer belt. The increasing division of labor, and a trend toward radical specialization were identified with positive values through the comparison with specialization in sports.\textsuperscript{114}

Many of Weimar’s writers used familiar concepts of teamwork in sports to convey individualistic and collective aspects of Taylorism to the German readers. Individual achievement was encouraged, but it was imbedded in the larger context of cooperative production. This observation is especially important in the light of the rapid rise of team sports and the imbedded tension between individual and collective achievement. The rise of team sports meant a departure from the traditional Turner ideology, which had despised competition and down played individual achievement. In 1914, upon observations of the sports boom made in the United States, Carl Diem himself had marveled at the positive mutual reinforcement between competition in the field of production and work and competition in the arena of sport.\textsuperscript{115}

The political and cultural events of the 1920s rekindled the debate about the dichotomy between \textit{Kultur} and \textit{Zivilisation}. Becker concludes that Weimar’s intellectuals conflicting reaction to sports as a new mass phenomenon was split between conservative


cultural critics on the one hand and admirers of America as the epitome of progress and rationality on the other. Since the 1870s conservative writers had warned against “Americanization” and the evils of materialism, mechanization, and mass society. In the eyes of many in Weimar Germany, the West, responsible for democracy, was also responsible for the stifling Treaty of Versailles. The notion that the Allied Powers were the enemies of *Kultur* and its premier proponent Germany carried over from the First to the Second World War. Many German intellectuals saw in America the embodiment of the loathed *Zivilisation*.

High culture and popular culture remained uneasy partners at best in Weimar Germany. One should be cautious to seek a direct link between the impact of competitive sports on society at large in Weimar and its appearance in the realm of “high culture.” It is not clear whether the frequent use of the athlete-machine analogy and references to sport helped in the rise of competitive sports, or whether it was merely a reflection of the same. Although small in number, intellectuals may have had considerable impact on the public through their publications. Writers like Berthold Brecht may have hoped that their work would reach and inspire the working classes. But in reality, it attracted mainly fellow intellectuals and enlightened bourgeois audiences. Even in the 1920s, with its craze for sporting events like six-day bicycle races and boxing, the *Bildungsbürgertum* (educated middle-class) remained critical toward the sports


enthusiasts. Their status continued to be based upon schooling and on “high-culture” leisure activities like theater, opera, and fine arts.\textsuperscript{119} However, this point does not challenge the finding that the appeal of boxing, for instance, penetrated some “respectable circles.”

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CHAPTER 3

FIRST DOWN: THE BRITISH ISLES

“Other People’s Games”: American Football on the Pages of the Times of London

On April 22, 1943 a special correspondent of the Times of London erred when he informed his British readers that “The first game of American football ever to be seen in this country will be played at the White City Stadium on Saturday, May 8, starting at 2.30pm.” The journalist missed the mark by at least a third of a century, as the Times had already recorded a series of American football exhibitions in England in 1910. Several factors made England a logical first port of entry for gridiron football in Europe: a shared history and language, alliances in two world wars, and widespread familiarity with American football’s relatives rugby and Association football. Next to the presence of American military, innovations in communications technology and the power of
America’s entertainment industry facilitated the introduction of football to British audiences in the first half of the twentieth century.¹

In 1978, English-born Joan Chandler speculated that pro soccer “could almost certainly be replaced professionally in Britain by football” since “pro soccer is relatively poor TV entertainment.” At the time a faculty member in American Studies at the University of Texas in Dallas, Chandler asked, “Will the National Football League ever consider trying to break into the British sports market?” Although the answer could not be certain, Chandler encouraged the NFL to develop business overseas “before the bottom drops out of the home market.” Possibly unknown to Chandler, the NFL had in fact already revealed plans to introduce a six-team professional football league in Europe in 1974. However, professional football did not follow up on these plans until the 1980s. Joe Maguire’s work brilliantly identified the network of interdependencies involving a private British television company, the NFL, and Anheuser Bush, which supported the growth of grassroots football played by British teams and facilitated football’s “penetration of the cultural terrain of British society” during the 1980s. Based on “a content analysis of The Times index for the 5-year period prior to the first regular televising of American football in 1982,” Maguire finds that “the game was infrequently reported, and when it was, the report tended to the short and related to the Super Bowl.”

¹ “American Football: A Match to be Played at the White City,” Times (London), 22 April 1943, 2.
Thus, he concludes, “before the early 1980s American Football was virtually unknown in England.”

Maarten van Bootenburg correctly asserts that the American involvement in World War aided in the diffusion of volleyball and basketball to Europe as American military engaged in these pastimes while being stationed abroad. He argues that in the absence of a well-developed professional game in America, football was limited to university and college grounds and thus seemed “relatively far away” for American’s on duty in Europe during World War I. He continues, “In any case, we do not have any instances of football game in Europe at this time. …As a result of the popularization of football in the United States, the posting of American forces in Europe immediately after World War II went hand in hand with the introduction of football.”

In his study of American football in England during the 1980s, Maguire reflects on the extent to which producers and consumers control the cultural meanings of products that result from the sport-media complex. While he acknowledges that “the relative power the NFL in its negotiations with the media ensures that it has greater influence over the mediated sport product it helps to produce,” Maguire also considers that “indigenous people have a range of resources available to reinterpret, resist and recycle

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global sport products.” In tracing the *Times’s* football coverage beginning in the late nineteenth century, we travel to a time when American producers had even less power to control how foreign newspapers depicted American football, we meet the “indigenous people” as the journalists and editors who largely controlled what their audience read about the game, and we join Michael Oriard’s attempt “to read football’s cultural narratives over the shoulders of its contemporary interpreters.” What I hope to offer is a thoughtful look at what these papers wrote about “other people’s games,” and how readers were introduced to foreign codes of football. My intention is to “avoid today-centred analyses” and “to be sensitive to issues of global cultural continuity and change,” as Maguire suggested for future research that aims to understand Americanization processes.  

A journey through the pages of the *Times* through World War II, augmented with selected reports from the *New York Times*, tells of the first European encounters with the Yankee pigskin. The American accounts also provide a glance at the American self-understanding expressed in and through football, and how newspapers discussed alternatives to the gridiron football code. The results of the survey show that both previous scholars and the *Times’s* special correspondent in 1943 must, to various degrees,  

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be corrected. People in Great Britain saw their first American football games even before World War I. The survey suggests that diligent readers of London’s paper could have acquired at least a basic awareness and understanding of the American game by the end of World War II.⁵

In January of 1888, dutiful readers of the London paper’s fifty-second installment of the long-running travelogue “A Visit to the States” found a glimpse of football’s importance in American higher education:

There are over 1,400 students in the various departments of Harvard, and about 55 professors with many tutors and instructors. Great attention is given to athletic training and outdoor sports, and the College has the finest gymnasium in America. The sporting fields are filled with ball-players practicing for the trials of skill at football with the representatives of other Colleges, and these combats, with the regattas and base-ball tournaments, attract great attention throughout the country.⁶

Of course, British readers would not have been struck by such emphasis on athletic prowess in higher education. In recent decades, British readers had gotten accustomed to reading about inter-collegiate sports in their own country. In an editorial on November 15, 1869, the Times justified its increased sports coverage to its audience: “Many of our readers must have observed with some surprise the space lately occupied in our columns by accounts of Athletic Sports at the University and Public Schools.” The rising number of articles devoted to these sports would indicate, “that there is really a considerable portion of the reading public for whom such events have what is not out of place to term

⁵ I borrow the phrase “other people’s games” from the headline of a Times article commenting on an American football exhibition in England: “Other People’s Games,” Times (London), 8 May 1943, 5.

a serious interest. It is an interest of very recent growth.” Given the novelty of this
demand for expanded coverage of collegiate sports, it may not surprise that a milestone in
the evolution of American football across the Atlantic went unnoticed in 1869: The
contest between students from Princeton and Rutgers, variably considered the first
American football and/or soccer match, had taken place only nine days before the
Times’s apologetic editorial appeared.7

What was more noteworthy about the 1888 article is what it did not report. The
British traveler had failed to notice how the game those Harvard men were preparing for
differed from what fellow Englishmen would have expected to see. After all, America’s
version of football had already gone through revolutionary rule changes of replacing
rugby’s scrum with a scrimmage giving possession to one team only (1880) and “five-

7 “Editorials,” Times (London), 16 November 1869, 7. While footballers in America took its first steps in
reconciling competing rules, their counterparts in England still struggled with the same issue despite the
founding of the Football Association in London on October 26, 1863. In September 1869 two letters to the
editor of the Times addressed the issue. “A Looker-On” urged the editor to discuss “the subject of
uniformity of rules.”

“The different games which are played in different clubs often occasion great inconvenience. …The
inevitable roughness of the game does not need to be aggravated by the process which are known by such
elegant terms as ‘hacking,’ ‘scragging,’ ‘collaring,’ &c.” A letter signed “Ex-Secretary” agreed that such
practices as kicking below the knee (“hacking”) had to be eliminated: “In the first place, the present system
of each club forming rules of its own effectually prevents a fair trial of skill between any two clubs, and
this, as in cricket, is the main support for the game. …Football is necessarily a rough and dangerous game,
but much needless danger is imported into the game by the brutal rules adopted. ‘Hacking’ and ‘scragging’
must be utterly abolished; ‘tripping’ is dangerous and unnecessary, and ‘pushing’ is almost as bad. …I
consider that running with the ball should be abolished, and handling only allowed to the extent necessary
to obtain a ‘drop kick,’ and the ‘offside’ rules be stringently enforced ….I am aware that this is not at all
conformable to the rules adopted by the Football Association formed for the very purpose we are now
considering; but I am conceited enough to think that this is partly the reason their rules are not more
generally adopted.” In 1871, the laws of the Rugby Football Union outlawed hacking and tripping. “Foot
Ball: To the Editor of the Times,” Times (London), 23 September 1869, 7. “Football. To the Editor of the
Times,” Times (London), 25 September 1869, 4. In 1863, just prior to the founding of the FA, the Times
had been the site of a lively exchange of letters regarding universal football/rugby rules. Signatures like
“Harrovienis,” “Etonensis,” “Carthusians,” “Westmonasteriensis,” and “Rugbæensis” revealed the public
school background of the senders. See the Times in 1863 on October 5 (p. 8), October 6 (p. 5), October 7
(p. 12), October 9 (p. 9), and October 10 (p. 11).
yards-in-three-plays-for-a-first-down” (1882). By 1890 the peculiarities of the American game became more obvious to sports minded customers of the Times.  

On November 29, 1890 the Saturday edition of the paper used a Dalziel telegram to inform readers about the outcome of the Yale-Princeton game, which had been played in Brooklyn on Thursday afternoon. Over the past decade, New York’s Thanksgiving Day game had secured a special place on America’s sporting calendar and had helped football to establish itself as a broader social event on campuses across the country during the fall. Although New York hosted the Thanksgiving Day game only eleven times, by the late 1880s the occasion had developed into a first rate extravaganza with the help of the New York press, which also aided in anchoring football’s colorful spectacle in the imagination of the American public. Already a major media event the United States, news about the Thanksgiving Day game also reached readers in England. 

In the “Sporting Intelligence” column one could read in considerable detail that 30,000 spectators had watched Yale total thirty-two points while keeping Princeton scoreless. The twenty-one-line report featured the names of outstanding players and briefly described plays such as that of Yale’s Stanley Morris, who “made a sensational run of 70 yards, and passed the ball to M’Lonny, who, however, failed to score.” British readers may have wondered what this curious form of football match looked like when

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9 Oriard, Reading Football, 60-2, 90-1.
they were told that “the feature of the play of the Yale team was massing round one of their man carrying the ball, and forcing him forward as a point of a wedge.”

On the other side of the Atlantic, the New York Times had called the game “the greatest victory that Yale ever won over her ancient rival.” Compared to the matter-of-fact description of Yale’s tactic that appeared in London, New York’s papers painted a more passionate portrayal: “Yale’s rush line was a wall of adamant against which the brave and plucky players of Princeton threw themselves again and again with all the fierceness of despair, only to be hurled back into deeper and more galling defeat.”

Michael Oriard’s analysis of the football narrative in New York’s dailies during the late 1880s and early 1890s shows that Yale was portrayed as “an efficient and well-trained team.” According to Oriard, “Yale, taking up the new game, mastering it, making it a science, represented programmatic modernity.” Princeton’s players on the other hand “were typically characterized as ‘dashing,’ often as the romantic, heroic, desperate losers crushed by the invincible Yale football system.” In 1890 there was only limited space for a game of football in America on the pages of the Times, and certainly no place for such elaborate narratives. The English report did not even mention the crashing down of a sizable portion of the stands, which had thrown two thousand spectators to the ground and left “two of the victims likely to die,” according to the New York Times that had devoted considerable space on its front page to the accident.11


Parts of the American football narrative may have gotten lost in transit and translation as the news traveled from the New to the Old World. Oriard’s statement that “the history of football...is inextricably tied to the history of the media,” applies for the football’s ascent in American culture as well as its diffusion to Europe. News services such as that of Davison Alexander Dalziel’s Cable News Agency provided the necessary technology to transport ideas about the new sport back to Europe and thus facilitate these earliest stages of American football’s diffusion abroad. As a young man Dalziel, the later Baron of Wooler, had developed a journalistic interest while traveling to China, California, and New York before settling in London. In San Francisco he reportedly founded the *San Francisco Daily Mail*, in New York he was the editor of *Truth*, and in London he later temporarily owned the *Standard* and the *Evening Standard*. In addition to co-founding Dalziel’s Cable News Agency in London, Dalziel also became a partner in the News Letter Company, which published the New York *Truth*, in 1887. In November 1891 he transformed the Dunlap Cable News into Dalziel’s News Agency of America. Early the next year, Dalziel moved his New York office into the Pulitzer Building, where his company catered mostly to the *New York World* until 1895. Meanwhile the executive office Dalziel’s Cable News Agency was located in the heart of London on the Strand. Wire services began to globalize the news business, including sporting news, a century

*Times* drew its readers “from the educated and business class.” In comparison to other papers, the *New York Times* targeted a select audience. In the 1890s, the paper’s circulation was far behind that of other New York papers like the *World*, the *Journal*, or the *Herald*. Oriard, *Reading Football*, 74, 75, 88.
before the ascent of satellite television and the Internet, but the news transmission was not always perfect.  

A series of exchanges between Dalziel and those disputing the accuracy of his company’s services in letters to the editor of the *Times* in 1891/92 demonstrates the perils of the news agency business in relaying news between London, New York, Kingston, and Constantinople. In light of such struggles it is not surprising that football news from America were sparse and didn’t not always appear correctly in Europe. For example, in 1910, Germany’s *Rhein-Westfälische Zeitung* by mistake referred to a Fußball game in New York when it summarized the carnage of injured and killed players in American


13 In one particularly humorous instance, Dalziel apologized to the editor of the *Times* for possibly misleading the paper to publish a false statement regarding the assumed death of the Bishop of Adelaide: “The telegram, as we received it, was as follows:—”Influenza extensively prevalent Wales Victoria numerous deaths Bishop Adelaide found dead Sea Serpent sixty feel Coffin Bay.” We read the last six words as a separate sentence, and, judging that it was not suitable for *The Times* omitted it in the copy sent out. We can only assume that the Bishop of Adelaide, or, possibly, a Mr. Bishop of Adelaide, found something in Coffin Bay which our correspondent describes as a dead sea serpent.” Davison Dalziel, “The Bishop of Adelaide,” *Times (London)*, 11 November 1891, 8. For other examples see: Henry A. Blake, “Dalziel’s Telegrams from Jamaica,” *Times (London)*, 6 June 1892, 7; Davison Dalziel, “The Jamaica Exhibition,” *Times (London)*, 30 June 1891, 10; Davison Dalziel, “Jamaica Exhibition,” *Times (London)*, 2 July 1891, 6; Davison Dalziel, “The Turkish Embassy and Dalziel’s Agency,” *Times (London)*, 10 December 1891, 4; Davison Dalziel, “Dalziel’s Telegrams from Jamaica,” *Times (London)*, 7 June 1892, 10; Davison Dalziel, “The Polynesian Labour Traffic,” *Times (London)*, 21 May 1892, 19; W. H. Groom, “Mr. W. H. Groom and Dalziel’s Agency,” *Times (London)*, 17 August 1892, 5; “Sir H. Blake and Dalziel’s Cable News Agency,” *Times (London)*, 5 August 1892, 3.
football. Compared to their German colleagues, British journalists had the benefit of,
being somewhat familiar with the language of the telegrams they received from their,
correspondents in America. However, even British writers still had to translate American
football terms to an audience only familiar with rugby and soccer terminology. 14

Under the headlines “Football in America” and “Football in the United States,” in
1891 readers of the Times found one- or two-sentences about American college games
added on to news from domestic rugby and Association football. When, on November 23,
the paper reported in its Monday edition from Springfield, Massachusetts that “The Yale
University football team yesterday defeated Harvard University by ten goals to nil,” a
British reader could have thought the “goals” were scored in an Association football
match. Stripped down to the bare essentials for the British audience, these brief news not
only lacked primers on rules and terminology, but also the narratives of football as
spectacle and social event, which Oriard identifies as part of the journalistic formula of
New York’s football press in the 1890s. In comparison, the beginning of the New York
Herald’s coverage of the same Harvard-Yale match opened with the flowery invitation to
“Come with me into the middle of Hampden Field,” with which the writer began not only
to recreate the game itself, “but the experience of being at the game.”15

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14 The Rhein-Westfälische Zeitung referred to “7 players seriously injured. Two died a few minutes later.
…Casualty list: 29 members killed, 19 seriously injured, cripples for life.” Quoted in Thomas Kistner and
Ludger Schulze, Die Spielmacher: Strippenzieher und Profiteure im deutschen Fußball (Stuttgart:
Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2001), 56.

15 Oriard, Reading Football, 112; Reuter, “Football in America,” Times (London), 23 November 1891, 12.
The 1891 Thanksgiving Day game between Yale and Princeton shows that wire and telegram technology allowed news about American football to travel quickly across the country as well as to foreign lands. When readers opened the sport pages in London on Friday, November 27, they were able read the following news hailing from the previous day in New York: “A football match between Yale University and Princeton, New Jersey, which has been looked forward to with considerable interest was played here today. The game, however, proved very one-sided, Yale University winning by 19 goals to nil.” On the same day, the front page of the Portland Oregonian greeted readers on America’s west coast with an account that opened with the announcement that “The greatest athletic event of the year is over, and it will be long remembered by the thousands who saw one of the finest games ever played in this country.”

In both Portland and London, news about New York’s Thanksgiving Day games relied on wire and telegram technology. Oriard finds that the Oregonian’s own renditions of the game reports were “considerably shortened wire-service versions” of the original formula that appeared in New York’s papers. Thus the version that reached British readers was an extremely condensed version lacking the narrative structures that at the time diffused throughout the United States. Oriard shows how the Oregonian copied the formula received in wire reports about games on the East coast to its own coverage. For example, its accounts of games of the Multnomah Amateur Athletic Club resembled the football coverage of New York’s World and Herald. Oriard finds that in the 1890s the

Portland paper played the same role the Pulitzer’s World had taken on a decade earlier: “it introduced football to newspaper readers…and taught them how to read the game.” However, it did so on a “considerably reduced scale.” Oriard uses the Oregonian’s front-page article on the 1887 Thanksgiving Day game to show that the paper’s earliest football coverage focused on football as a social event, while at the same time dropping most information on the game itself: 17

The great game of foot-ball between Harvard and Yale to-day was witnessed by 20,000 people. It was a splendid struggle, and ended in favor of Yale by a score of 17 to 8. The huge audience was extremely enthusiastic, and the nose made by the yelling collegians, alumni and ladies was frightful. Everywhere bunches of ribbon, streamers and flags fluttered. Yale’s blue predominated, Harvard’s crimson cane next, and the Columbian, Princetonian, Union, Wesleyan and Pennsylvanian colors went to make up as bright and pretty a picture as can be imagined. No only were the cheers of the contestants and their associates heard, but the Princetonian and Columbian cries were also sent forth. Columbia favored Harvard, while Princeton was inclined toward Yale.

When the game was concluded the crowd swarmed all over the field in wild excitement, sweeping fences and ropes before them. The victorious players were borne off the field by their fellow wearers of the blue. For to-night Yale has adopted Harvard’s Colors and is putting crimson all over the city. 18

While this American west coast daily substantially trimmed the news from New York, the accounts reaching English readers in the early 1890s had essentially been reduced to the opening two sentences. Therefore they were not yet capable of teaching their British audience how to read American football. The same style of football news could be found in November 1900, when the paper briefly mentioned: “In the inter-University football match to-day Yale beat Harvard by 28 points to nothing. Twenty-two thousand spectators

17 Oriard, Reading Football, 128, 129.

witnessed the game,” as well as during the same month three years later when the Times listed results from three games played on November 14 (Dartmouth College v. Harvard University 11-0; Columbia University v. Cornell University 17-12; Princeton University v. Yale 11-6). It was not until later that writers of the Times would specifically comment on the spectacle surrounding American football games.19

The 1891, 1900, and 1903 football reports in the Times mentioned here were based on information the paper had received from Reuters, the London-based news agency founded in 1851 by German-born Paul Julius Reuter. Reuter had started his business in 1849 transmitting stock prices using pigeons between Aachen, Germany, and Brussels. Two years later Reuter took advantage of the new cable between Calais and Dover and with overland telegraph and undersea cable connections becoming available, Reuter’s “business expanded beyond Europe to include the Far East in 1872 and South America in 1874.” Given the previously mentioned disputes with Dalziel’s services and the winding-up order Dalziel’s News Agency Of America received in 1895, it may not be surprising that the Times came to rely on Reuters as its source for football information from America. Later the Times would increasingly call on its own correspondents and so-called “special correspondents” for material on American football.20


In March 1895, the *Times* indirectly returned to the subject of American football in “Books of the Week.” Reviewing Caspar Whitney’s latest work it recognized the American sports writer and editor as an “American apostle of sport”: “He calls himself an advocate of the “doctrine of sport for sport’s sake,” and, in order to preach this doctrine with greater effect on the other side of the Atlantic, he has undertaken what he calls *A Sporting Pilgrimage…* devoted to ‘studies in English Sport, Past and Present.’” In England, Whitney had indeed found inspiration for his vision of sport as being conducted in a gentlemanly fashion. Oriard ranks Whitney, along with Walter Camp, as a preeminent spokesmen for college football in the 1890s and characterized him as “a reform minded critic of football.” Contrasting the writings of the two, Oriard concludes “Whitney, the anglophile, wanted football to mirror a social structure rooted in tradition and class distinctions. Camp, the Yankee businessman, promoted football for a competitive, democratic, pragmatic, corporate America.” After working together for several publications such as *Harper’s Weekly, Outing,* and *Collier’s Weekly,* a dispute over prior compensations led to a personal drift between the two football’s spokesmen in the summer of 1894. By fall of that year, Whitney strongly disapproved of the rationalized, managerial coaching style embodied by Camp. According to Oriard, “Whitney declared that the American game had become too scientific.” Consequently, Whitney developed into an outspoken critic of the professionalism that quickly had become part of college football. “Amateur spirit,” “fair play,” and “sport for sport’s sake” became reoccurring themes in his writings. 

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In December of 1894, the *New York Times*’s review of *A Sporting Pilgrimage* echoed Whitney’s sentiments. Under the headline “An American on English Sports” the paper wrote:

Mr. Whitney’s account of the management of sports in English universities is full of important suggestions. He shows very plainly that an Englishman does not go into sport of any kind simply for the sake of beating some one else, but for the sake of the sport itself. And he shows that the English university students contrive to maintain a high standard of excellence in rowing and track athletics without any of the extensive and elaborate training schemes in vogue in American colleges. He argues from this that three out of five of our college athletes are overtrained when they go on the field, and in this conclusion most thoughtful persons will agree with him.22

Whitney’s appreciation for England’s upper-class sporting tradition appeared to be lost on the *Times*’s in London, however. Its reviewer explained that to “thoroughly understand the present condition of modern games in the United States” Whitney had found it “necessary to study their past traditions and present systems in England.” Yet, the paper received the findings of the American writer with a stiff upper lip. Referring to England as “the mother country” the *Times* wrote: “Mr. Whitney is at times a rather

22 “An American on English Sports,” *New York Times*, 16 December 1894, 23. In 1901 John Corbin expressed a similar sentiment when he shared his personal experiences as an American undertaking to play English Rugby for Balliol College at the University of Oxford: “Willful brutality is all but unknown; the seriousness of being disqualified abets the normal English inclination to play the game like a person of sense and good feeling. The physical effect of the sport is to make men erect, lithe and sound. And the effect of the on the nervous system is similar. The worried, drawn features of the American player on the eve of a great contest are unknown.” Despite these potentially positive aspects of the English upper-class approach to rugby, Corbin saw football as the embodiment of America’s superiority: “These elements of possession of the ball and interference have raised our game incalculably above the English game as a martial contest. Whereas English Rugby has as yet advanced very little beyond its first principles of grunting and shoving, the American game has always been supreme as a school and a test of courage; and it has always tended, albeit with some excess, toward an incomparably high degree of skill and strategy. … More than any other sport, Rugby football indicates the divergent lines along which the two nations are developing. By preferring either game a man expresses his preference for one side of the Atlantic over the other.” John Corbin, “English and American Rugby,” *Outing*, November 1901, 166.
severe critic of the sports in the mother country. In some cases he evidently things that we are far behind the United States. On football, for instance, his remarks will strike some readers as singularly wanting in reverence.” After watching the Princeton varsity team play, Whitney had reportedly been little impressed with the gridiron’s ancestor:

I could not help feeling, as I stood on the side lines, I was a spectator of an underdeveloped game. …One who knows American football must at first seeing a Rugby Union match, feel he is watching an elementary game. …You appreciate at once how this sort of touch-and-go, haphazard game was the beginning of our scientifically developed play of to-day.23

If British readers were not amused with such obvious disrespect, increasing reports of football’s brutality would soon make it even less likely for the Old World to warm up to America’s exceptionalism on the football field.24

American football’s brutality on and its reform struggles off the field dominated much of what patrons of the *Times* read about the game in coming years. In that respect, their vantage point was not unlike that of their American counterparts. In the United States, football’s brutality has long had its critics and defenders. In 1890, *The Nation* contemplated “The Future of Football” and found:


Football is obviously gaining popularity, and bids fair soon to become an established sport. …The combination of discipline, individual skill, and brute strength which it calls for, the splendid fierceness of the game; the element of personal combat, which delights the savage instinct lingering in the breasts even of the most civilized among us—these qualities account for its growing popularity, and promise a vogue even wider than it now enjoys. There would be little rashness in predicting that within ten years we shall have in the great cities professional elevens, like professional baseball nines, and that thousands will gather to shout themselves hoarse at the exploits of hired rushers and backs.25

Despite concerns for “the quality of the game when it is no longer exclusively in the hands of the gentleman amateur,” the periodical saw football as the proving ground for America’s future: “The spirit of the American youth, as of the American man, is to win, to ‘get there,’ by fair means or foul; and the lack of moral scruple which pervades the struggles of the business world meets with temptations equally irresistible in the miniature contests of the football field.”26

As the work of scholars like Michael Oriard and Ronald Smith makes clear, it is difficult to overstate the need for rule changes in college football caused by the rampant brutality, commercialism, and professionalism, which characterized the sport at the beginning of the twentieth century. Smith concludes, “In American intercollegiate


26 Ibid. A year earlier, W. Cameron Forbes had defended football’s roughness with a similar argument: “But the distinctive features of the game must not be changed. The bodily contact, the fierce struggle of man to man in the rush line, and man to man in the tackling and interference must stay, or the essence of the game will be lost. Football is the expression of the strength of the Anglo-Saxon. It is the dominant spirit of the dominant race, and to it owes its popularity and its hopes of permanence.” W. Cameron Forbes, “The Football Coach’s Relation to the Players,” Outing, December 1899, 339. Forbes had coached the football team of his alma mater Harvard the previous two seasons. The grandson of Ralph Waldo Emerson eventually became a successful investment banker, governor-general of the Philippines and ambassador to Japan. Based on the above statement, it may not surprise that he has been characterized as a Darwinist. Gary Ross, “W. Cameron Forbes: The Diplomacy of a Darwinist,” in Diplomats in Crisis: United States-Chinese-Japanese Relations, 1919-1941, ed. Richard Dean Burns and Edward M. Benett (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-Clio, 1974).
history, no year has been as momentous as that beginning in mid-1905. ...[Football’s] Reform or even abolishment was almost assured.” With America’s dominant college sport under heavy scrutiny by American journalists, President Theodore Roosevelt was pressed into service for the reform efforts. In October, representatives of the “Big Three”—Harvard, Yale, and Princeton—met with the president in the White House and promised to “carry out in letter and in spirit the rules of the game of football, relating to roughness, holding and foul play.” Such resolution was admirable but also impossible to realize as the desire to win overruled any efforts to control the collegiate game effectively. Neither the MacCracken conference, named after the chancellor of New York University who first convened representatives from thirteen colleges on December 8, 1905, nor the resulting National Collegiate Athletic Association would manage to rid the game of all its evils. 27

As the British press picked up on the drama overseas, albeit on an obviously much smaller scale than in the United States, attentive readers had an excellent chance to keep up with American football’s monumental crisis in 1905. On November 30, the Times introduced “The Movement Against American Football.” Based on Reuter information the paper reported:

At Columbia University the committee on students’ organizations has abolished football as one of the recognized sports of the students. Earlier in the day the New

York University Faculty voted a ‘request’ calling a conference of representatives of 20 colleges to consider the abolition or thorough reform of the present game.28

In the United States a series of widely publicized rule violations and the football’s inherent brutality had caused a public outcry for change during the 1905 season. Views on just how these changes should look like varied considerably. While President Charles Eliot of Harvard, America’s leading institution of higher education and traditional football power, also wanted the game abolished, Harvard graduate and United States’ President Roosevelt favored reforms to save college football.29 Readers of the Times caught a glimpse of the ensuing power struggle between the established rule committee headed by Yale’s Camp, several reformers, and those who wanted to see the game disappear from college campuses altogether. The paper stated:

President Roosevelt feels assured that the football authorities will eliminate brutality from the game, and render the sport less dangerous. The President believes that by modification of the rules of the game may be saved. During the current season 15 persons have been killed and many injured in American football.30

A short notice on December 11, 1905 followed the developments overseas by mentioning that “The representatives of 13 colleges have voted in favor of the reform of American football by means of new rules. The committee has been instructed to eliminate roughness and brutality.”31


29 Smith, Sports and Freedom, 201.


Two days before second meeting of McCracken conference, which gathered sixty-eight institutions in New York, British readers and American expatriates seemed to be interested enough in the topic for the *Times* to bring a long piece on “Football in America” written by an American correspondent on December 26, 1905. This article stands out from previous, more generic pieces since it specifically addressed a British audience. Its author was clearly concerned that recent news accounts would taint the perception of American football abroad:

> It is not to be wondered if most people in England, judging by what they have heard or read about American football have come to the conclusion that it is a most objectionable game. But the accounts of matches and the statistics that have appeared in many English newspapers during the present year, are (I think) more alarming than is justified by the state of affairs.32

The American apologist tried to put the disturbing accounts into context by pointing out that Association football was not played extensively in the States. The game of American football “therefore, is practically the only one played in the United States in the autumn, and it is played in every school and University, so that the number of those who take part in it is very large. Furthermore, I cannot help believing that in some cases casualties have been attributed to football which in reality have been due to other causes.”33

The writer further explained that changes made to the game in America would tend to confuse English observers used to the watching of rugby and thus would be the cause of many misconceptions:

32 American Correspondent, “Football in America,” Ibid., 26 December, 8.

33 Ibid.
For example, the custom of padding the uniform, which was adopted by American players soon after the game was introduced, was made necessary largely because American playing-grounds freeze and become very hard in October and November, so that a player, but for his protection, would probably be bruised every time he was thrown.34

The text went on to clarify some of the fundamental differences of between the British and the American game. Since it may well have been the first effort made to explain the game of American football to a large British—and for that matter European—audience, it is worth to review this primer in greater detail. Many of its items, such as the use of substitutes and what exactly constitutes legal physical contact in the game of football, would become reoccurring themes in the writings of European observers and those who defended the game throughout much of the century.

Regarding the in England uncommon tactic of bringing in replacement players during a match, the American said, “Another essential difference between the two games is the idea of substitutes. In America each side consists only of 11 men, and, as united rather than individual effort is emphasized, it was thought necessary, if a man should be hurt, for his place to be filled.” Since that time, he described, the use of substitutions had expanded to a point where it no longer is limited to replacing a hurt player. “This rule may seem perhaps a curious one, but the game is very hard and tiring, so that it is sometimes an advantage to a side to put a somewhat inferior but fresh player in the place of one who is tired out.”35

34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
Despite the publicized evidence of foul and dirty play, frequently occurring underneath piles of players and away from the eyes of officials, the correspondent wanted his foreign readers to believe that it simply didn’t happen in the college game. He categorically stated:\(^36\)

As to striking an opponent, tripping, or anything of that sort, it is enough to say that it is forbidden by the rules, and does not occur in University football. And the surgeon and ambulance, which some perhaps regard as necessary accompaniments of the American game, exist only in the kind of game described by humorous papers.\(^37\)

The reference to “surgeon and ambulance” by this American writer may quite possibly have been the direct response to a letter to the editor of the *New York Times*, which had appeared earlier the same month. In it Mr. Newnham-Davis, a self-proclaimed English Varsity man, former referee, and experienced coach, had chimed in the debate about “the brutality and danger of the football game.” He suggested consulting scholars at Oxford regarding their opinion on the games of rugby and football. According to the letter writer, “The published letters of several of the Rhodes scholars have appeared in the sporting magazines and show that the writers are capable of forming opinions on matters of sport, new to them, well worthy of respect.” Whether a Rhodes scholar himself or not, the author undoubtedly felt that they would agree with his assessment that the English game would make a splendid replacement for American football:

English Rugby is sufficiently like the game played here to make it comprehensible and interesting to upholders of the American game: it requires

\(^36\) For examples of rampant rule violations and dirty play in collegiate football at the time see: Smith, *Sports and Freedom*, 196-98.

\(^37\) American Correspondent, “Football in America,” *Times (London)*, 26 December 1905, 8.
neither professional coaches, the physique and training of a prizefighter, a supply of substitutes to replace the injured, nor the attendance of surgeons and ambulances.\(^{38}\)

The repeated reference to football’s need for “surgeons and ambulances” in the discussion of the relative merit of football and rugby on both sides of the Atlantic within the same month appears to be more than coincidence. It at least raises the possibility that the American correspondent to the *Times* of London was indeed responding to this English contribution in the *New York Times*. On the other hand, people near and far had long been convinced of football’s alleged need for medical staff. Already in 1893, the *Münchener Nachrichten* conveyed football’s grisly image to readers in Germany. In describing scenes from a recent Harvard-Yale match the paper wrote, “Both teams appeared on the field with a crowd of ambulances, surgeons, and nurses.”\(^{39}\)

By 1900 second-hand reports had Reverend Monsignor George H. Doane, rector of St. Patrick’s Cathedral in Newark, New Jersey, speak up against football in a letter denouncing this sport and other “so-called modern games”:

> I have never seen a prizefight, a bullfight, or a Rugby game, but from the accounts I have read of them, I should think they were about equally brutal. Why call the Rugby game a game? Why call it playing when it is fighting? The places where it is played are, I am told, equipped like a battlefield, with surgeons and stretchers, if not ambulances … We have laws against dogfights, bullfights, and prizefights. Why is there not a law against such contests as these, in which violence and roughness carry the day?\(^{40}\)


\(^{39}\) Quoted in English in: Parke Hill Davis, *Football: The American Intercollegiate Game* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1911), 98.

\(^{40}\) Doane concluded, “Some other name than ‘muscular Christianity’ will have to be devised for these so-called modern games if a spade is to be called a spade.” “Protests Against Football,” *New York Times*, 21 November 1900, 7. In 1875, Doane had become the first president of the Catholic Young Men’s National Union at a meeting in Newark, New Jersey, which he had called himself. The organization’s objective was
As the American correspondent suggested, humorous allusion to football’s brutality were indeed not uncommon. Early in the twentieth decade a vaudeville song in *The Wizard of Oz* reportedly used the very terms found in the *New York Times* and the *Times* of London:

> Just bring along the ambulance,
> And call the Red Cross nurse,
> Then ring the undertaker up,
> And make him bring a hearse;
> Have all the surgeons ready there,
> For they’ll have work today,
> Oh, can’t you see the football teams,
> Are lining up to play.\(^{41}\)

In *America’s Sporting Heritage*, John Betts attributed the lyrics to a number in *The Wizard of Oz*. Unfortunately, the text did not cite a specific source or year in which the lyrics appeared. L. Frank Baum’s musical extravaganza originally opened on stage in Chicago in June of 1902. A year later, the show became Broadway’s greatest hit to that day, and afterwards successfully toured stages across the country for the next decade. Several songs of the stage version became very popular in their own right, and were distributed widely through sheet music, “the fastest way to circulate new songs at the turn of the twentieth century.” The review of a few show program books of the time suggests that Baum added a “Football” song to the show’s second act during the second half of

\(^{41}\) John Rickards Betts, *America’s Sporting Heritage* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1974), 244.
1905. Based on the musical synopsis included in the respective program books, neither of the versions performed in Greene’s Opera House in Cedar Rapids on Friday, October 24, 1902, nor the New National Theatre in Washington, D.C. the week of March 20, 1905 included the “Football” song. However, when the New National Theatre again performed Baum’s play six months later four more songs were listed in the program including Scarecrow and Tinman’s “Football” song in the courtyard of the wizard’s palace. Despite several changes in the musical lineup, the song remained part of the program when the show returned to Cedar Rapids in September 1908. Given the public attention on the game’s alleged brutality in 1905, American audiences would have certainly gotten a kick out of the timely addition of a song mocking football’s roughness. Americans were certainly quite aware of the gridiron’s rough reputation.42

The assertion the American correspondent made in the *Times* of London in December 1905, according to which college football would be free of fouls and dirty play, was clearly contrary to reality. While such tactics as fist blows and pinching were indeed outside the written rules of the game, their common occurrence had forced even

football’s strongest proponents to admit to wrongdoing on the field. An a preemptive
effort to soften his president’s call for football’s abolishment, Harvard’s coach Bill Reid
had drafted a letter to the Harvard Graduates’ Athletic Association in November 1905. In
it the coach conceded the need for reforms, although he was clearly unwilling to give up
on the sport:

Although I am willing to admit that the necessary roughness of the game may be
objectionable to some people, that appears to me much less serious than the fact
that there is a distinct advantage to be gained from brutality and the evasion of the
rules—offenses, which, in many instances, the officials cannot detect because
they are committed when the players and the ball also are hidden from the eyes of
the umpire. For these reasons I have come to believe that the game ought to be
radically changed.\(^{43}\)

The author of the *Times*’s article apparently did not share the same sense of urgency in
regards to changing the rules of football. However he did acknowledge that the spirit with
which the game was played in America was seriously flawed as he proceeded to give “a
brief description of how the game is played…to illustrate its good points as well as its
bad ones.” The description highlighted several “point[s] of departure from English
custom” such as blocking, calling signals when the ball is put into play, three downs to
cover five yards, and the relative absence of a kicking game. The author shared his belief
that football’s blocking for the ball carrier “in the United States this feature of English
Association [football] has been added to Rugby football.”\(^ {44}\)

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\(^ {43}\) Reid had obtained a copy of a Harvard President Eliot’s letter calling for an end to college football and
used its main criticisms in his own letter in an effort to diffuse more radical measures. See: Smith, *Sports
and Freedom*, 195.

\(^ {44}\) American Correspondent, “Football in America,” 8. Evidently, this notion was quite common in the
United States. In 1901, John Corbin had written, “It has been truly enough said that the American game has
exaggerated the most dangerous features of the two English games—the tackling of English Rugby and the
‘charging’ or body-checking of the Association game.” Corbin, “English and American Rugby,” 166.
Rather than being an adopted element of soccer, blocking in football was the unintended result of rules changes Americans had made to make the game more “scientific,” as well as what some felt was a particular American approach of exploiting loopholes in the rules to one’s advantage. After 1880, interference had crept into the game following the introducing of the scrimmage, which gave possession of the ball to one team at a time and thus practically nullified rugby’s original offside rule. Interference or blocking had become a legal part of the game in 1889.45 British observers later continued to comment on this particular aspect of the American game, and it is no surprise that the American writer took time to explain the concept. He admitted,

it cannot be denied that the principle of ‘blocking,’ together with that of “mass-play,” that is to say, a whole side pushing forward the man who has the ball, is a serious drawback to the game. Although probably not too rough for well-developed, mature players, it can be readily seen that it may prove dangerous when played by younger boys. And, further, this has a tendency to put a premium upon weight rather than skill.46

Despite misidentifying the origin of football’s blocking in English soccer, the American correspondent discovered the root evil of American football with his countrymen; particularly in the way Americans approached the sport:

But now for the greatest difference between the two games—a difference caused not so much by the American game itself, as by the spirit in which it is played. In a word, the game is taken too seriously in America. Though this spirit more or less pervades all American games, yet for some reason it is stronger in football than in any other.47

45 Oriard, Reading Football, 30, 32-3.

46 American Correspondent, “Football in America,” 8.

47 Ibid.
Strict training and daily practice would place players “under too great a strain of excitement before an important match.” The author rationalized, “There is no doubt that this spirit is also an indirect cause of roughness.” He went on to explain how the president of one of football’s finest institutions could call for its elimination:

Thus it has become a principle of American football to direct play after play at one man in the opposing team who proves to be “the weak spot.”…If a player thus made the object of attack is worn out and has to leave the game, this is looked upon as one of the necessities of football. It is to this no doubt that President Eliot of Harvard refers when he declares that the game as now played encourages brutality.48

As to a resolution of the problem, instead of replacing football with Association football or rugby, as some had proposed, the author favored a gradual change: “What should be done before the autumn of 1906…is to do away with ‘blocking’ and ‘mass play’ and encourage more open and individual play.” In addition, he advocated a gradual change of “the injurious effect of too great zeal to win.” With this the Times temporarily laid its commentary on American football to rest.49

Other American and British travelers had also kept busy gathering and sharing information on the football codes of both sides of the pond, and their opinions were eagerly shared with the newspaper reading public. Two examples show the range of backgrounds and qualifications to speak on the matter. In December of 1904, the New York Times interviewed the Earl of Suffolk regarding his impressions of American life

48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
gathered during a visit in New York. The topics ranged from American women to New York’s subway. On the subject of college sport, the Earl had this to say:

Well, I think football is the sportiest game I have seen over here, speaking entirely from an unprofessional point of view. There is nothing like the enthusiasm over college football in England that there is here. It would be a good thing if there were. Football enthusiasm over there is confined almost exclusively to the professional games—the same as your baseball here.\(^5^0\)

To the extent American gridiron faithful would have rejoiced over the Earl’s diplomatic flattery, they would have been equally disgruntled with the impressions James E. Sullivan, Secretary of the Amateur Athletic Union, brought back from a trip to England exactly a year later. The American visitor returned quite impressed with rugby as a possible substitute for American football:

I was very much struck by the English Rugby football game. Englishmen take to football for the sheer love of the game, and they do not go in for it with the grim earnestness that they do in this country. I was a spectator at the Oxford and Cambridge game, and during the whole contest not a man was laid out. The game was not stopped once because of injury. It was simply good, clean, wholesome football from beginning to end. When a man was tackled and brought to the ground he was not hurt, and he was allowed to at once get up. The chances for rough play are not as numerous as in the American college game, and yet I am satisfied that it is the best substitute we can find. We must change our method of educating the college player, and when a man is ruled out of the game for brutality the disqualification should last the entire season, and not for the game only. …A combination of the present college game and the Rugby game should produce an interesting contest.\(^5^1\)

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51 Sullivan had visited England to build an athletic alliance between his AAU and Great Britain’s Amateur Athletic Association. The mission was to lay the foundation for increased sporting exchanges. Details would have ensured that both organizations barred disqualified athletes from competition in the respective other country, and led to common record keeping. Despite promising negotiations, the agreement could not
Despite sweeping changes made to the game in 1906, severe injuries remained a part of American football in following years. Consequently, the twin issues of football’s reform and its distinctive rules surfaced on the pages of the *Times*. Under the segment of “Colonial and Foreign Intelligence” the paper covered Roosevelt’s visit to his alma mater Harvard in February 1907. The *Times* “own correspondent” reported that the president’s speech touched on several important subjects: “The first was athletic sports, which he thinks should be reformed and widened, not abolished, so that the largest number of students may be given a chance to taking part in them, as in English schools and colleges.” After devoting some space to the president’s thoughts on federal interference in the rights of individual states in the union and the need to curb the power of syndicated wealth in some corporations, the article returned to the subject of football:

> At the beginning of the address Mr. Roosevelt aroused wild enthusiasm by an emphatic avowal of his belief in football properly regulated as tending to develop courage. He added:—“There is no justification for stopping a thoroughly manly sport because it is sometimes abused, when the experience of every good preparatory school shows that the abuse is in no shape necessarily attendant upon the game.” Dr. Eliot, the President of Harvard, is known as one of the opponents of American college football, and Mr. Roosevelt’s remarks therefore created some surprise.53

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52 In 1906, Harvard had come out the winner in the power struggle with Yale and the newly formed rules committee passed a number of fundamental changes to open up the game. These included “prohibiting runners from hurdles the line, creating a ball-length neutral zone between the two teams, requiring six men on the offensive line of scrimmage to prevent massing behind the line, preventing tackling below the knees, and increasing the number of officials to four while adding larger penalties for violations…the 10-yard rules in three downs and the forward pass.” Smith, *Sports and Freedom*, 205.

Thus the article reintroduced English readers to prominent players in the American debate and the ideologies used to buttress the sport. Roosevelt’s characterization of football as a “thoroughly manly sport” reflected the most common justification of football’s “necessary roughness.” Oriard’s examination of the American press in the gridiron’s early years shows that “manly” was the most often used adjective to describe the game at the time. For example, during a previous crisis over football’s brutality in 1894, an editorial in the American weekly *Outlook* had declared, “We have believed, and we still do believe, in football, legitimately played, as a splendid test and development of manly characters.” Already in March of 1895, three years before he led the Rough Riders in the Spanish-American war and five years before he was elected Vice President of the United States, Roosevelt had voiced his disgust with Harvard president Eliot’s desire to ban football in a letter to Yale’ coach Camp. Roosevelt felt that football’s roughness was of great benefit for the men who engaged in it, for in life a man “can’t be efficient unless he is manly.” He went on to affirm that he “would a hundred fold rather keep the game as it is now, with the brutality, than give it up.” Thus, with Roosevelt’s words found in the *Times* in 1907, English readers were brought up to speed with the longstanding defense of football’s violence.\(^4\)

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In December 1907, American football’s substitution rule was of special interest in a lengthy discussion of tactical intricacies of what in today’s terminology one would refer to as “all out attack.” In “Generalship in Games” a correspondent to the Times shared his thoughts on the use of reserves in combat and on “the field of play, the theatre of mimic warfare.” He also reflected on general differences between English and American games:

In ancient times people thought that the chase was a similitude of war and the best training or it. …In these latter days, however, there are better lessons in strategy and tactics to be learned from watching a great football match and from studying the evolution of the disposition of forces and the various methods of utilizing them to good purpose. Perhaps the chief lesson which the military expert could learn (if he would) from a study of generalship in such co-operative games as football, hockey, and lacrosse is this—that the theory of reserves ought not to be applied in accordance with hard-and-fast rules, but that its application should be changed to suit changing circumstances.55

The article appeared to take a page right out of “football father” Camp’s own playbook. Camp had occasionally used references such as “the foot-ball army” and compared football’s kicking game to “artillery work.” Commenting on the first Army-Navy game in 1890, Walter Camp had pointed out “that football most closely mimics ‘the art of war.’” According to Oriard’s analysis of Camp’s understanding of “generalship” in the game of football, Camp’s “interests in the military lay not in the physical and psychological demands on soldiers, but its lessons for command and strategy.”56

55 “Generalship in Games,” Times (London), 17 December 1907, 4.

56 Walter Camp, “Football of 1891,” Outing, November 1891, 155; Walter Camp, Walter Camp’s Book of College Sports (New York: Century, 1893), 99, 117. Quoted in: Oriard, Reading Football, 42-3, 286. The year 1890 was pivotal for the application of military tactics to football in one more sense. It was the year in which Lorin F. Deland saw his first football game. Without ever playing football himself, the game inspired him to apply his knowledge of Napoleon Bonaparte’s war tactics to devise the flying wedge, the game’s most controversial innovation, which was first implemented by Harvard against Yale on November 19, 1892. Scott A. McQuilkin and Ronald A. Smith, “The Rise and Fall of the Flying Wedge: Football’s Most Controversial Play,” Journal of Sport History 20 (1993): 60.
Seemingly echoing Camp’s sentiments, but without making reference to him, the *Times*’s next passage further reflected on American football’s peculiarities:

Of course, the analogy between war and a game of football, for example, must not be unduly pressed. In war there must always be a reserve from which the wasting by death, wounds, and disease of the force in the fighting line may be repaired without delay. In English co-operative pastimes no such wastage occurs as a rule, rough play being sternly forbidden by the laws of the game, which are effectively enforced. In American football, however, where ‘interference’ is permitted, with the result that serious casualties are frequent, substitutes are allowed to take the place of injured players, and these may be said to form a militant reserve. The same statement applies to lacrosse and ice-hockey, which, as played in Canada at the present time, are the roughest and most dangerous of games.57

The distinction given here to the Canadian games as being the most dangerous sports is an interesting deviation not only from previous depictions of football in this paper, but also from a standard formula the German press used in the 1970s, which commonly referred to American football as the world’s toughest team sport.58

After pointing out American football’s unique substitution rule, the correspondent went on to trace the “tendency to abolish the system of reserves” in sports practiced in England. In horse racing he detected that “the American plan of making the pace throughout and never riding a waiting race has become fashionable.” He further found examples of increased offense in cricket, rugby, hockey, lacrosse, as well as Association football. In the latter game, he credited Preston North End and their captain N. J. Ross, “a thoroughgoing sportsman with the brain of a strategist” for “systematizing passing between the forwards and bringing the half-backs into the attack.” Apart from the

57 “Generalship,” 4.

reference to American tactics in horse racing, the article did not suggest that American sports had introduced more offensive-minded strategies to British sports; and indeed exposure to American football would have been far too limited to suggest such an influence. Nevertheless, the example shows a growing awareness and a particular perception of American football by British observers.59

The next piece, published in February 1908, reinforces the point that British journalists made sporadic reference to American football in the early twentieth century, which in turn suggests that readers had at least a rudimentary understanding of American football. The correspondent examined the growing popularity of (field-) hockey in the Midlands and North of England, which the author saw as “largely the result no doubt, of the growing distaste for professional [rugby] football.” The article then explored the possibility of set plays and calling signals when returning the ball into the field of play in hockey as it would be the case in “the football team of an American University.” However, on the subject of football’s much noted blocking, the writer emphatically declared, “Interference, the corner-stone of strategy and tactics in American football, is not, and never will be, countenanced in hockey. It has ruined Canadian ice hockey, which, as played, is the most brutal and dangerous of co-operative pastimes.” Notable again is that the writer classified Canadian ice hockey, not American football, as the most brutal team game at the time.60

60 “The English Hockey Team,” Times (London), 29 February 1908, 11.
Closing out the first decade of the twentieth century football in the *Times* continued the previous mix of reporting about casualties on the gridiron and reform efforts. From a news bulletin that appeared on Christmas Eve 1908 we know that even the British medical community monitored football’s bloodshed across the ocean:

> Statistics have been compiled by the *British Medical Journal* of the casualties in the connexion [sic] with American football. They show the results of this year’s football playing in America, and a summary of the results for the past eight years. For 1908 the total deaths are 10, and the total numbers injured is 272. The total of the past eight years is 113 killed and 1,377 injured. Many of the latter are described as permanently maimed.61

A year later, the *Times* continued its theme of American football’s viciousness. This time it reported about Canadian rugby missionaries, supposedly equipped with an English game, coming to the aid of its southern neighbors. In the afternoon of Saturday December 11, 1909 the Hamilton Tigers, erroneously reported as an American team in the *Times*, played a game of rugby against the Ottawa Rough Riders under Canadian rules. Site of the game was New York’s Van Cortlandt Park, where reportedly 30,000 spectators, “including a number of college coaches and other American authorities on the game,” saw the Tigers come on top 11-6. According to the *Times*, the *New York Herald* had organized the match as a means of studying the English game with a view of changes in the American rules, the necessity for which has been brought home to the American public by the large number of fatal accidents—amounting to 30, besides 200 injuries—on American football fields this season, and the consequent prohibition of the game in the public schools.62

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62 “Rugby Football in America,” *Times (London)*, 13 December 1909, 18. The game’s announcement in the *New York Times* referred to the “Ottawas of Ottawa, Canada.” It also noted that “In addition to bettering the present game, there is the underlying desire on the part of some to have football rules the same throughout
Thus Times readers were once more reminded of the brutality of the American game.

The year 1910 saw a drastic increase in the Times’s American football coverage. As before, readers were able to keep up with the continued saga of carnage and rule changes abroad; but by the end of the year the London daily was also able to cover the first exhibition of American football in England. In March Reuter reported in considerable detail from New York about American football’s latest rule alterations:

The Inter-Collegiate Football Rules Committee has tentatively adopted six changes in the rules of American football calculated to make the game safe. The changes remove the five yards restriction on a player receiving the ball from the snapback, and require seven men to be maintained on the offense at the line of scrimmage. The flying tackle is prohibited, and the game divided into four periods of 15 minutes each. Pushing or pulling a man running with the ball are forbidden, and the onside kick is limited to 20 yards beyond the line of scrimmage. The changes so weaken the offense that other changes will be necessary to strengthen it. This matter will be taken up at a meeting of the committee, to be held in Philadelphia on April 29, when the rules regulating the use of the forward pass will probably be decided.63

As it turned out football-minded Brits had to wait well past April to hear about the outcome of the deliberations abroad. Given the limited game coverage to this point, it is difficult to imagine that throngs of Times readers anxiously awaited word from

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Canada and the United States, and thus make it possible in the future to bring about a series of international matches.” “Canadian Football Match,” New York Times, 11 December 1909, 9. According to Frank Cosentino, “by 1909 the game of Canadian rugby-football was neither rugby in the traditional sense nor football in the modern.” At the time, the Canadian game was played with fourteen players a side, the ball was heeled out to the quarter, and there was no interference or forward pass. Thus, in 1909 American’s were considering a Canadian game as an alternative to American football, not English rugby. Frank Cosentino, “Football,” in A Concise History of Sport in Canada, ed. Don Morrow and Mary Keyes (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1989), 145. Between 1950 and 1961, NFL teams played seven games in Canada against clubs of the Canadian Football League, including the Ottawa Roughriders and the Hamilton Tiger Cats. The contest between the New York Giants and the Roughriders in Ottawa on August 12, 1950 was the first with NFL participation abroad. World League of American Football, 1991 Record & Fact Book, 16.

Philadelphia, but the paper apparently felt that the interest warranted continual news stories on football’s development. By the end of August, just before the start of a new season in the States, Reuter followed up on the revised rules:

The Football Committee, after deliberations which have lasted all the summer, have made public the rules which are to govern the conduct of the game during the season of 1910. The changes adopted are revolutionary in character, and will, it is hoped, minimize the danger of fatal accidents existing under the old rules. They have already been adopted by nearly all the large colleges. Amongst the alternations are the following:—the “flying tackle” has been entirely eliminated by the new ruling, which provides that a player must have one foot at least on the ground when tackling an opponent. “Interlocked interference”—that is, players of the side having the ball taking hold of each other, or using their hands or arms to grasp members of their own team in any way—is forbidden; and it is also forbidden for any man on the side having possession of the ball to push or pull any way the man running with the ball.64

“See a Real Game of American Football”: Sailors on Shore65

The true historic highlight, however, occurred in November of 1910. The presence of American military led to what locals believed to be the first American football game in England. Just before the memorable event, the Times reiterated the danger involved in American football by printing a Reuter’s report from Wheeling, West Virginia. Under the headline “American Football Player’s Death,” readers, otherwise unlikely to be familiar with the persons and teams involved in the incident, found out that “A coroner’s jury has exonerated McCoay, a player of the Bethany football team, from all responsibility for the death of Mr. Munk, captain of the West Virginia University team, who died from

concussion of the brain sustained in match last Saturday.”66 On Thursday, November 24, another headline proclaimed, “American Football. Match at the Crystal Palace.” The short announcement of this first football exhibition read:

The American sailors at present in London will play a game under American “College” rules at the Crystal Palace this afternoon. The teams are the representatives of the Idaho and Vermont battleships. They will play under conditions recognized in the United States and wear the full complement of necessary football armour in the way of head-guards, shin-guards, and padded clothing. It is the first exhibition of the American game in England. The kick-off is timed for 3 o’clock.67

On the next day, a New York Times headline let readers know “Our Sailors Play Football.” The article covered a reception at the Dorchester House by American ambassador Whitelaw Reid attended by officers of the American fleet visiting London as well as the previous day’s game in London between the sailors “for a silver cup given by a London paper.” The short notice included the game’s final score and that “The spectators included many English players who were curious to see the American game.”68


67 “American Football. Match at the Crystal Palace,” Times (London), 24 November 1910, 17. The First and Third Divisions had arrived in European waters for an elaborate battle and scouting problem in early November. In England the ships stayed for three weeks in Portland and Gravesend, before departing for France. The Second and the Fourth Divisions replaced their predecessors in England before leaving on December 29. Since the fleet consisted of a total of sixteen battleships, it is quite possible that several more games took place during this period. For example, in 1986 Sports Illustrated mentioned a game between soldiers of the USS Rhode Island and USS Georgia at Northfleet, Kent on December 14, 1910. However the magazine erred when it referred to the game as “the first football game ever to be staged in the British Isles.” Clive Gammon, “The Brits are Having a Ball,” Sports Illustrated, 7 July 1986, 40. For information on the Atlantic Fleet at the time, see: “The American Sailors,” Times (London), 27 December 1910, 8. Dictionary of American Fighting Ships, (Department of the Navy—Naval Historical Center, accessed 25 May 2005); available from http://www.history.navy.mil/danfs/r5/rhode_island-ii.htm.

The same article quoted Ambassador Reid at the Thanksgiving Day banquet of the American Society on the subject of representing the United States abroad:

I suppose what an Ambassador is sent abroad for under modern and civilized conditions is very simple and straightforward work. It is to look out for the interests for his own country and to protect and promote them as far as he can by honorable and peaceful means. …The pursuit of honorable American diplomacy finds its type neither in the clawless kitten nor in the scratching cat. First protect and promote the interests of your own country. Next, keep the peace.69

While neither the journalist nor potentially the ambassador made the connection, Reid’s words were a reminder that those who came to watch “other people’s games” not only came to compare the merits of each other’s sports but also those of the countries the games represented. Onlookers made observations not only about interference and offside rules, but also about the manliness and virility of those who played the game. Like Reid, the American sailors had come to England to “protect and promote the interests” of their own country. In this case, they did so not only as members of the United States military, but also as representatives of America’s version of football. While they may have simply wanted some diversion from their daily routine, the soldiers/players transported ideas about America and its way of life. During the last quarter of the twentieth century, another set of America’s football ambassadors, the NFL, would come primarily to “protect and promote” its own business interests abroad, but in the course they also promoted America’s business interests and its way of life.70

69 Ibid.

70 For example, in assessing the NFL’s efforts in England during the 1980s, Maguire writes, “The need perceived by the NFL as essential to its operation was to establish and protect its trademark on a worldwide basis for commercial production.” Also see his discussion of the NFL’s cultural impact in England during the time. Maguire, “More Than a Sporting Touchdown,” 226, 230-35.
In 1910, the understanding of the sailors as “good ambassadors” was articulated in a follow-up the *New York Times* published on November 27: “Sailors Behaving Well. Not One Arrested in London—Interest in American Football Game.” The special cable assured that the seamen represented their country well, both on the streets of England’s capital and on the gridiron. The recap of reaction sailor’s own version of the Thanksgiving Day game closely monitored how the British saw the game:

In commenting on the game in the Daily Mail, Mr. Woodhouse, one of the best authorities on English Rugby football and himself an old player of distinction says: “First of all, let it be said that there was not a serious single accident: indeed, not one man suffered more hurt than would have been the case had the game been an ordinary strenuous English Rugby match, but it is quite true that accidents, very serious accidents, and even deaths occur in this game; for unless it be played by two clean sporting sides it lends itself to the more brutal tricks and devices, which no referee and no number of referees could possibly detect. It was a grand, hard game, fast and vigorous, but on the whole not so spectacular as our English football.”

Those who had missed the opportunity to watch their first American football match in London were able to catch up in the *Times’s* account of the action the day following the game.

By way of celebrating Thanksgiving Day it was arranged that the football teams of the United States battleships Idaho and Vermont, the former of which holds the Navy Championship, should play a match under American Rules at the Crystal Palace yesterday, and a fair-sized crowd—enough to form a ring all round the field—assembled to see a specimen of the game which has been so much criticized for its roughness on the other side of the Atlantic. Unfortunately, the slippery ground and greasy ball and the fact that the Vermont men were slow and unscientific, and might almost be described as a scratch team, prevented us from seeing the American variant of football at its best, and it is to be feared that the object-lesson—the first of this kind ever given in this country—was wasted on the majority of spectators present, who went away convinced that Ruby Union

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Football (which by the way, is preferred in the Pacific States to the American game), is superior in every respect, better to play, and better to watch, and a much more sensible form of physical training.72

Thus the reporter gave American football the benefit of the doubt that stronger teams may have provided a better first impression, but he also, upon first glance, pointed out that a major obstacle the American game would face during its diffusion to Europe:

A detailed description of the play would be meaningless to those who are not fully conversant with the American code, which is as much a mystery to the lay mind … and even presents difficulties to the experts—for example, to the officials controlling yesterday’s game, who had on several occasions to refer to their copies of the rules.73

As the latter introduction of American football to Germany made clear, the game’s complicated rules, especially in comparison to the well-established game of soccer, became an often-cited impediment to the football’s chances to gain any popularity in Germany.74 In light of the many foreign regulations, the Times’s commentator continued to do his best to translate rules, players’ “defensive armour,” and the action on


73 “Match at the Crystal Palace.”

74 From the beginning of German club football in the 1970s, journalists pointed out that the game’s complicated rules would make it hard for football to become popular in Germany. For example, see: Wolfgang Scheffler, “Die Zuschauer wollen sehen, wie starke Männer sich weh tun,” Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 3 October 1978, Rhein-Main-Sport, 34. Wolfgang Scheffler, “Eine Bundesliga für das amerikanische Spektakel,” Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 3 August 1979, 20.
the field for his English audience. Before long, he return again to the one aspect of football British readers would have been most familiar with:

It was clean football of its kind for the most part; casualties were few and not serious; and, seeing as we did an example of American football played in a spirit of keenness combined with good humor, it was easy to believe that the yearly “butcher’s bill,” of which so much is heard in the United States, is really the work of those who deliberately indulge in foul and brutal play. …That the game, even when played in accordance with the spirit of sportsmanship as well as the letter of the rules is rough to a degree cannot be denied. An ill-tempered game of Rugby football in the Celtic twilight is a Sunday school picnic in comparison. But it is not the legitimate, but the illegal, roughness which is the cause of fatal accidents nine times in ten, and it should be possible to strengthen the band so the field officials as to repress the brutal “slugging” which is never seen in Yale v. Harvard match or in any other contest between gentlemanly players.⁷⁵

Of course, games between Yale and Harvard had seen their share of unsportsmanlike conduct and therefore the writer’s comment was either a case of flattery or he was relying on bad sources.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, the author tried to put the game in perspective for his readership by explaining that English spectators may regard the game as unsportsmanlike, if they compared American football with Rugby without considering fundamental differences in the rules. Most importantly, English spectators should note that the American game allowed interference. Further, he indicated, “the absence of an

⁷⁵ “Match at the Crystal Palace,” 23. Accidentally, in 1978 Chandler predicted that soccer’s increasing violence on the field, where “the most flagrant and vicious fouls have gone unpunished,” might lead to its replacement by American football as the most popular spectator sport in England: “In pro football, violence is legitimized. Every man goes on the field knowing that on each play he can expect to be in violent physical contact with an opponent. …Pro soccer depends for its very existence on a kind of gentleman’s agreement; an agreement which in Britain no longer exists. Britain may be ready for a game which demands ritual violence.” Chandler, “American Pro Football,” 152.

⁷⁶ See for example a highly publicized incident in the 1905 visit of Yale to Harvard, which subsequently caused President Roosevelt to call Harvard coach Reid to the White House. Smith, Sports and Freedom, 196-7.
off-side rule, which makes the forward pass the corner-stone of American tactics, also
gave rise to illogical criticisms.” Rather than regarding the American game as a variant of
English rugby, the author explained, football should be seen as an offspring of
Association football, with which it shared elements familiar to the English sports
enthusiast. “American football is really an amalgam of our two games,” concluded the
journalist. “As such it has developed on logical lines into a pastime which, though slow
and laborious, has many interesting points and is a drastic test of strength and courage.”77

The writer’s conviction, that American football should be regarded as “the direct
descendant of the all-in football of our ancestors,” was followed with accounts of rough-
and-tumble folk football of sixteenth century England. Having thus demonstrated
American football’s lineage, the article concluded with a clever stab at America’s self-
image:

Being milder and more humane than our ancestors, we have preferred two
“fellowly” [sic] pastimes to one aboriginal form of football… and shall stick to our
preference despite the Crystal Palace object-lesson in an antiquarian pursuit, a
fossilized form of football. But one must needs feel amazed and a little amused
that the Americans should be playing 16th century football in the 20th century.
Really, it is rather unprogressive.78

77 “Match at the Crystal Palace,” 23.
78 Ibid.
The witty remark closing the *Times*’s first eyewitness account of an American football game in England confirmed that the reporters of the *Times* certainly thought rugby was the more evolved, more progressive game. 79

On the Monday following the game, the *Times* of London picked up its coverage of the exhibition series:

> Few besides those who were immediately interested in the result had the curiosity and enterprise to travel to the Crystal Palace on Saturday to see a real game of American football. The victory of the United States warship Idaho team over Rear-Admiral Schroeder’s flagship’s—the Connecticut—side produced an exhibition which, if to a great extent incomprehensible to the English football expert, was nevertheless interesting by reason of its mystery and contrast.80

The next paragraph revealed both the pride this English observer took in comparing rugby to American football and his respect for American athletes:

> The first impression of the average spectator would probably take shape in the selfish regret that the players were not conforming to our Rugby rules. The physique pace, alertness, and dash of the players were well matched in the strength and accuracy with which they passed the ball, and one involuntarily regretted that, as in cricket, tennis, and racquets, and largely in polo, the genius of the American race has not endorsed English ideas.81

The reporter noted the furnishings of the field may suggest resemblance between the English and the American game, “but here the similarity ends, for they play 11 aside and their methods and tactics do not coincide with ours. The contrast is complete and holds

79 Meanwhile, the *New York Times* did not acknowledge the English criticism of the American game as it kept up with football adventures of the United States Navy men in England. On November 30, the paper reported from the English capital, “The final match for the American Football Cup will be played next Saturday at the Crystal Palace between the teams of the Connecticut and the Idaho. The Daily Mirror will present a trophy to the winning team.” “Football Trophy for Our Sailors,” *New York Times*, 30 November 1910, 6.


81 Ibid.
out no hope of compromise; to enlarge upon it, therefore, could only create misunderstanding.\textsuperscript{82} The text’s conclusion unknowingly foreshadowed the theme of football as entertainment spectacle, which would dominate the sport’s depiction in European media by the end of the century:\textsuperscript{83}

The victory of the Idaho’s team was the signal for a great demonstration of enthusiasm, in which the ship’s band took conspicuous part. The hurricane-like tactics of the players is reflected in the attitude of the spectators, who follow the game with a nervous energy and vociferous enthusiasm which must be rather exhausting.\textsuperscript{84}

Interestingly, this would not be the last time the \textit{Times} would comment on the boisterous music that accompanied displays of American ball games in England.

After the exposure the game received in 1910, it is possible that more readers of the \textit{Times} noticed the short American football news the paper brought the following years. In 1911, the \textit{Times} summarized two telegraphed reports of the Harvard-Yale match. The first sent by the paper’s correspondent in New York included the final tally (a scoreless draw) and the attendance of over 40,000 spectators. The telegram further noticed that this had been the fourth straight year without a touchdown in the rivalry and that “the teams were evenly matched in strength and skill, although Harvard’s endurance exceeded Yale’s.” The second telegram came from Reuter in New York and received almost as much attention as the previous game report since its content was more closely related to

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{83} For example, Maguire describes a “shift toward an American style of coverage, with the emphasis on entertainment, and away from a British ‘journalistic’ style” in the presentation of American football on English television in the early 1980s. Maguire, “More Than a Sporting Touchdown,” 218.

\textsuperscript{84} “Battleships Idaho and Connecticut,” 20.
the affairs of the empire than the game itself. The telegram reported that the son of the Gaekwar of Baroda, who was the maharaja of the Maratha dynasty that ruled this Indian state, got hurt on his way to the game. The young man, at the time a Harvard undergraduate, had suffered a concussion after jumping off a moving electric car (trolley). He reportedly fell temporarily unconscious but was not seriously injured. Had it not been for the accident of the Indian prince, the football game may not have made it into the news in England at all.85

With more American troops in England after the United States had joined allied war efforts against the Central Powers in April 1917, contacts between American troops and British civilians, and thus exposures to American sports, became more likely.86 In November 1918, American football returned to Chelsea’s soccer ground. “It was a typical November day—muggy, wet and dark,” wrote the Times about the day on which continued American military presence afforded Londoners another first-hand look at football. On the twenty-eighth of the month, the paper announced,

A football match under American rules will be played on the Chelsea Football Club ground to-day between sides representing the U.S. Army and the U.S. Navy, in aid of St. Dunstant’s Hostels, National Milk Hostels, and the Bulldog Club.

The two elevens, which will consist of former ‘star’ university players in the United States, have been in training in Hyde Park under the direction of a former


86 For example, baseball games between American soldiers stationed in England were reported on more frequently after the United States entered the war. An article about what was believed to be the first official baseball match played at Hyde Park described in detail the American custom of having a band play during the game. “Baseball in Hyde Park,” Times (London), 18 July 1918, 3. For another reflection on baseball from a British perspective, see: “The Soul of Baseball. Fourth-of-July Reflections,” Times (London), 3 July 1918, 9.
Yale University coach, and a keen game is anticipated. Among others who have expressed their intention of being present are Princes Patricia, Admiral Sims, and General Biddle. The game will start at 3 o’clock.87

Instead of featuring the announced Army-Navy battle, the game was held between two teams of the United States Navy, the Destroyer Squadron and the Battle Squadron.

“There are many forms of football which have now all played in the British Isles,” reported the correspondent to the Times as he added the American code to a list that also included Rugby, Association, two games played at Eaton (“at the Wall and in the Field”), the Harrow and Winchester games, and Australian rules football, which had been on display in England during World War I. “The game is not easily comprehensible,” wrote the correspondent about the American form of football. “There are multifarious rules and definitions; it is highly specialized and team work, of which we hear so much nowadays, plays a large part.” Once again, it appeared that the actual display did not live up to the expectations regarding the game’s violence, which had been raised by the accounts that had made it across the sea. “It was not by any means so ‘ferocious’ as some people imagine, although hard enough in all conscience,” this eyewitness shared. “There were no casualties of the least seriousness, hard as the tackling was.”88

The at times rather casual description of the game suggested that the writer was not particularly knowledgeable about the American game. Nevertheless, he obviously


appreciated certain aspects of this style of football: “Whatever the technical term of the
form of scrummage may be, it is in that, no doubt, that the great science lies.” Next to the
game’s scientific basis, the spectacle of football clearly caught this onlooker’s attention:

The match had many concomitants, which we are accustoming ourselves to hear
in many American games. There was lots of cheering and shouting, and much
excitement generally. During the interval some of the many sailors and others
who watched the game beguiled the time by dancing. In the second half of the
game they marched round the ground headed by the band, and an airship also put
in an appearance.89

Already in 1918, the American-style show surrounding the gridiron in England included
blimp, band, and bop. The section on American football on England’s stage and screens
shows, the connection the Times made between football and entertainment was not
coincidental. Next to football lessons made in Hollywood, occasional telegrams and first
radio broadcasts kept American football in the headlines in England during the interwar
years.

89 It is interesting to note that the particulars of the actual game didn’t seem to matter much to the reporter,
while the article provided details that would have been meaningless for the majority of the readers. On the
one hand, about the outcome, it was simply stated, “The result of the game was that nothing was scored.”
On the other hand, the article listed the names of players and their positions for both teams. Ibid.
In 1978 Chandler liked the chances of American football in England, since “the Football Association in
Britain behaves as if it had no responsibility to its audience. …There is no halftime entertainment, no band,
no cheerleaders…. There is no invocation, no color guard, no national anthem. Players are not introduced.”
Somewhat contradictory she had the following advice regarding the introduction of pro football to British
audiences: “the game must be shorn of its American trimmings; the prayer, the color guard, the
cheerleaders. The British have been accustomed to taking their pro sports seriously; when live football is
eventually played, in custom built stadia, some melodrama can be introduced, but not on TV.” Chandler,
“American Pro Football,” 149, 152-53. Interestingly, Maguire credits a “shift toward an American style of
coverage, with the emphasis on entertainment, and away from a British ‘journalistic’ style” for football’s
initial success as a spectator sport in England in the early 1980s: “The sports department of Channel 4
appears to have taken the decision that the traditional form of British sports coverage was no longer
appropriate. Channel 4 decided to take the video and commentary from the main American television
networks, CBS, ABC, and NBC, and then use a British production company—Cheerleader Productions—to
package the game via edited highlights, popular presenters, rock ‘n’ roll title music, and rock ‘n’ roll
In this period, the traditional rivalries of Harvard versus Yale and Army versus Navy produced the most news stories. On Monday, March 16, 1925, amongst other non-sport related news from around the world, the Times announced the death of footballs perhaps most influential individual to that date: “Mr. Walter Camp, a once famous Yale athlete, popularly known as the ‘Father of American football,’ was found dead of heart disease on Saturday in the Hotel Belmont, New York. He was 66 years of age.”

The annual clash between Camp’s alma mater and Harvard made news three years later. After the Crimson upset Yale, Reuter reported from Newhaven:

Harvard defeated Yale in the 47th annual football match between the two Universities by 17 to nothing to-day. This game is the most important event in the American football season. Harvard has had an unlucky spell in big sporting events during the last few years and has not beaten Yale at football since 1922, and when the game was over Harvard men past and present gave vent to their enthusiasm in an uproarious manner.

Without additional primers on American football rules or more elaborate descriptions, such short written accounts did little to educate British audiences about the game itself.

Football’s first radio reports from America were seemingly better suited to capture the imagination of broader audiences in the United Kingdom. In his analysis of the

90 “Telegrams in Brief,” Times (London), 16 March 1925, 13. In 1931, the Times noted the death of another influential football coach. Referring to Knute Rockne as “one of the most famous football players and coaches in America” the New York correspondent to the Times reported the details of the plane crash that had cost the lives of ten people, including Rockne. The report further commented, “He had been coach of the Notre Dame football team for many years, and reached the height of his fame last season, when the team won a series of brilliant victories over the leading teams of the country.” “U.S. Air Liner’s Crash,” Times (London), 1 April 1931, 14.


92 British and American radio stations reached each other’s audiences already in November of 1923. Special programs transmitted from English stations reached listeners on the American east coast at 10pm EST on November 25. The following night American stations put on special concerts for listeners in England. While stations were powerful enough to cross the sea, the exchanges were only possible during the
football’s early radio days in the 1920s and 1930s, Oriard finds that the new medium “helped standardize football as part of a national sporting culture” in the United States. However, most of the early reporting on the airwaves lacked the expert analysis we are accustomed to today. Instead it featured a more descriptive than analytical reporting style, as the announcer’s chief role was to bring the atmosphere of the stadium into living rooms and public gathering spaces, where listeners anxiously huddled around the receiver. Relaying football’s pageantry was one of the main goals of radio producers. As early as November 1922, at a time when there were an estimated 1.5 million radios in homes across America, producers made special arrangements to catch the spirit of college crowds on the air. For example, before that year’s Harvard-Yale contest it was noted that “microphones will be arranged so that the cheering and songs may be heard on a wave length of 400 meters.” Pioneer broadcasters like Graham McNamee, Ted Husing, and later Bill Stern became celebrities in their own right based on their ability to re-create the excitement of the game. The style of announcing reflected the spectacle that had been created around college football since the 1890s. Oriard explains,

 darkness of night over the Atlantic since sunlight weakened the strength of the radio waves. Sleepless radio enthusiasts in England had already been able to catch American evening programs, which reached the British coast during local nighttime. “Radio: English Stations to Call America,” New York Times, 18 November 1923, X13.

93 Oriard, King Football, 42, 45, 47, 48. “Radio: 1,500,000 Sets Now in Use,” New York Times, 19 November 1922, 99. Several examples can be found in which papers highlighted special efforts made to bring the excitement of the stadium home via the radio. The New York Times noted before the Princeton-Yale game at Palmer Stadium: “Three microphones have been installed in the stadium, one placed in front of the Yale stands, the second near the Princeton cheering section and the third will be used by the radio observer, who will describe each play the instant it is made.” About the broadcast of the meeting between Columbia and Dartmouth from New York’s Polo Grounds, the paper wrote, “Special microphones will be arranged so that the cheer and clamor of the crowd will be heard clearly by the radio audience.” “Football for Radio Fans,” New York Times, 17 November 1922, 24.
College football games were staged in settings that mattered as much as the games themselves. The crowds, the bands, the card section, the cheerleaders—the endlessly noted “spirit” of college football—were crucial to football’s appeal, and thus to the announcers who tried to capture it.94

Given its importance in popularizing American football even in remote areas of the United States, expectations were high, when radio first carried the pigskin through the air to listeners in England.95

On November 22, 1930 the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) aired fifteen minutes of running commentary of the Yale-Harvard game during its national evening program. The day prior to the game, the Times’s announcement of the show declared, “This is the first running commentary on a football match played in the United States to be broadcast in this country.” According to the paper, the BBC would pick up the report of the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) from Soldier’s Field in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and relay the signal “to Savoy-hill by means of the Transatlantic telephone service.” However, it should be pointed out that Harvard did not host this game. Instead it took place in New Haven’s Yale Bowl, from where veteran announcer

94 Oriard, King Football, 45.

95 In 1932, a statement of a CBS representative underscored the importance of press and radio in creating a national market for football and foreshadowed the role advanced communication technologies would have for the future diffusion of the sport internationally: “It is apparent that the broadcasting of national football spectacles, which a vast portion of the distant audience could not attend anyway, serves to whet interest and increase attendance. It engenders an intimate feeling of Intersectional competition, and crystallizes a national following for the gridiron. Not only has this helped to familiarize the general public with the sport figures of all sections but indirectly has served to attract many to the fine traditions of campus life.” Orrin E. Dunlap, “Busy Days on the Air,” New York Times, 3 July 1932, XX5.
Bill Munday brought the game to listeners of stations aligned with the NBC-WEAF network.96

Munday, a former baseball pitcher at the University of Georgia, had built his broadcasting career with local station WSB in Atlanta. Known for its southern drawl, Munday’s accent likely added to the bewilderment of English listeners during the first transmission of an already strange football game.97 On the day of the broadcast, the Times again alerted its readers to the special relay from America by adding,

The commentary occurs shortly before the end of will have the opportunity of comparing British and American methods of describing the match, which is always keenly contested. Listeners to the National programme of sporting events, for Mr. George F. Allison’s commentary on the second half of the Arsenal and Middlesbrough Association football match will be relayed from Highbury during the afternoon.”98

Based on an Associated Press report from London, the broadcast apparently mystified most football novices in England: “A torrent of words describing the Yale-Harvard football game came tumbling over the Atlantic tonight from New Haven, but not in a fashion likely to add to Britain’s expert knowledge of the American college game.” The commentary shared that expatriate Americans enjoyed listening to the program covering


97 One of Munday’s highlights came in 1929 when NBC added him to announcer Graham McNamee for the national broadcast of the Rose Bowl. At the time of his death in 1965, Munday was still remembered for his call of Roy Riegels’ sixty yard wrong-way run that ended up ensuring Georgia Tech’s Rose Bowl victory over California by a score of eight to seven. It was later said about the Munday’s memorable coverage from California that his “exaggerated drawl and Southern charm soon made him a national favorite.” United Press International, “Bill Munday, Announcer of Sports Events in South,” New York Times, 27 February 1965, 25. The quotation is printed in: Oriard, King Football, 45.

98 “A Relay from America,” Times (London), November 22 1930, 17.
parts of the third and fourth quarter, which included Harvard’s second touchdown for a
final score of 13-0 in front of 79,000 fans, “but to the English listeners the technical
description was like so much Sanskrit.” By quoting the reaction of Jack Slee, sports
editor of Reuters News Agency, the article preserved a sense of just how the broadcast
was received in England:

The first attempt to broadcast American football to England was highly successful
from the standpoint of noise, but not as a missionary effort to convert Britain from
her own Rugby game to the American gridiron game. The ether seethed and
sizzled with pace and vigor of the announcer’s description. It was easy enough to
keep in mind the fact that old Harvard was leading. The announcer must have
been a Harvard man, he repeated the score so often. There was one moment when
no announcer was needed as the tumult sounded across the Atlantic. Just how the
score was made no English listener could hazard, but all the world’s akin when a
goal, touchdown or whatever you call it is made. It was an exciting moment. Ex-
Rugby stars stirred in easy chairs at their clubs and said, one to another, “I say,
old chap, what is all this bally row [sic]?“

British listeners baffled by this first running commentary from the American gridiron had
a chance to catch more football on their radios less than a month later. Listeners in the
United States and abroad had several options to catch Navy-Army game that was played
as a fundraiser for the unemployed on December 13 in Yankee Stadium. The four
broadcasts included those of NBC with Graham McNamee, Columbia Broadcasting
System (CBS) featuring Knute Rockne alongside Ted Husing, and Navy
Communications. NBC and CBC each reported more than sixty stations in their hook-
ups, making it one of the largest networks linked for an athletic contest to date. NBC’s

addition of “at least four short-wave transmitting stations would make the play-by-play account available abroad.”

After the game, the Navy Department informed the press that the round-the-world broadcast by Naval Communications “was a complete success.” Naval wireless stations in Annapolis and Arlington, Virginia had transmitted a short-wave length signal in high frequency code after receiving the original program by land wire from New York. European stations received the signal just like nine hundred guests of the Army and Navy Club in Manila, who listened to the game at 4 o’clock in the morning with a three to seven minute delay caused by the relay through San Francisco and Honolulu.

On Saturday, December 3, 1932 listeners in London could follow a running commentary from the Army-Navy relayed from Philadelphia. The thirty-minute program included “an introduction and a final word on the commentary by Mr. Raymond Swing, from a London studio.” The addition of the local comments may have helped British audiences to make sense of the words from overseas, but it still did not win over everyone. A letter of A. G. Stevenson of Carshalton, Surrey to the editor of the Times expressed that some fans felt the sting of the early stages of sport media globalization:

102 The program aired from 7:15 pm to 7:45 pm. “Broadcasting,” Times (London), 3 December 1932, 13. Two years after the first successful international football transmissions, a move to ban radio broadcasts of college games jeopardized the future of encore performances of audio football both at home and abroad. In June 1932, in an effort to boost ticket sales and citing the need to increase football revenue to support other sports, the Eastern Intercollegiate Association decided it would no longer allow radio broadcasts of games under its jurisdiction. After only a few months public demand for access to instant news from the gridiron caused a reversal of the radio ban. On November 9, 1932, the Eastern Intercollegiate Association voted to permit its members to decide for themselves whether their games could be heard on the radio or not.
I fear it must be left to the Mad Hatter for a suitable explanation, but it bewilders me to find a British station broadcasting a running commentary on American football, while it is left to a French station to carry the same service for those who want to hear an “all-British” Test Match. I suppose there must be a reason which would be above the heads of ordinary listeners.103

Overall however, the sporadic appearance of football on British airwaves and sport pages gave little occasion for local sport enthusiasts to feel that their favorite pastimes would soon get replaced by foreign games. During the interwar years, neither the announcement that American football would be featured as a demonstration sport in the Olympics, nor the annual news with results from the Harvard-Yale and Army-Navy rivalries took up much space in the *Times*. When the Olympic Stadium in Los Angeles was completed in November 1931, the paper added, “An interesting feature of next year’s Games will be the inclusion of demonstrations of American football, which, of course, does not form part of the official Olympic Games programme.” In November 1933, Reuter succinctly reported from Cambridge, Massachusetts: “The annual football match between Harvard and Yale was played here to-day on the Harvard ground. Harvard won by 17 points to 6.” Two years later, the news from Philadelphia was similarly brief: “The Army decisively beat the Navy by 28 points to 6 in the outstanding match of the American football season here to-day. Eighty thousand people attended the match.” Although these short accounts

pressure from their alumni, Army and Harvard had pushed for the modification of the ban, while smaller institutions, which relied heavily on gate receipts, feared potential spectators would prefer to listen to the big games on the radio and thus stay away from their own games. Immediately after the modification of the ban was made public, Navy and Columbia announced that they would resume broadcasting their games. “Eastern Football is Banned on Radio,” *New York Times*, 28 June 1932, 27. “Banned on Radio,” 27.

indicate a slow but steady trickle of football news, none of them suggest that interest in the gridiron was on the rise in the United Kingdom.\textsuperscript{104}

In the second half of the 1930s commentaries again returned to comparisons of the three codes of Association, Ruby, and American football. In the winter of 1936, fans saw a particularly heated London derby between Arsenal and Chelsea. After a game marked by rough play, the \textit{Times}’s association football corresponded commented,

There were times on Saturday when it really seemed that it would be better to give up the pretence that football was being played, organize a new pastime with rules borrowed from American football and all-in wrestling and legalize a free-fight with a ball thrown in somewhere.\textsuperscript{105}

It is obvious that the writer counted on the fact that the words “American football” would conjure up particular associations in his readers, none of them favorable. Given these popular notions, it does not surprise that English rugby players again set out to convince Americans of the more civilized character of their game in the spring of 1938. That year’s tour of Cambridge University Rugby team to the United States was the second since 1934. According to the \textit{Times}, “the object of the tour was in no way competitive, but rather educational; the Cambridge mission was to try, by actual play, to teach the ever-growing number of Rugby players in the Eastern States some of the finer points of the game.” The Cambridge men played six matches scoring 216 points while conceding only


\textsuperscript{105} “An Unpleasant Game at Highbury,” \textit{Times (London)}, 21 December 1936, 6.
six against them. Next to narrow fields constructed for American football, the English lads reportedly struggled with the American ignorance of the finer points of the game:

The blocking and interference which amount to obstruction, are two phases of attack and defence in American Football …demand more attention from coaches and players than almost anything else in the game; it is therefore natural that a player coming straight from America Football to Rugby should fall back upon such tactics until he learns, from force of habit, that they are not part of the Rugby game.106

The tour made clear that there was still much need for education on each other’s football codes on both sides of the Atlantic. Stanley Woodward of the New York Herald Tribune picked up the cause in June, 1939, when the Times of London published his sizeable article entitled “Sports and Spectators: Popular Games of Impact.” “If you substitute baseball for cricket and the savage heavily armoured game of American football for Rugby,” the American journalist wrote, “the sports programmes of the United States will check almost sport for sport with those of the British Isles.” Woodward explained that “college, —and lately the professional—football” dominated the American sports scene in the autumn: “For three months in the fall the nation lapses into a schizophrenia whose symptoms must be seen to be believed.” English readers learned that the reason for the hysteria lied in the American preference for vigorous physical contact:

In general the American sports spectator, the so-called “fans,” appear to like sports in which there is impact. …American football has impact in each manoeuvre. In our game interference is legal, and the player is taught form his schooldays that the most important phase of the game is to knock down the defensive enemy and clear the way for the runner. This basic principle of American football makes our players notoriously poor at Rugby. …Starting as a

copy of the traditional English game, American football has developed in the
diametrically opposite direction.\textsuperscript{107}

Thus the American journalist confirmed the impressions the English observer of the
Cambridge tour had shared the year before. Once more, the key difference between rugby
and American football was found in the latter’s interference and what would sport
philosophers later would term brutal, but legal, body contact. In Woodward’s eyes,
Americans simply preferred their version of football because its rules legalized more
“impact.”\textsuperscript{108}

World War II certainly had its impact on England. As it had done before, war against
Germany made Great Britain and the United States close allies and brought more
American troops to the British Isles, who in turn brought their sports. Already before the
United States joined the active warfare, English listeners to the “Programme for the
Forces” were able to catch the spirit of college football. For example, on October 16,
1940 the morning broadcast featured “American college football songs” on a day on
which the program also included news in French, Dutch, and German, as well as sports
news from Canada. Although these programs were primarily directed to military
personnel, limited options on the airwaves most certainly ensured that some avid civilian
listeners also caught these shows. In the afternoon of Saturday November 14, 1942, these
radio enthusiasts could have listened to a report of an American football game from


\textsuperscript{108} Michael Smith defined “brutal body contact” as one of the categories of his sports violence typology.
According to Smith, football’s tackling and blocking are widely accepted in America—though historically
not uncontested—and legal since it conforms to the official rules of the sport as well as the law of the land.
Smith, Violence and Sport, 8.
Northern Ireland, as well as a five-minute presentation of the “American Sports Bulletin.”

The spring of 1943 returns us to the erroneous announcement mentioned at the onset of this chapter. On April 22, the *Times* confidently told its readers “the first game of American football ever to be seen in this country” was to be played at White City Stadium on May 8:

The game has been arranged by the Athletic Branch of the Special Service Section of the United States at the request of the sports committee of the British Red Cross. No expenses are being charged either by the White City authorities or the United States Army, so that the whole of the money paid at the gates will go to the Prisoners of War Fund. There will be no advanced booking for seats.

The two Army teams consisted of a Field Artillery unit and an Engineer unit that went by the nicknames of Crimson Tide and Fighting Irish, respectively. According to a later publication in which His Royal Highness the Duke of Gloucester thanked the donors to the Red Cross and St. John Fund, the game ended up contributing over £1,600 to the

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109 “Broadcasting: Programme for the Forces,” *Times (London)*, 16 October 1940, 6. “Broadcasting: Programme for the Forces,” *Times (London)*, 14 November 1942, 8. Given the history of football in England, is likely that this was not the first time American soldiers staged a football game in Ireland and Northern Ireland. In 1988, the Republic of Ireland hosted the first NCAA Division 1-A football game in Europe. 42,524 saw Boston College defeat Army by a score of 38-24 in Lansdowne Road Stadium in Dublin. The game was telecasted to the United States, Iceland, Okinawa, Cuba, Korea “and the entire U.S. Atlantic and Pacific fleet.” The Emerald Isle Football Classic was a brainchild of American Jim O’Brien, a former Boston College football player. Similar to the situation in Great Britain, American football’s growth in Ireland was facilitated by television broadcasts of NFL games. In 1984, the first live Super Bowl aired in Ireland. By 1988 Ireland’s American Football Association counted 10 amateur teams. Russel Gray asserted that the organizers of the Army-Boston College contest went out of their way to treat Irish spectators to a “real” college football experience: “The game itself was just part of the show. Among other attractions were the marching bands, drum majors, cheerleaders, twirler, and West Point Glee Club that enlivened a Dublin parade and a pre-game rally on St. Stephen’s Green …the previous afternoon. … Though the Goodyear blimp made no appearance, an unmanned one-third scale dirigible was tethered about the north end of the grounds.” The singing of the Star Spangled Banner, mascots, and parachutists completed the American spectacle. Russel W. Gray, “Dublin’s First Hurrah: American College Football Comes to Ireland,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 24 (1990): 113-16.

110 “American Football: A Match to be Played at the White City,” 2.
cause. That was almost twice as much as the organizers of a baseball game on the 
grounds of the Everton Football Club were able to raise. But charity was only a 
byproduct for the parties, which were about to go to duke it out on the gridiron. The 
teams had met twice before, each taking one game, and were now to square off for a 
deciding game three. The game was also going to provide all the entertaining trimmings 
readers in England had heard about:

The match is to be played under the collegiate rules of 1942 and the teams will 
wear complete regulation equipment. Two United States Army bands will be in 
attendance, and there will be cheer leaders and cheering sections reserved for 
soldiers.112

On Tuesday May 4, the *Times* continued to build anticipation for Saturday’s game by 
sharing that “preparations for the first public exhibition of American football ever to be 
given in this country are well advanced.” Ticket prices could reportedly be bought for 10, 
5, 2, and 1 shilling.113 From this second announcement we also know that this would be 
“the third game in a series which was begun in Northern Ireland last summer.” This 
makes it possible that the aforementioned radio broadcast of a football game from that

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111 The list of donors included: “£1,653 Is. 9d.—The White City Stadium, W.12. (American Football 
Match)… £860—Everton Football Club Co., LTD (Baseball Match)” “H.R.H. The Duke of Gloucester 
Thanks the Following Donors to the Red Cross & St. John Fund,” *Times (London)*, 30 July 1943, 3.

112 “American Football: A Match to be Played at the White City,” 2.

113 On May 8, the day of the game, the *New York Times* printed a report by the Associated Press. According 
to the source, four thousand advanced tickets had been sold at a top price of $2, and organizers hoped for 
than 30,000 spectators, “the majority civilians.” The engineers were “coached by Captain Tom Nurnburger 
May 1943, 13.
country the previous November came from the second of the three games. Meanwhile,
the paper’s correspondent seemed quite excited about the upcoming exhibition:

As the *Stars and Stripes*, the daily newspaper in the E.T.O. [European Theater of
Operation] so aptly put it in a recent article, “everything from A to Z in the
football alphabet will be on display.” One learns from the same source that
Crimson Tide will “throw everything in the books at the Fighting Irish” and that
the latter will stick to straight “hit’em hard and knock’em over” football.
Spectators will have points in the game explained to them over the loud-
speakers.\textsuperscript{114}

On Thursday, the coverage continued with a brief notice that the two teams “are having a
private try-out to-morrow afternoon. Neither team will see the other at work. On Saturday
there will be seats and standing room for over 30,000 spectators.\textsuperscript{115}

On game day, the *Times* devoted two large articles to the affair. The first conveyed
more conventional information about the game, but the second concerned itself with just
how spectators should partake of a game they knew little about. In the first piece, the
*Times*’s “special correspondent” once more advertised the game as an historic event:

American football, which has often been seen on the films but never in the flesh
in this country, will be played at the White City this afternoon in aid of the British
Red Cross Prisoners of War Fund. The match is America’s gesture to Great
Britain for the hospitality their troops have received here. There is still
accommodations for more than 40,000 spectators at 1s. and 2s. each. The
preliminaries will be begun at 2pm. And the match at 2.30.\textsuperscript{116}

It may be noteworthy that admission prices appeared to have dropped since the earlier
announcements, while the publicized capacity increased. In addition, the reference to
American football in movies confirms that America’s movie industry had played its part

\textsuperscript{114} “American Football: Saturday’s Game at the White City,” *Times (London)*, 4 May 1943, 2.

\textsuperscript{115} “American Football,” *Times (London)*, 6 May 1943, 2.

\textsuperscript{116} “American Football: To-Day’s Match at the White City,” *Times (London)*, 8 May 1943, 2.
in spreading the gridiron gospel. Given the expectations these movie depictions probably had raised in British audiences, the following promise of entertainment should not surprise:

> Every effort has been made to make the affair like an inter-Collegiate game “back home”; there will be cheering sections and cheer leaders, two United States Army bands, a parade of the Women’s Services, and so on.\(^{117}\)

While such ballyhoo might have been what some readers hoped for, others apparently had to be reassured that the match would not just be show but a serious contest:

> “In Ireland each team has beaten the other once, this will be the deciding game and no mere exhibition.” The text continued with a comprehensive explanation of rules and regulations that indicated that the writer either had previous knowledge of the game or had done thorough research on the subject. Similar to earlier pieces, the described differences between rugby and American football focused on forward passes (“which are a spectacular feature of this spectacular game”), obstruction, and signal calling. In regards to the latter it almost seemed as if one team adopted a no-huddle offense: “The Fighting Irish will call their ‘plays’ from a ‘huddle,’ which is a gathering of the players about 10 yards behind the line of scrimmage, to determine the next ‘play.’ The Crimson Tide signals will be called from the line of scrimmage and by a code previously arranged.” And finally, the writer reinforced football’s reputation as a rough sport by stating, “American football is a dangerous game and the players are suitably padded, each man’s equipment weighing about 10lb.” In comparison to reports from the turn of the century, it is noteworthy that that the writer referred to football as “a dangerous,” but not

\(^{117}\) Ibid.
a brutal or violent game. Undoubtedly, this author meant to promote football in general and the upcoming game in particular.\textsuperscript{118}

In a second article, the \textit{Times} extended its efforts to instill in British observers “the right frame of mind.” “To-day’s American football match at White City must necessarily have an audience sharply divided into two sections,” proposed the paper, “one informed and nostalgic, the other filled with an uneducated but friendly curiosity.” The rest of the article did not make clear whether the former group would consist of British spectators, who had through one way or another heard about the game, or American expatriates, who would take the opportunity to catch a taste of home. The latter might seem more likely. At any rate, it was anticipated that novices to the American code would be mystified by the display, despite being able to make out some familiar aspects:

Finely judged kicks and brilliant running are self-explanatory marvels which appeal to all; but the mysterious huddle, the words of a cryptic code which dictate the plan of the next campaign, the few painful yards gained as a result—these things, of which many have read but which very few have seen, may at first puzzle rather than entrance.\textsuperscript{119}

How then was a reader of the \textit{Times} interested in attending to approach this game? The writer suggested, “The finer points of the play at a new game must needs be hidden from him, but let him look for the skill with sympathetic intelligence, rather than approach it in the mood of loutish criticism. Based on late Herbert Leeder, introduced as “an almost omniscient authority on the sport in the United States,” readers were told “that of all such pursuits into which Americans throw themselves with a passionate eagerness of

\textsuperscript{118} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{119} “Other People’s Games,” 5.
painstaking, football represented the highest technical achievement. So the skill is there in abundance if the spectator has eyes to see it."\(^{120}\)

Despite the promised display of technical ingenuity, a quality that had become part of how Europeans imagined America, the exhibition was admittedly bound to fall short of the real thing.\(^{121}\) "There must be one intensely important element lacking in a strange game in a strange land, and that is atmosphere," cautioned the paper. Missing from such exhibition as staged by American teams playing baseball in England would be "the red hot fury of partisanship." Even if local crowds knew about the foreign customs of native connoisseurs, the writer feared it would be mere mimicry: "If the audience were conscientiously to get up and stretch themselves in the orthodox manner after the seventh innings [sic], it would be but a poor artificial attempt at verisimilitude." Once more the reader may have wondered what would be the proper way to partake of the American display.\(^{122}\)

In the face of the proposed dilemma, the article concluded with an almost poetic pep talk encouraging the British onlooker to take a side in the contest:

Let him read, if he can light on it, an account of Yale journeying south to meet its doom in Georgia—the crowds and the throbbing of the band and the processions, and, above all, the playing of “Dixie.” Failing that, he may recall the long trains of sleeping-cars that in happier days waited at King’s Cross to take him to Edinburgh and Murrayfield, the parading up and down Princes Street next

\(^{120}\) Ibid.


\(^{122}\) “Other People’s Games,” 5.
morning, and the small boys in their tasseled caps proclaiming that they too in their lesser world had fought not without glory. It may almost move him to excited tears. If he can attain this mood in the White City; if he can take sides, whether for Artillery or Engineers—and watching a game without partisanship is but a poor anemic business—he will at worst have been sympathetic, and at best may find himself swept off his feel into rapturous cheering.123

Thus, the *Times* defined the right frame of mind to observe “Other People’s Games.” Judging by the post-game report, not too many of the British observers were able to get themselves into the game in the manner suggested.

On Monday the *Times* reported that “perhaps the chief impression left on the minds of the non-American visitors among the 25,000 on the ground was that this game had too many delays and, judging by Rugby or Association Football standards, was slow almost, at times, to the point of becoming tedious.” The majority of the onlookers seemed unable to take the paper’s previous advice to get into the game:

Most of the British spectators missed a number of the finer points, and some, no doubt, all of them, and maybe the game would have gone with more of a swing if the audience had been more knowledgeable and therefore more appreciative of what was happening.124

In the end though, the cause for the apparent lack of enthusiasm was to be found with the American code itself, rather than the crowd, as “the fact remains…that the game is much more spasmodic than Rugby.” The report explained how downs—a novel concept for rugby fans—were followed by huddles, substitutions, time outs, or all three, which altogether hindered the flow of the game. In addition, the author blamed the relative absence of a passing and kicking for slowing down the game. Evidently it was difficult to

123 Ibid.

find occasion to report about moments of actual excitement. “We also had a splendid example in the opening seconds of how effective ‘blocking’ or ‘interference’ can be,” wrote the journalist focusing on American football’s more striking aspects for British observers. “From the kick off Herstrom, of the Irish, ran 75 yards down the right line while his colleagues bowled over like ninepins the Artillery men as they came a cross to cut of the runner.”

American readers in London may have chuckled when they opened their paper to see football’s passing game and scoring explained to those who didn’t know the game. About the pigskin it was said, “the players threw the ball, which is rather smaller than a Rugby ball, one-handed, like a javelin and with considerable accuracy;” and about the outcome of the game that it “was won by Crimson Tide, of the Field Artillery, who beat Fighting Irish, of the Engineers, by three touchdowns, and one conversion (19 points) to one touchdown (6 points).” Considering the previous promotion for the event, it may surprise that no comment was made about the advertised cheering sections, cheerleaders, and bands. Instead of the spectacle of American sports, it was once more the Yankee custom of using substitutes in their sports that drew further attention.

“The mention of substitutes, strange to our insular ears, in the recent game of American football suggests the reflection that many people are to-day taking somebody else’s place,” remarked an almost philosophical editorial three days later. It continued cleverly,

125 Ibid.

126 Ibid.
The gentleman, facetiously designated in imitation of Mr. A. N. Other as Mr. A. S. Ubstitute, has never played in so many matches in all his life. He has now played so long and so regularly that he has grown into his place and is publicly recognized. If, to continue the metaphor of games, he makes a great catch in the country, his glory is no longer anonymous.127

The reader found this poetic piece on the merit of the practice of substitution in sports and other spheres of life nestled in political news from around the world. Triggered by the recent exposure to the American mutation of rugby, the article serves to show what surprising ripples the game caused on the pages of the Times. The author went on by inserting a line from Shakespeare’s Merchant of Venice, which the reader apparently was expected to be able to put into context without additional reference to author or title: “‘A substitute shines brightly as a king until a king be by,’ but that remark of Portia’s is not now of necessity true, for the stop-gap has sometimes disclosed merits that were not conspicuous in his predecessor.” Fortunately, the following illustration of the concept of substitution in the form of “a homely example of universal appeal, in the matter of cooking” allowed even the less-well-versed reader to catch the author’s drift:

She, and sometimes he, who has been torn from normal avocations to become a cook, exhibits a gift, which but for this opportunity might have lain dormant and has with practice matured into an exquisite talent. That one whose place has been filled had many virtues; heaven forbid that she should be disparaged, but she never could master the art, let us say, of making a rice pudding. It was either too milky or too arid, and now there comes along this amateur who by pure natural genius produces the pudding of hitherto fallacious dreams.128

Using a few more obscure literary references the author then demonstrated that “substitutes have not always been rated so highly.” Finally, the writer closed by

127 “Substitutes,” Times (London), 13 May 1943, 5.

128 Ibid.
returning, without forewarning, to the theme of the *Merchant of Venice*: “Meanwhile the familiar appeal from the fevered pen of the vendor, to refuse all substitutes, falls on comparatively deaf ears.” To think that this graceful reflection was prompted by a curious custom displayed in a profane American football game… Meanwhile more people felt prompted to react to the recent exhibition and its coverage in the *Times*.¹²⁹

It appears that some readers had been paying close attention to what the *Times* wrote about American football. In response to the repeated claims that the game on between the American field artillery and engineer units was the first of its kind in England, Mr. H. W. Yoxall of Richmond, Surrey sent the following lines to the editor of the *Times*:

> The statement in your issue of May 8, that the game of American football which took place that day was the first to be seen in this country, is erroneous. I saw such a game at Stamford Bridge, between two United States service teams, in the winter of 1918-19.¹³⁰

But even Mr. Yoxall’s first experience had not been the first American football game in England, as Reverend Hugh Legge pointed out in his letter, which he sent a few days later from the rectory in Newbold de Verdun, Leicester: “On November 24, 1910, I went to the Crystal Palace, where a large crowd gathered to see a game of American football between the teams of the United States battleships Idaho and Vermont.” Given that the event took place thirty-three years ago, and judging by the accuracy of his memory, the

¹²⁹ Ibid.

The last game of American football mentioned in the *Times* before the end of the war took place in February 1944. Much of the football coverage reviewed here expressed the efforts of journalists to make sense of “other people’s games” and to compare the various codes of football for their readers. Thus this last *Times* article in this survey provides a fitting conclusion:

131 Hugh Legge, “Points from Letters,” Ibid., 18 May, 2.

The White City Stadium became the “Tea Bowl” for a few hours yesterday afternoon in memory of the Rose Bowl, the Cotton Bowl, and all the other “bowls” of American football. The occasion was a football game between the American Army, represented by the Central Base Section Pirates, and the Canadian Army, represented by the Mustangs, the first half being played under American rules, the second under Canadian rules. There were no score in the opening half, but the Canadians did well under their own rules, which allow more open play, and became the winners of a silver tea-pot, symbolizing the traditional trophies of the American game. The score in their favor was 16 points to six.  

Although active warfare would continue against Japan until August 15, peace and order had returned to war-torn London by Monday, July 23 1945 and its residents enjoyed a “rather warm” day. May 8 had brought victory to the allies in Europe; and with both the Trinity test in the desert of New Mexico and the Potsdam Conference in defeated Germany taking place the week prior, World War II was coming to an end and the Cold War was already lurking on the horizon. When the NFL brought its first European exhibition game to London in 1983 the Cold War context was evident in another letter to the editor of the *Times*. An appalled Mr. T. M. Sharman of Oxford wrote, “Sir, It is bad enough to agree to have cruise missiles here in England, but to have American football as well must surely herald the end of our ancient and revered civilisation.” Though war in Europe had gone from hot to cold in the intervening four decades, the spread of American military, business, and popular culture remained intertwined with all its intended and unintended consequences.  

133 “American Football at the White City,” *Times (London)*, 14 February 1944, 2.  

134 “Network of interdependencies” and their “intended and unintended consequences” are part of the theoretical backbone of figurational or process-sociology based on the work of Norbert Elias. Based on Elias’ *What is Sociology*, Maguire writes, “Figurational sociology is concerned with examining the multiple networks of interdependence that both constrain and enable the actions of people. The integration and dynamics of figurations cannot be understood simply in terms of the plans and intentions of individuals but must be explained in terms of the whole network of unintended interdependencies within which intentional
military, radio, and the *Times* once more came together in bringing impressions of American football to people in England in a two-hour afternoon broadcast of “records of American Service football songs”\(^{135}\)

**See a Reel Game: American Football on England’s Stages and Screens**

In addition to live exhibitions and radio broadcasts, British audiences were exposed to football through America’s powerful entertainment industry. Analyzing the selling of American movies overseas, Robert Sklar maintains,

> American movies presented American myths and American dreams…. What attracted foreign audiences to American movies on an everyday basis was their implicit descriptions of American values and styles, their speed, humor, brashness, glamour, their satire and violence, their open spaces and glittering cities, their cowboys and entrepreneurs.\(^{136}\)

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Even though the *Times* as a source of information on which movies played in London does not reveal the availability of these movies outside of the metropolis, the size and make-up of the audiences, nor their social circumstances, the survey shows that the gridiron was the subject of several American productions to reach British shores.\(^\text{137}\) As Sklar points out, it is important not only to consider the number of films shown in a country, but also the frequency of bookings and play dates. For example, “In France during the silent period, for example, American films consistently comprised more than two thirds of all films released, yet they were largely confined to a few Parisian theatres.” Despite the lack of more detailed information about the market reach of American football movies, the overall control American productions had over the British film market in the 1920s is undisputed: “In Great Britain more than 80 percent of the films shown were American, and British producers succeeded in claiming no more than 4 to 5 percent of their domestic market.” In 1927, British Parliament enacted a quota system that called for a 7.5 percent distribution share of British made movies in the home market by

the next year, which was to be increased to 20 percent by 1936, but the legislation’s effect was limited. According to Sklar, American companies circumvented the restrictions by establishing production units for quota films in England, as well as buying controlling interest in Britain’s biggest production-distribution-exhibition company. 138

As a 1923 comment in London’s *Morning Post* demonstrates, the power of the American film industry was certainly not lost on local observers:

> If the United States abolished its diplomatic and consular services, kept its ships in harbour and its tourists at home, and retired from the world’s markets, its citizens, its problems, its towns and countryside, its roads, motor cars, counting houses and saloons would still be familiar in the uttermost corners of the world. … The film is to America what the flag was once to Britain. By its means Uncle Sam may hope some day, if he be not checked in time, to Americanize the world. 139

Although we cannot know for certain how British viewers received these movies, it may be safe to assume that some of them came to associate low-rate American popular culture with these productions, while for others football America may have become an imaginary place of suspense, pleasure, and entertainment. Either way, frequent moviegoers in London had plenty of opportunity to form an opinion about American football. 140

138 Sklar, *Movie-Made America*, 218-19, 220-21. Compared to the situation in Great Britain, Hollywood’s impact was much less pronounced in Weimar Germany. Several factors limited Hollywood’s market share in Germany at the time: during World War I Germany had built a strong domestic movie industry; until 1921, Germany made motion picture import illegal; and the introduction of sound in 1929 and its related translation issues diminished the inroads Hollywood had made in Germany in 1923-1924. Regarding the consequences of the sound revolution for the American movie in Germany, Saunders writes, “Since dialogue and, where applicable, song, were in English, titles and subtitles were required to translate at least the most critical phrases for German viewers. The only other options, both tired but not well received in the early sound era, were to produce multilingual versions with native actors or to dub pictures after completion into German.” Saunders, *Hollywood in Berlin*, 5, 222, 224.


140 In the early 1980s Ien Ang studied the reception of the American television show *Dallas* by Dutch viewers. She had placed an ad in a Dutch women’s magazine inviting readers to tell her why they liked
Already early in the century, American theater and movie productions transported images and ideas about American football across the Atlantic, thus gradually introducing the sport to European audiences and creating mutual reference points. For example, in 1908 London’s Adelphi Theatre staged George Ade’s *The College Widow*. A review provided *Times* readers with a summary of the plot:

> Love and football are the ruling passions in the breast of young Indiana—and football of course must come first. Atwater (Presbyterian) must beat Bingham (Baptist); and so the railroad-king’s son, Billy Bolton, who visits Atwater on his way to Bingham, is kept there. He is the best half-back in the world, and, as he has only played so far for three different colleges in three years, he has still a fourth year and a fourth college at his disposition. That college must be Atwater, not Bingham.141

In the play, the irresistible president’s daughter, the “college widow,” is called upon to keep the star at Atwater to win the big Thanksgiving Day game. In addition to summarizing the plot, the theater critic impressed upon readers stereotypical images of American college life with a litany of examples that included a number of football references:

> To belong to an American college—in Indiana, at any rate—must be “an awfully big adventure. … Think of …the “town-girls,” who know more about football

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than you do and are even capable of advising the team. Think of learning to do the college cry, “A-t-w-a-t-e-r! Atwater Atwater! Ra! Ra! Ra!” all the time, and with the correct gestures.142

American audiences may have seen the play as a parody of college life, but at least this English reviewer did not seem to make such a connection: “Why does [author George Ade] call it a satire? It is nothing of the sort. It is a very kindly, amusing picture of strange habits, high spirits, and honest feeling, and every moment of it is enjoyable.”143

In February 1910 an article on a newly arrived three-act play by American author Edward Locke stated the following:

It appears that The Climax has been a great success in America; and you can well understand it. The play serves up just that kind of homely, obvious humour, saccharine sentiment, and cheap science which you find in so many American plays and in every popular American magazine. Incidentally, it dwells on the contrast between some half-baked, unsophisticated, Puritanical Azalea, Ohio, and the aesthetic-intellectual emancipation of New York—which is not perhaps quite so far ahead of Azalea as I fondly suppose. …On the whole [the play] is artless to puerility… the best that can be said for it is that it is preferable to an American football play. Somehow American plays do not export so well as American apples.144

The crushing review certainly suggests that the critic had a low regard for American popular culture with its “cheap science.” Apparently the only way to describe the dreadfulness of the production was to say that it was still better than an American football

142 Ibid.

143 Ibid. As with anything journalists wrote about American football, the opinions of theater and film critics do not tell us how actual audiences received those movies, what meanings they brought to them, or what they made of the depictions of American football. However, they did frame the opinions of those who read the reviews in their newspapers. Oriard makes a similar point in King Football: “Unfortunately, this book cannot be a history of what football meant to its actual fans…but only of the media universe within they lived.” Oriard, King Football, 17.

144 “Comedy Theatre,” Times (London), 18 February 1910, 12.
play. Whether “play” was meant to refer to a specific action on the gridiron or a theatre production with football as its theme, it is clear that the Times’s writer assumed his readers would understand the reference and thus associate American football with lack of class and refinement.

Because of the common language and the countries’ military alliance throughout the twentieth century, English theatre audiences were more likely to see American plays than audiences in other European countries. Hence, they were exposed to content and references related to American football earlier and more often than their continental counterparts. The same is true for the moving pictures, where football related examples abound. Comparing the different mass media that delivered representations of football to Americans between 1920s through the 1940s, Oriard notes, “Though few were big hits, football movies reached the largest audiences of all.” It seems safe to assume that the same holds true for the way the British encountered the gridiron. A cursory search found several combined references to American football and the film world in the Times alone.\(^\text{145}\)

During the silent movie era, several American football tales reached British shores. In all cases mentioned here, the movies were released in England either in the same year or the year after they premiered in the United States. According to Times’s listing of films playing in the London area, Brown of Harvard made two appearances. In November 1919 it played at the Stoll Picture Theater. In January 1927, the Capitol hosted a remade, but still silent, version, in which John Wayne made his screen début as a member of the

\(^{145}\) Oriard, King Football, 57.
Yale football team. According to Oriard, “football films settled into a handful of formulas in the 1920s, the master narrative concerning a hero who overcomes some obstacle to win the big game in the final minutes.” In the case of Brown of Harvard (released in the United States in 1926), as well as The Plastic Age (1925), and College Days (1926), “heroes fell into dissipation or became entangled with dangerous women, then found their senses in time.”

A movie called College Days played on screens in London in January 1926, but it was not the same as the aforementioned. Its arrival was first foreshadowed by the Times in May 1925, when it mentioned, “Mr. Harold Lloyd’s new film, Rah Rah, made for the American firm of ‘Famous-Lasky,’ is now completed. It deals with American football, and will soon be seen in this country.” Starring Harold Lloyd as Harold “Speedy” Lamb, the movie was eventually released in the United States under the title The Freshman in 1925, and a year later as College Days in the United Kingdom. The changed title and the Times’s following comment revealed the apparent issues that were involved in marketing American football movies across cultures:


This is one of the rare occasions on which the strange language of American subtitles seems not out of place. If a moving picture has for its subject the adventures of a too romantic freshman at an American university, and if its principal scenes lie in and about a football stadium, we must expect to be asked at the outset some question such as this:—“Do you remember your college days, when it was a higher ambition to be right tackler than Premier?”

The Times went on to summarized the show, which ran simultaneously in at least three major theaters in London, as follows:

Harold Lamb, nicknamed Speedy, whose ambition is to be voted most popular student at Tate College, and guilelessly makes his plans on the basis of a moving-picture and a pile of handbooks on college cries and college etiquette. …far from being the college hero he supposes himself to be, he is, in the splendid subtitular tongue, the “college boob,” he makes a supreme effort to retrieve his fortunes by thrusting himself uninvited into the football team. The trainer makes him the “water boy,” a position, we gather, of abasement and humility, but Speedy imagines that he is a chosen substitute and that, if only enough players are injured on the great day, his chance will come. So there he sits on the bench at the edge of the stadium, dressed in the uniform of a player and Mr. Lloyd’s gigantic spectacles. …When at last the stretchers and ambulances have so far done their work that Speedy can be denied his opportunity no longer, his rush for the field is the rush of an enthusiast going to the chance of his life.”

Even though the movie was a comedy, this description fits what patrons of the Times had read regarding football’s alleged need for nurses, stretchers, and ambulances two decades earlier.


149 Ibid. This storyline may remind of that of The Waterboy (1998). Internet Movie Database notes about Waterboy, “Suzanne Lloyd Hayes, granddaughter of silent screen star Harold Lloyd, filed a $50 million dollar lawsuit against the Walt Disney Company in 2000, claiming that this movie was a rip-off of Lloyd’s silent film classic The Freshman (1925). By 2002, the courts had ruled against her.” Trivia for The Waterboy (1998), (Internet Movie Database Inc., accessed 10 June 2005); available from http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0120484/trivia. The Freshman was also a hit in Germany, which Thomas Saunders attributes to Lloyd’s star power. Saunders, Hollywood in Berlin, 160.

150 On December 26, 1905 an American correspondent Times readers, “the surgeon and ambulance, which some perhaps regard as necessary accompaniments of the American game, exist only in the kind of game described by humorous papers.” American Correspondent, “Football in America,” 8. Oriard points out that
The Plastic Age, a romantic campus comedy involving an ambitious freshman athletic star falling for popular party girl, played in London in October 1926. Movifgoers in England’s metropolis were as familiar with this basic formula as their American counterparts, when The College Widow returned to London in 1928. Silent movie star Dolores Costello, Drew Barrymore’s grandmother, starred as the female lead in this movie adaptation of the original stage play.  

Oriard says about movies like The Plastic Age and Brown of Harvard,

These films let viewers glimpse at the joy of being young and beautiful and athletic in a place where those qualities were all that mattered. The world of college football became one of those scenes in popular fantasy where privileged youth played out their culture’s desire.

In the summer of 1929, College Love brought not only a slight variation to the familiar theme of the campus comedy, it also stood apart from its predecessors because it was “All-Talking and Singing.” The story revolved around a college football player taking the fall for a friend who had past out drunk the night before a game. As such the movie belongs to a series of 1920s football films in which, “others were falsely accused or nobly took the blame for a misguided teammate, but again were exonerated, and again just in the nick of time.”

The Freshman satirized “the innumerable boys’ stories written by the pseudonymous Burt L. Standish, Ralph Henry Barbour, and others.” Oriard, King Football, 57.


152 Oriard, King Football, 170.

153 “Picture Theatres: Marble Arch Pavilion,” Times (London), 20 August 1929. Oriard, King Football, 393. For the plot summary, see: College Love (1929), (Internet Movie Database Inc., accessed 11 June 2005); available from
Part silent, part talkie, *The Time, The Place and the Girl* marked the dawn of the 1930s college football musical. Patrons of the Piccadilly Theatre saw the Warner Brothers production in October 1929, and learned how football stars enjoyed preferred treatment by their school’s alumni. Those English viewers who preferred drama over musical could catch a fictional version of the Army-Navy football rivalry in *Salute* in December. With the *Times*’s annual report on the outcome of the clash between Army and Navy, some moviegoers may have been able to appreciate the drama of the story, which pitted Army cadet John against his brother and midshipman Paul on and off the gridiron.\(^{154}\)

In January 1930 fans of the silver screen could not only see *Sweetie*, another football musical, but also *So, This is College*, advertised as “ALL-TALKING, Laughing, Sensation. The Happy Hit of the Happy Season.” The tale, starring Robert Montgomery in one of his first major roles, told of two University of Southern California (USC) teammates vying over the same girl and featured actual footage of the 1928 USC-Stanford game.\(^{155}\) The same month the *Times* reported about *Flight*, a new all-talking film directed by Frank Capra, revealed that one of the movie’s heroes would be “sent on to the

http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0019782/?ref_=c2l0ZT1kZnxteD0yMHxsbT01MDB8dHQ9b258ZmI9dXxwbj0wHE9Q29sbGVnZSBM3ZlfGh0bWw9MXxubT1vb__;fc=1;ft=21;fm=1.


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field in the last two minutes— they do these things in American football—of an inter-
university football mach, ‘Lefty’ promptly scores a try, if that be the correct word, for the
wrong side.”  

1932 brought more American football drama and comedy to London in the form of
Horse Feathers, 70,000 Witnesses, Rackety Rax, and That’s My Boy. In September, the
Marx Brothers came over England with “a new humorous fantasy called Horse
Feathers,” in which Groucho, Harpo, Chico, and Zeppo parodied the standard heroic
football drama. Given that both the stage and the screen versions of The College Widow
had played in London, some local viewers may have even understood the references
made by the Marx Brothers to that mysterious woman. Even without such insight, the
slapstick of the football game may have translated well enough for British audiences, as a
review in the Times indicated:

Harpo and Zeppo, imprisoned in an upper room, saw away the piece of the floor
on which they are sitting and hurtle down to embed themselves in the ground
three storeys below. It is their nearest way to the football field on which they
score several tries by novel means. Once Zeppo would have no chance of
reaching the touch-line did not Harpo drop pieces of banana skin under the feet of
the pursuing players, and on another occasion it is a piece of string attached to the
ball that enables them to throw the whole opposing team on to a false scent. Their
humour, however elusive to an earnest critic, goes straight to its mark with the
average audience.  

156 The scene was inspired by Roy Riegels’ highly publicized sixty-yard dash toward his own team’s goal
line during the Rose Bowl on January 1, 1929. See: “Riegels’s 60-Yard Run Toward Wrong Goal Helps
Georgia Tech Win on Coast, 8-7,” New York Times, 2 January 1929, 35. “Capitol Theatre,” Times
(London), 15 January 1930, 12.

Indeed, average Englishmen and –women appeared to have liked the farce well enough for the film to continue its run in at least two London theatres in February 1933.\textsuperscript{158}

However, the likes of the British “earnest critic” may never have embraced either America’s comedy or its football. In 1938, another \textit{Times} commentator was not quite as forgiving as the former had been. In a lengthy article that discussed the Marx Brothers as an example of “American Film Humour” it said,

\begin{quote}
To understand the Marx Brothers it is necessary to understand American humour. Although Lewis Carroll wrote nonsense so brilliantly, and was hailed as a genius by his countrymen, it is doubtful if the average Englishman will ever take kindly to comedy based on a complete denial of reality; the American, on the other hand, is fascinated by it.\textsuperscript{159}
\end{quote}

This may be a case in which the opinion of the cultural critic diverged from that of the general public. Since the Forum on Villiers Street brought back \textit{Horse Feathers} in the summer of 1939, it seems that the Marx Brothers found at least a viable niche in the British market.\textsuperscript{160}

In November 1932, the Plaza showed \textit{70,000 Witnesses}, described by the \textit{Times} as an American movie with the original concept a murder during a football game. Only two months after its American October release, \textit{Rackety Rax} opened in London. Hailed in America by \textit{Time Magazine} as “a brilliant travesty on college football and racketeering,” \textit{Times} called it “another of those robust satires on phases of American life which the Americans do so well and with such evident enjoyment, and this time it is the turn of

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{158} “Other Picture Theatres,” \textit{Times (London)}, 27 February 1933, 10.

\textsuperscript{159} “Entertainments: American Film Humour,” \textit{Times (London)}, 13 July 1938, 14.

\textsuperscript{160} “Picture Theatres: Forum,” \textit{Times (London)}, 3 June 1939, 10.
\end{flushleft}
American sport to suffer.” Also in December, That’s My Boy entertained crowds in London with another college football drama, in which the hero first falls from glory by accepting a high-pay/no-work summer job, only to later redeem himself and finally scoring the winning touchdown. A young John Wayne again appeared as a football player alongside actual members of the 1931 USC national champion team.\textsuperscript{161}

There was no shortage of gridiron images in the remainder of the years leading to World War II. In June 1933, football and Bing Crosby were featured prominently in College Humor, another campus musical, and the Army-Navy game returned in West Point of the Air, billed as “The Mightiest of Air Romances,” as well as in Navy Blue and Gold, in April 1935 and November 1937, respectively. Also in 1937, English moviegoers were treated to the American weekly newsreel March of Time; and Times readers knew that the sixth installment of the series “shows how specialized and professionalized American University football has become.” In the same year, the people at Fox decided to rename Judy Garland’s feature début in Pigskin Parade for the British market. Concerned that local audiences might be unfamiliar with the football term, the musical was released as Harmony Parade. The Times summarized the show as follows:

A minor university in Texas gets, by mistake, an invitation from Yale to play them at that branch of big business, American University football, and they win

the game by signing on a yokel who can sling melons with perfect accuracy from anything that looks to be 100 yards upwards.162

A Yank at Oxford made its appearance on London’s screens in late March 1938. The movie tells of the adventures of sporty, spoiled and smug “Lee Sheridan of America” at Oxford’s Cardinal College. Although the story focused largely on Sheridan’s love interests and heroics on Oxford’s crew team, one of the movies early scenes touches on the different football codes played on either side of the Atlantic. Newly arrived in England and on a train ride to Oxford, star athlete Sheridan brags to fellow British students about his accomplishments on the gridiron. Upon the American’s question what kind of football would be played at Oxford, the Englishmen reply they would play both kinds: rugby and association football. The light-hearted comedy made quite a splash in London. It was the first Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer production to be shot on location in England. The film’s anticipated premiere on Thursday March 31 at the Empire Cinema drew a long list of dignitaries led by the American ambassador and several members of parliament. The movie’s accuracy of the depiction of traditions and decorum of student life at Oxford came under much scrutiny by the British public. “The customs of the undergraduates, their initiation ceremonies, celebrations, and methods of expressing public disapproval, have clearly been studied by a competent anthropologist,” judged the Times’s reviewer. If anything, it would be the character of the American visitor that seemed a bit too unbelievable. The journalist wondered, “is he not a trifle too much like a

stage Yankee in an English comedy?” Several letters to the editor of the *Times* expressed
that others were not quite as convinced by the American account of Oxford’s treasured
traditions. These readers bemoaned a number of “trivial but rather irritating and surely
quite unnecessary mistakes.” Notwithstanding such critical reception, the comedy of
cultural exchange on the athletic fields of the old and the new world appeared to appeal to
audiences in both England and the United States.163

A year after the release of *A Yank at Oxford*, Hollywood again played trading
places—this time with a slight variation in the roles of visitor and host. In May 1939, just
a few months before Germany invaded Poland, Londoners could still enjoy the
adventures of *The Duke of West Point*, an American “having been educated in England
and having played Rugby football for Cambridge, he is as an effeminate dandy whose
supercilious manners are bound to make him unpopular with his new associates.”
Reviewers of the *Times* seemed to enjoy the English-American twist, plus there were
“good scenes of American football, ice-hockey, military parades, and many curious
sidelights on the tradition and customs of West Point.” *Come on, Leathernecks* (February

163 ‘‘A Yank At Oxford:’ Charity Performance At Empire,’’ *Times (London)*, 4 March 1938, 12. “Empire
1938, 13. By September the movie had reached smaller screens; see: “Films in the Suburbs and Provinces:
‘A Yank At Oxford’,” *Times (London)*, 5 September 1938, 10. The movie title appears to have lingered in
the memory of Londoners, as the clever headline of a 1983 report on expatriate Americans in England’s
1939) and *Up the River* (May 1939) completed the line-up of football-themed movies on display before the war.164

World War II did not completely stop cinematic introductions to American life and sports. The silver screen continued to provide opportunities to learn about American football for those who would still make it to theaters. In the midst of Germany’s Blitz on London, Hollywood offered diversion in the form of *The Quarter-Back*, according to the *Times*, “a high-spirited, sometimes amusing and always unremarkable film of American university life as the screen would persuade us it is lived.” And finally, six months before the war ended, a very special, if unexpected, tutor of “American football 101” received raving reviews by the *Times*:

Goofy is the most attractive and human of all animals Mr. Disney has been giving us lately. Mickey, never a very outstanding personality, seems to have been forgotten. Pluto is charming but limited, and, after so many meetings with Donald Duck…who is bumptious and boring vulgarian, is indeed a pleaser to come across again. … What is more, How To Play Football is both his and Mr. Disney’s best short film for years. Goofy himself is all over the field, winning the game single-handed, while Mr. Disney, instead of relying on a raucous voice and purely fantastic incident, sees the field from all angles and points of view, fills the screen with movements, sound, and colour, and out of it all creates a gorgeously funny satire on the whole hysterical business American football sometimes seems to English eyes.165

164 “London Pavilion,” *Times (London)*, 8 May 1939, 12. “Picture Theatres: London Pavilion,” *Times (London)*, 6 February 1939, 10. “Picture Theatres: London Pavilion.” In July, the *Times’s* article on “New American Films” noted the following, “Mr. Joe E. Brown’s next comedy will probably be called A *Thousand Dollars for a Touchdown*, and in it he will appear as a frustrated Shakespearian actor who organizes a college team after reading a book on how to train a football eleven.” The actual title of the American release was *$1000 for a Touchdown*. I found no indication that the movie was released in England. “New American Films,” *Times (London)*, 14 July 1939, 12. The movie flopped with a critic of the *New York Times*, who called it “a painfully witless football farce of almost fantastic unoriginality. … It ends with Joe E. scoring the last-second touchdown by being thrown over the goal post. They threw the wrong man: Delmer Daves, who wrote it, would be our choice—and we insist on a field goal.” Frank S. Nugent, “The Screen,” *New York Times*, 5 October 1939, 32. Also see: Oriard, *King Football*, 24, 385.

According to Thomas Saunders, the era of the 1920s and 1930s “holds the key to the enduring ascendency of American popular culture,” which went hand in hand with Hollywood’s rise to international dominance:

Still a curiosity at the turn of the century, by 1918 the cinema was an ubiquitous and influential public medium. Parallel with America’s rise to global importance, it emerged as the dominant form of popular entertainment and enlightenment. As a vehicle for exporting the American way of life and stimulating demand for American products it proved unrivaled. Hollywood became the promotional guardian of the American dream and the primary instrument for domesticating American culture in Europe.166

The survey of theatre and movie listings in the Times shows that the gridiron was a recurrent image of Hollywood’s dream machine during the period until 1945. If movies had a significant role in cultivating a national audience in the United States for the commercial spectacle of American football, Goofy and a host of other screen heroes and clowns also played their part transporting imagined America and its football overseas.

**Discussion**

Maguire found that “prior to the early 1980s, American football was virtually unknown on the British cultural landscape. The game was infrequently reported and when it was, the report tended to be short and related to the annual end-of-season Super Bowl.”167 There is no doubt that American football had only a marginal place in British sports pages for much of the century. However, American football did not arrive in

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167 Maguire, *Global Sport*, 158.
England unannounced in the 1980s. This survey of American football on the pages of the *Times* turned up a sizeable amount of references. However, this summary may suggest that football was more important to the “British cultural landscape” than it actually was. The condensed and annotated presentation here can be deceiving. Over the fifty-five year stretch analyzed in this study, certainly no single reader would have been aware of each and all of the occasions the paper mentioned, at times very briefly, American football. Most of the references probably went unread or were soon forgotten. However, it is especially the shortest of references used in the expectation that readers would be familiar with the term and/or that it would conjure specific associations, which demonstrates a degree of awareness. This can be said for a veiled Shakespeare quotation as well as “American football” as a metaphor for brutality. Likewise, the letters sent to the editor of the *Times* in response to the paper’s coverage of the game in April 1943 show that some readers had been following the arrival of American football in England. Since they reached broader audiences, depictions of American football and the culture surrounding the game in theater and movie productions were even more important than actual exhibitions in raising awareness and creating certain associated images. Together these processes prepared the game’s growth spurt as a sport for British spectators and participants during the 1980s.

Stories from and about the gridiron were sprinkled on the pages of the *Times* throughout these five and a half decades. While they represented the exotic rather than the mainstream, these articles and the events they covered make an important point: The introduction of American football to England was not a one-time event or even a
development limited to one or two decades, but a gradual process over a period of close
to a century. Before the Super Bowl became an expected topic, the Harvard-Yale and
Navy-Army rivalries had made regular appearances in the Times. And before the 1983
American Bowl between Minnesota and St. Louis, and even before the 1943 game
between American service men, English audiences had seen the game played or listened
to it on the radio. All of this shows that football’s “global media-sport complex,” which
facilitated the gridiron’s popularity in England during the 1980s, had its antecedents in
the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.¹⁶⁸

As American troops crossed the Rhine in 1945, the (American) football bounced from
the British Isles to Germany. Although it would take another thirty years before football
would begin a steady grassroots development in Germany, the presence of American
troops in that country would once again be an important key in the diffusion of the game,
much as it had in the initial introduction of the gridiron in England. After World War II,
Personal contacts between American soldiers and German civilians, radio and television
programs originally intended for American forces, and eventually advancements in
telecommunication put Germans in touch with the pigskin.

¹⁶⁸ Maguire uses the term “global media-sport complex” in: Ibid.
CHAPTER 4

SECOND DOWN: ENTERING GERMANY

Getting to Know American Football

The Barbwire Bowl Classic

About thirty-years before Germans would eventually form the first long-term football clubs, leagues, and federations, a different group of Germans became familiar with pigskin and gridiron during a more involuntary stay in the United States. The first all-German football teams played in the mid-1940s in prisoner-of-war camps in California and teams in the American-occupied zone in Germany. German prisoners of war (POWs) participated in at least two organized football games during their internment in California camps. In the first game, two German teams played each other in Stockton, California on January 13, 1946. 2,000 curious onlookers gathered to watch what was termed the *Barbwire Bowl Classic*. The memories of one of the participants, an official program, and
a team photo provide detailed information about the contest, which must be considered the first between two teams made up of German players. A 1996 article in the German football weekly *Huddle* on the game captured the memories of Hubert Lüngen, who was seventy-four year-old at the time of the interview.¹

The program’s roster supplies the name, height, weight, age, hometown, and position of the twenty-one and twenty-two participants who played on the respective sides. Most of the players were in their early twenties, as was the twenty-three year old Lüngen, who led the *Fairground Aggies* as quarterback. In May of 1943, parachuter Lüngen had been captured by British troops in North Africa. He later was transferred to American POW camps in Arizona, Texas, and eventually California. Organizing sporting events for German POWs was a common practice by the American military. For example, while in Camp Hood, Texas, Lüngen’s handball team had won the camp’s championship. Other activities for prisoners included soccer and boxing.²

In December of 1945, the Commanding Officer of Camp Stockton, Kenneth Barager proposed a football game between the German prisoners of the main camp in Stockade and the smaller Fairground camp as part of the reeducation program for the POWs. The game was to be held as part of a sport festival in January. Originally the team names reflected the respective labor camps’ purpose. Since the POWs in Fairground mostly worked on tomato farms, their team was called the *Fairground Aggies*. The main camp’s


team went by Stockade Tech. Quickly, however, the teams were also given nicknames that honored the respective camp commanders. Thus, the Fairground team was also referred to as Barager’s Bears, while the Stockade squad went by Kernan’s Krushers.

It appears that the camp management went to extraordinary lengths to organize the games. The POWs who volunteered to participate in the contest went through a month of intense preparation including film studies and all-day practices. The local army team provided a handful of coaches for both teams with Sergeants Ed Tipton for the Bears and J.P. Palesynski for the Krushers as head coaches. Fairground’s coaches hoped to surprise their counterparts by devising a double-wing offense instead of the expected T-formation. In an attempt to fool the Stockade’s team, the Bears even posed in the T-formation for the photographer of the camp newspaper, which covered the preparations for the game.

The spectators, who came to see the sports festival on January 13, 1946, were treated to a special display of international sport as the program announced that “An exhibition game of soccer, the German equivalent of football, will be played, one twenty minute half before the football game, and one twenty minute half during half time of the football game.” The program further explained that the soccer teams were comprised of “star players” of the Fairground and Stockade camps. The main event of the festival, however, was clearly the football game, “The forty-three men involved have never witnessed a game played by American teams and have been playing only for one months, under the
supervision of American military personnel. Unique to the annals of sports history, the spectators…today are the first to witness anything of this type.”

Under a watchful crew of four officials led by referee Carlos Souza of the Stockton City Recreational Department, lack of familiarity with the sport resulted in a low-scoring affair. Stockade scored the only points and beat Fairground 6-0. What the players lacked in knowledge and skills, they made up with intensity. As quarterback Lüngen remembered, “For some the whole thing developed into a full-blown brawl, but the referees stepped in and sent them early to the showers.” Unsatisfied with their first outing, the Bears intensified their preparations for the rematch four weeks later and won 20-0.

Later in the same year, Lüngen was transferred to England and subsequently lost contact with his fellow-POWs with whom he had shared his football experience. Upon returning to Germany, Lüngen’s attention turned to more existential problems then jumpstarting football. What time he had for sports, he spent playing team handball. Football, however, did catch his attention when newspapers reported about German clubs playing in the 1980s. On occasion he went to watch teams like the Red Barons Cologne play the game POWs like him had been exposed to three decades before the first long-term German team was established.

4 Hubert Lüngen, interviewed by Frank Gidaszewski in ibid. My translation.
Football Reeducation

Reeducation measures also led to the incipient introduction of American sports of football and baseball in Germany. However, these efforts proved to be anemic and did not result in the establishment of these sports. Immediately after the war, Germans tried to reestablish their “normal lives” by revitalizing old sporting traditions. Former clubs were reorganized and competition resumed quickly. The occupying forces took actions to maintain control over German attempts to organize themselves in political parties, unions, and clubs. Aware of the role of sport and physical education in Nazi-Germany’s Hitler Youth and the extent to which para-military organizations were used in the 1920s to bypass the restrictions of the Treaty of Versailles, the Allies made some conscious efforts to control sports clubs and youth organizations. In its Directive No. 23 “Limitation and Demilitarization of Sport in Germany,” the Allied Control Council ordered

To prohibit the conduct and development among the German population of all military athletic organizations. This prohibition shall apply particularly to organizations engaged in Aviation, Parachuting, Gliding, Fencing, Military or Para-military drill and display, shooting with firearms. ... Every newly established sport organization of a local character must have permission from the local Allied occupation authority, and its activities will be subjected to supervision or this authority. Physical education of the youth will concentrate on elements of health, hygiene and recreation which will exclude from this type of sport elements of assimilated military character.

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6 Arnd Krüger notes that basketball caught on in post-war Germany “especially in the American occupied zone and in university towns.” Germans had first witnessed basketball during the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin. For lack of experience in the sport, second-rate team-handball players were selected to represent Germany in the Olympic tournament. Arnd Krüger, “‘We Are Sure to Have Found the True Reason for the American Superiority in Sports’: The Reciprocal Relationship Between the United States and Germany in Physical Culture and Sport,” in Turnen and Sport: The Cross-Cultural Exchange, ed. Roland Naul (New York: Waxmann, 1991), 60-61.

The American Joint Chiefs of Staff originally drafted this directive in October of 1944. Its final form in December of 1945 was the result of long Allied discussions. Finally, the United States had to give up on a statement containing a philosophy of democratization and accepted a directive that was “more restrictive than necessary.” The political reach of Directive No 23 was limited, and its implementation varied depending on the jurisdictions.8

Whereas the British had little interest in the field of education and sports and had no specific plan, the Americans had a more organized and pragmatic program. Their efforts were in part a reaction to the strong Russian commitment to reach young Germans through the “Free German Youth.” The governing Office of Military Government for Germany of the United States (OMGUS) had a separated branch for “Education and Religious Affairs.” This branch had its own “Youth Activities Section.” Even more effective was a separate program initiated by the United States Army in the fall of 1946, the Army Assistance to German Youth Activities (GYA). This program was very popular at least through 1949. It established youth centers where American and German counselors offered leisure and educational activities, and “German Boys” and “German Girls Clubs” were organized. In the American sector of Berlin alone there were about 300

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8 Ibid., 96.
youth centers in 1947. Such authorized groups included 750,000 young Germans in the beginning of the same year.9

The OMGUS programs also included American sports. The Athletic Training Program for German Youth and Sport Leaders of 1946 declared, “The program...should emphasize practical sports which may not now be widely known to German youth.”10 The rational for the introduction of new sports is unexplained. One can only speculate that the Americans relied on sports that were proven in their own educational system. On a practical level, these were the activities they knew and could teach. The Army Assistance to the German Youth Program “List of Activities” included:

- supervising and conducting classes in all types of sports, putting instructional stress on the sports unfamiliar to Germans; fostering the German Youth such sports as softball, baseball, boxing, gymnastics, track events, mountain climbing, football, soccer, horse, pitching, rowing, hiking, swimming, ping-pong, badminton, tennis, handball and volleyball; and, assisting the formation of gymnastics clubs, sport clubs, nature study clubs, football clubs and watersport clubs.11

Despite the United States’ early involvement in youth activities, traditional American sports did not gain substantial popularity during the post-war years. In the American occupied zone, Germans formed a number of short-lived baseball teams. The Marburg Angels Baseball-Club, for example, was active between 1947-1955. Similarly, a handful of German football teams existed for a short period of time in Bavaria during the late

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10 Bundesarchiv Koblenz, Aktenbestand OMGUS, Az 5/302-1/2. In: Ibid.

1940s. With the help of American military, teams formed in Bad Tölz, Freising and Fürstenfeldbruck. Werner Heim was among twenty young Germans who formed the *Fürsty Eagles* in September of 1948. The team borrowed their nickname and the necessary equipment from the Americans stationed in Fürstenfeldbruck whose military team went by the same name. The *Eagles* disbanded after only a few months in the spring of 1949, when, according to Heim, a number of team members went to study in the United States. ¹²

The reasons why these first baseball and football teams were short-lived are not clear. Baseball’s comparatively longer lifespan during the post-war era may be explained by the fact that many Germans would have been familiar with the basic idea and skills of baseball from the similar children’s game of *Schlagball*. Compared to football, baseball could also more easily be played with makeshift equipment. The institutionalized rules of football were more foreign, and the know-how and equipment to play football much less accessible for Germans. It would have taken a sustained and well-funded program to introduce football at the grassroots level to draw the German youth away from their traditional sports. The young baseball and football teams were heavily dependent on the private initiative and goodwill of nearby stationed Americans. However, the prohibition of fraternization between American military and German civilians limited opportunities for informal contacts. According to Arnd Krüger, American officials were unwilling to

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get actively involved in the reconstruction of German sports. He finds that American influence on post-war sport in Germany was largely of indirect nature as through the effects of Avery Brundage’s presidency of the International Olympic Committee from 1952-1972.\textsuperscript{13}

American youth programs had some distinct advantages over local German clubs since they were able to provide facilities and equipment. However, they lacked necessary long-term strategies to transport the American way of sport. In 1957, Harold Zink, former Chief Historian for the United States High Commissioner for Germany, mentioned two main reasons for the ineffectiveness of youth programs carried on under American auspices. He argues that the chief obstacle to creating a pendant to the aggressive Communist youth program was the democratic character of the American occupation. On a more practical level, GYA programs were largely based on voluntary leadership, and the frequent moving of American forces caused rapid shifting of leaders and a lack of continuity. The latter of the two reasons appears to be a more reasonable explanation why the American sports did not catch on in the 1940s and 1950s. Given these obstacles, young Germans had little incentive and opportunity to embrace American sports. Unlike Lucky Strike, Coca-Cola, and rock and roll, football did not capture the imagination of young Germans until the late 1970s. Germans continued to gather around the English soccer pitch, not the American gridiron.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{13} Krüger, “We Are Sure,” 62-3.

In 1954 soccer provided the definitive event in Germany’s collective postwar memory, the *Wunder von Bern*. The “miraculous” 3-2 over favorite Hungary in the World Cup final in Switzerland crowned soccer’s slow ascendance to the uncontested status as *König Fußball* in Germany. From the 1870s, modern sports had spread to Germany mainly under English influence. English merchants, travelers and students introduced modern sports like rowing and boxing to Germany. Inspired by British public school models, Konrad Koch, a high school teacher in Braunschweig, founded the first German association football club in 1874. Yet, it was not until the 1890s that the activity grew in popularity among some high school and university students, as well as some middle-class men. In Germany, soccer’s popularity exploded only after World War I when the game expanded from its white-collar roots to the working classes. After World War II, the World Cup win turned into the ultimate rally for crushed Germany. As Karasek remembers, “Suddenly… after the 90th minute, we were back. Nobody could get on our case. We had lost the war, but now we had won, we were world champions.”

**The Original Six**

The following section provides an outline of the introduction of grassroots football in Germany in the late 1970s focusing on the original six teams of the inaugural Bundesliga

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season in 1979. It shows that the presence of American military personnel was an important key in the formation of the several clubs in Germany during the late 1970s and 1980s. The proximity of most of the initial American football teams to large American military facilities indicates the significant role Americans had in the process. Americans provided the know-how, most of the players, and often practice facilities on their bases, which were otherwise hard to come by. The first broadcasts of Super Bowl highlights on German television, increasing press coverage, and football programs on the American Forces Network (AFN) also inspired Germans to pick up the game. However, ultimately the introduction of gridiron football was the outcome of coincidences and personal initiatives rather than the result of such conscious measures as reeducation or cooperate marketing.

A chance encounter between German Wolfgang Lehneis and an American Alexander Sperber led to the formation of the first significant German American football club in Frankfurt am Main in 1977. Sperber was very much a product of German-American post-war relations. He was born in 1952 on Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio, as a son to an American father, who had been stationed in Germany, and a German mother, who later became a naturalized American citizen. As the child of a military family, Sperber spent most of his youth and young adult life going back and forth between Germany and the United States. Playing for Frankfurt American High School in the military leagues, he became an all-European defensive linebacker. After going to college in America, Sperber returned to Germany to study architecture at the university in Frankfurt in 1973. During a night out on the town in the summer of 1976,
Sperber’s letterman jacket caught the eye of Lehneis. The 22-year old German bank clerk asked what the gold symbols on the jacket stood for and a conversation about American football ensued. Lehneis later remembered that family vacations in America and reading Western stories had given him “a thing for America.”

The two young men decided to gather a handful of friends for a game of touch football. A few weeks later, up to fifteen young men gathered twice a week for informal get-togethers to learn the game of football in one of Frankfurt’s public parks and the most dedicated also met on Saturdays on the field of a nearby American military base. The attention they received from bystanders and flyers distributed downtown and posted in school gymnasiums helped to recruit more football novices, many of whom had prior experiences in other sports, such as soccer, boxing, wrestling, and track and field. For example, Lehneis, whose father had founded a successful dojo in 1960, was a long-time judoka. The *Frankfurter Rundschau* appropriately referred Germany’s football pioneers as the “avant-garde from Grüneburgpark,” after the group’s gathering place. Much like generations of German youngsters who had appropriated jazz and rock and roll before them, many of these young men became interested in football because it was new and unconventional.

For example, one of Berlin’s football pioneers later remembered, 


Soccer was the old, the outdated, the boring. We always looked at football as being the young, the dynamic, that which has a future. We perceived ourselves as trendsetters [Vorreiter einer Zukunft], while soccer players were for us the old guard… the past that would disappear one day. That’s how we felt back then. We thought that we would be remembered as pioneers in forty to fifty years when there would be a professional [football] league. That’s silly, of course, but that’s how we felt back then.\textsuperscript{18}

Early in 1977, plans were underway to register the club in Frankfurt with the sport federation of Hesse. After the early winter months had slowed down progress, Lehneis and Sperber made another recruitment push in February by contacting local newspapers. Seven founding members, including Sperber and Lehneis, as well as their fathers, officially formed the “1. Deutscher Football Club Frankfurt e. V.” on February 27, 1977 in a meeting at the Henninger am Zoo in Frankfurt.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{18} Holger Korber, phone interview by author, tape recording, Berlin, Germany, 19 July 2002. The notion that American football interesting because it was “new and exotic” came up in several interviews I conducted with former players from the late 1970s and early 1980s. Asked what it meant to be part of a football team in the late 1970s and early 1980s, one former Düsseldorf Panther said, “I think it had something exclusive, because it was an exclusive sport. … For example, we would all go downtown together. It had something cool about it, I would say. There were the [American style team] jackets; you always drew attention. We had some [large guys] with us—as you can imagine—from the [offense and defense] line. And then we had the Americans with us, who could also party hard. It had something exclusive about it, and we thought it was super cool and great.” Karsten Ahlers, translated phone interview by author, tape recording, Düsseldorf, Germany, 25 July 2002. Another former player and club official maintains that, while the American origin made the new sport “cool” for some, it was not the overriding attraction for most who got involved in the game: “The guys who played football here were primarily interested in the sport. For them, it could have been a sport from Burkina Faso. Of course the American elements were part of it, like stickers, jackets, t-shirts, and equipment. All of that was interesting, no doubt. But it doesn’t mean that all of those who were involved in it were pro-America. They were pro-sport, and this [sport] happened to come from America.” Thomas Jülicher, translated interview by author, tape recording, Düsseldorf, Germany, 25 October 2002.

\textsuperscript{19} Thomas Lünendonk, “‘American Football’ am Main oder: ‘Gladiatoren in Plastikmontur’,” [Frankfurter Neue Presse], [March] 1977. This article was part of the collection of paper clippings provided to me by Alexander Sperber. Based on content and layout, I believe it was published in March 1977 in the Frankfurter Neue Presse.
The team was first nicknamed “Hot Dogs,” for Frankfurt’s sausages, but later adopted the name "Löwen" (Lions). In mid-April of 1977 official practices were held under the guidance of Sperber. A few hundred interested came to the practices during the early stages of forming a team, and eventually a core group of fifty men remained. Early on, German football supporters developed the strategy of using the sport’s tough image to attract young men, while at the same time stressing the sport’s fairness, often in comparison with soccer. In their 1979 guidebook Sperber and Lehneis noted about the high fluctuation of players during the early days of the Löwen, “Only a few Germans were able to withstand the demands of the ‘toughest martial art,’” In the next sentence, the authors mentioned that they constantly had to confront preconceived notions of football being unfair and brutal, a notion that Germany’s football enthusiasts had to deal with from the get-go. Lehneis told the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, “Discipline and fairness are most important for us. We are all people with heart, strength, and condition; [and] we love *Gemütlichkeit* [sociability] as well.”

Television was an important catalyst for Germany’s burgeoning football movement. At the initiative of Holger Obermann, German television brought Super Bowl highlights to German viewers in the late 1970s. Formerly a professional goalkeeper in Germany, Obermann had done “pioneer work” in American soccer in the 1960s and apparently was

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motivated to do the same for American football in Germany.\footnote{According to a newspaper interview, Obermann played for S.C. Elizabeth in the German-American Soccer League in New York “for $25 a game” and got a semi-professional soccer league of the ground in Florida. He also wrote for the New Yorker Staats-Zeitung and did work for ABC. Oskar Beck, “Mister Holger und das Fernweh,” Welt am Sonntag, 7 February 1999.} \textit{ARD}, at the time one of only three channels available to most German viewers, showed a summary of Super Bowl XI between the Oakland Raiders and Minnesota Vikings on Wednesday January 12, 1977 from 10:50 to 11:35 p.m. Despite the three-day delay and the late hour, the program “received enormous response,” according to one newspaper.\footnote{For the response to the ARD’s Super Bowl summary, see: Stenger, “Die Avantgardisten vom Grüneburgpark.” ARD stands for \textit{Arbeitsgemeinschaft der öffentlich-rechtlichen Rundfunkanstalten der Bundesrepublik Deutschland}.} On Tuesday January 30, 1979, Obermann hosted the ARD’s second Super Bowl summary, which aired from 11:00 to 11:45 p.m. Over twenty years after these broadcasts, several of Germany’s football pioneers remembered vivid details of the game between the Pittsburgh Steelers and the Dallas Cowboys and described these first images as instrumental to their getting involved in American football. One referred to Obermann as “the midwife of American football in Germany.”\footnote{\textit{“American Football,” Hör Zu, 27 January–2 February 1979, 54. The following individuals mentioned the two Super Bowl highlight shows: Franz Bayer (associated with Munich Cowboys; interview on 16 July, 2002), Markus Becker (Düsseldorf Panther; 16 December, 2002), Erich Grau (Ansbach Grizzlies; 10 June, 2001), Holger Korber (Berlin Bären; 19 July, 2002), Angelo Leichtenstern (Munich Cowboys; 16 July, 2002), Walter Rohlfing (Düsseldorf Panther; 20 July, 2001), Alexander Sperber (Frankfurt Löwen; 29 July, 2002), Udo Thimian (Berlin Bären; 25 July, 2002). Korber referred to Obermann as “the midwife of American football in Germany.” Holger Korber, translated interview by author, e-mail, 03 October 2002. In 1979, the ARD’s regional program in Hesse, the Hessischer Rundfunk (HR), had brought a total of six football related stories. In 1980, Obermann cited the program’s high cost as a reason for the ARD’s decision not to air a Super Bowl summary that year. Holger Obermann in a letter to Holger Korber dated 15 January 1980.} The “midwife” and “the founding fathers” were also involved in a television moment that gave birth to a number of Frankfurt Löwen offspring. In January 1979, Obermann
invited Sperber and Lehneis to promote their team during a live television interview. Sperber pulled off a winning bluff, when Obermann asked him on the air about football’s popularity in Germany. Although Sperber knew of only one other German team, the Düsseldorf Panther, he said that clubs already existed in every major city in West Germany. Following the program, the station passed on numerous phone calls and letters it had received from people wanting to get in touch with the purported clubs in their hometowns. Caught in a bind, Sperber reacted with another white lie when he told interested parties that the supposed club founders in the respective city had been involved in a car accident and would be unable to continue their work. In their place, Sperber and Lehneis offered help in setting up a new team or advised callers to start their own club.

During the following months, Lehneis and Sperber placed their jobs and studies on the backburner and traveled through Germany teaching the fundamentals of football on a shoestring budget based mostly on the support of their parents. Karsten Ahlers described his first encounter with Sperber and Lehneis during a clinic in Düsseldorf as follows:

“The weather was awful. It was classic. Everything was muddy. In retrospect, I have to laugh about it. They conducted a practice like you see in the movies, just like you imagine football practice with yelling and everything. They were both impressive figures. Both could play football, they were big and built. For us, they were [role models]. They knew what they were doing. And they ran some practice. Everybody had to yell, mud was flying. … It was fun. Of course, we all had no clue. We were all into it. … We were puppets on a string and they were the drill sergeants screaming at us. … Just like in the movies.”

24 Bradley, “Germans Punting, Passing.” F4. The members of the team founded in Düsseldorf in 1978 chose the German word “Panther” as their nickname, which can take both the singular and plural meaning. In this case, it is used to express the plural. Throughout this text, I use the original German team name “Panther,” instead of the English translation “Panthers.”

Düsseldorf, where Sperber and Lehneis conducted their clinic, was already on its way of becoming home to Germany’s second and oldest still existing club.

A string of professional contacts led to the formation of the Düsseldorf Panther. While the common ground of the founders of the Frankfurt Löwen was the field on which they played, the makers of the Panther shared an interest in the graphic design and marketing of football. They developed their vision in an office without touching the ball. Insurance salesman Bernd Gothan had observed the development of the Frankfurt Löwen, saw potential in the new sport, and subsequently became the team’s manager. According to Sperber, Gothan may have hoped that football clubs and their members would provide him with a new customer base. It was through Gothan’s involvement in the football scene that his friend Meinhard Pfanner became interested in the sport. Pfanner, a young marketing manager, became intrigued with the visual presentation of football in America and the idea of creating his own designs for future teams in Germany. When Pfanner left southern Germany for a new position in an advertising agency in Düsseldorf in February 1978, he brought along with him a portfolio with plans for an American football league in Germany. Pfanner’s enthusiasm slowly convinced one of his new colleagues, twenty-five year old media consultant Gerd Bucher, to join the project. Neither Bucher nor the majority of the seven mandatory club founders had ever seen a football before they established the “1. Düsseldorfer Football-Club 1978” on May 1, 1978. Only after the club was founded, did Pfanner and Bucher begin to recruit people interested in learning the
game by encouraging local newspapers to report about the plans to form an American football team in Düsseldorf. 26

In addition to the initial approach of its founders, the club’s location made the Panther the exception among the six clubs that formed the inaugural football Bundesliga in 1979. Unlike Düsseldorf, the other five teams—Berlin, Bremerhaven, Ansbach, Munich, and Frankfurt—were located in various parts of the former American Occupied Zone and thus in the vicinity of large American military bases. The fact that Düsseldorf had been part of the British Occupied Zone after World War II put the team a competitive disadvantage on the gridiron in the late 1970s. Football know-how was scarce in Düsseldorf, where it reportedly took several weeks to obtain an actual football for practices. Not surprisingly, the team finished the 1979 season with a 0-10 record. The other Bundesliga teams not only benefited from their American players and coaches, but also from a better understanding of the game, which many of the German football pioneers brought with them when they organized. To a large extent, this familiarity was related to the popularity of the programs of AFN. 27

26 Alexander Sperber, interview by author, tape recording, Laufach, Germany, 24 October 2002. Thomas Jülicher, translated interview by author, tape recording, Düsseldorf, Germany, 25 October 2002. German law requires at least seven members to officially register a club. Pfanner apparently struggled to find the six cosigners. Eventually, Bucher and Planner invited a handful of colleagues, family, and friends to a restaurant and presented them with their idea for a club. To overcome concerns, the club’s bylaws freed the founding members from any membership fees. A booklet printed for the club’s twentieth anniversary contains a history of the club and a copy of the minutes of the founding meeting. 1. Düsseldorfer Football-Club Düsseldorf 1978 e.V. “Panther”, Touchdowns, Tackles, Tradition: Festschrift zum 20jährigen Jubiläum der Düsseldorf Panther, ed. Frank Gerwald and Angelika Matzke (Düsseldorf: privately printed, 1998).

27 For an insightful popular history of AFN in Berlin, see: Domentat, Coca-Cola, Jazz und AFN. As late as 1984, a German American football magazine commented on the importance of AFN for German football fans and on the difference between the availability of football coverage in England and Germany: “While in Germany small groups of dedicated football fans had to retreat to hotels in AFN-receiving areas to watch
Although AFN was only one catalyst the diffusion of football, it is an important aspect of the larger influence the American military presence in Germany had on the process. The interception of AFN airwaves is a prime illustration for the fact that the arrival of American football in Germany was to considerable degree a product of unintended and unforeseeable consequences. As a teenager in West Berlin during the mid-1970s, Dieter Hoch first experienced American football while watching AFN television in his home in the southern part of the city, which had been part of the American Occupied Zone after 1945 and where many of the American military installations were still located. While AFN radio was more widely available throughout the city, the reception of the American television program was mostly restricted to the districts of Zehlendorf and Steglitz, traditionally the home of educated middle class families. 28

Although the reception was often bad, Hoch regularly watched football with a group of six to ten classmates. Spending the night of the first to the second day of the year watching New Year’s Day bowl games became an annual fixture for the group. Later the friends also followed the NFL when AFN added professional football to its lineup. Twenty-five years later he fondly remembered how late-night television sessions first led to playing eight years for the Berlin Bären and Adler and later to a career as a football

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28 Only after the transmission power of the station was increased in 1983 were you able to receive it in the northern part. Dieter Hoch, translated interview by author, tape recording, Berlin, Germany, 4 July 2002.
journalist: “I saw that these padded people were fighting around on the screen. Naturally, I didn’t know exactly what that was at the time. I stayed with it, got interested, and it developed from there up to the point when the team was founded in ’79.”

Hoch saw his first American football game in person in June 1976, when NAIA Division I teams Texas A&I and Henderson State, Arkansas, met in Berlin’s Olympic Stadium to celebrate the American Bicentennial with American troops and their families. According to an article in the local edition of Bild, 8,000 spectators watched this first game between two American college teams in Germany. However, Hoch estimates that the actual crowd was only half the size and consisted mostly of Americans. The article presented football with the themes of money, show, entertainment, spectacle, and sex. The headline read, “Texas-Soccer! Pretty Girls, Hot Guys.” The author described the game as “a thrilling and exciting mix of soccer, wrestling, track and field, and show,” and referred to the players as “modern gladiators.” He also mistakenly identified the players as ninety tough professionals who made hundreds of thousands of dollars for a four month long season. One of the three paragraphs described the cheerleaders as a “chorus of pretty girls” who “wanted to see their boys fight.” In a postscript the writer mentioned, “By the way: The Texans won 17-8. But that was really not so important,” and thus foreshadowed a common aspect of later football coverage in which the “party” became more important than the game itself. The article concluded, “Come back soon, boys.” As Hoch noted in his own article two decades later, it took fourteen years until Berlin’s Olympic stadium hosted another football game when the NFL sent the Kansas City

29 Dieter Hoch, interview by author, tape recording, Berlin, Germany, 4 July 2002.
Chiefs and Los Angeles Rams for the first American Bowl exhibition in Germany on August 11, 1990.  

Among the few Germans in attendance for both those games was Frank-Peter Schmidt, for whom the college contest in 1976 was the first personal contact with football and eventually the reason to get involved in the sport. Eager to find out more about the sport, Schmidt searched the public library on anything remotely related to American football. After three years of solitary research on the subject, he saw an announcement of a home game of the Berlin Bären, who had been founded on February 12, 1979 as Berlin’s first American football club. At the game, Schmidt inquired how he could get in touch with the club, and the twenty-one year old joined three days later. His playing days were cut short due to a back injury in 1982, after which he focused his efforts on becoming the team’s stadium announcer, a position he also held for all of the NFL’s American Bowl games in Berlin.  

As it had for Hoch before, AFN became an important part of Schmidt’s football experience and like others, he went to extraordinary length to make sure he could receive

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31 The Berlin Bats may be considered the city’s first football team, although there is no evidence that they ever played a different team or formerly established a club. In January 1978, nine football enthusiasts looked for teammates through an article in the Berliner Zeitung. The group reportedly practiced on Saturdays at 2 p.m. on a field with artificial turf on Siebenendenweg. About a dozen young ranging from in age from about sixteen to twenty-three continued to meet on weekends throughout 1978. Several of the Bats eventually joined the Bären in the winter of 1979. “Wer will American Football spielen?,” Berliner Zeitung, 5 January 1978. Andreas Schreck, translated telephone interview by author, tape recording, Berlin, Germany 26 July 2002.

32 Frank-Peter Schmidt, translated interview by author, tape recording, Berlin, Germany, 29 June and 4 July 2002.
the program. While looking at a new apartment in 1980, he found out by coincidence that the television set that had been left was able to receive the American station. He kept the apartment and the television, for which he had extra parts installed for color and sound at a local shop that specialized in such updates. In the early 1980s, Schmidt had access to a pilot program that introduced cable television to Berlin and which, much to his delight, included AFN as part of the cable package on a trial basis from 1981 to 1984. According to Schmidt, the station was removed at the request of CBS, when an employee of network saw by coincidence that their shows were part of the public cable access in Berlin. Apparently, CBS was providing programming to AFN for little to no costs to entertain the American troops abroad. The assumption was that most people in Berlin were able to watch AFN. In reality, however, it still required some technical ingenuity to receive the signal. By mid-October of 1984, AFN was no longer available via cable in Berlin. After that, Schmidt got an extra antenna to ensure he would still be able to watch football on AFN.33

Erich Grau was chiefly responsible for the formation of another of the original six Bundesliga teams, the Ansbach Grizzlies. In the late 1970s, the capital of Middle-Franconia was home to a population of about 40,000 plus a major American military community with about 10,000 soldiers and their families. The Grizzlies owed much of their dominance on the gridiron during the first decade of football in Germany to this American presence. Between 1979 and 1986 Ansbach reached every national championship game and won the title three times. The pigskin and the gridiron were

33 Ibid.
familiar objects to many Germans in Ansbach. Grau had spent almost every summer
vacation in America during the 1970s and he had brought back several footballs from his
trips. Other Germans attended games of the successful team of the local American
military high school or watched games on AFN. Grau watched his first Super Bowl on
AFN in 1976 at the age of twenty-one. The next day, it turned out that the majority of his
fellow physical education majors had tuned in the game on AFN:

At the time, nobody was listening to anything but AFN radio. By using a cloth
hanger in the back of your TV set you were also able to receive AFN on
television. You needed a different kind of antenna. In fact, the signal was so
strong that you had to unplug your antenna and use a metal hanger instead, which
immediately gave you great reception. You really needed an NTSC decoder,
which, of course, nobody had at the time. That means we watched the football
games without sound. However, the Super Bowl was also broadcast live on
radio.34

With such exposure, Grau had no problem motivating a group of his friends, who were
competitive athletes in other sports, to start a team of their own after they had learned
about the existence of the clubs in Frankfurt and Düsseldorf through a television report of
a game between the two in 1978. On April 3, 1979, Grau invited the public to an
informational meeting after which fifteen more players signed up and a group order for
equipment went out to Sperber and Lehneis. Less than eight months later the Ansbach
Grizzlies held their own against the much more experienced Frankfurt Löwen in the first
German championship game, losing by only a touchdown.35

34 Erich Grau, translated telephone interview by author, tape recording, Ansbach, Germany, 10 June 2001.
35 Erich Grau, translated telephone interview by author, tape recording, Ansbach, Germany, 10 June 2001.
Wolfgang Scheffler, “Schlußpunkt einer deutschen Meisterschaft in einer amerikanischen Sportart,”
Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 12 November 1979, 17.
Among the six original Bundesliga teams, Bremerhaven was located the farthest north. The team owed its football know-how to the fact that the city had been part of the American enclave in British occupied northern Germany, which had given the American troops a strategically important seaport. Already in the 1950s, Germans attended the home games of the Bremerhaven Blue Devils in the American military leagues. However, as it did elsewhere, the idea to form a German team did not mature until the Frankfurt Löwen made the national news and the Super Bowl aired on television. In February 1979 Americans and Germans together founded the “1. Deutsch-Amerikanischer Sport- und Football-Club e.V. ‘Bremerhaven Seahawks.’” At the age of twenty-one, Thorsten Schultz joined the club during its first year of existence after his girlfriend had already been active as a cheerleader for the team. He shared that watching football on AFN fostered close ties between the American and German players on the team:

[AFN] television and radio, you could receive everything. Smart ones could turn their antenna just the right way to receive a clear picture. That’s why there was a lot of uproar when they closed down the station. After that you needed a satellite dish with a secret code from the US Army. We still watch football original program in the German-American club via satellite here. …That’s also where we watch the Super Bowl, instead of the German broadcast. That way you get the original commentators with quality comments instead of the rubbish you get from [German commentators]. …Most of us understand English, and those who don’t enjoy the pictures. The good thing about it is that we make it “American.” For years now we have our club party on that day with barbeque and a round of free beer for every touchdown scored.36

Different accents, customs, and almost the entire vertical stretch of Germany separated Bremerhaven Seahawks from Munich Cowboys, but their clubs’ origins shared several common elements, including proximity of American troops and watching Super Bowl highlights on German television and AFN. Angelo Leichtenstern grew up in Munich watching American soldiers, who lived in barracks nearby, throwing the pigskin. He had marveled at the ease with which the men tossed “the egg.” When he saw a report on German television about the Frankfurt Löwen in 1979, twenty-four year old Leichtenstern did not hesitate to pick up the phone to call the station to get the number of the team in Frankfurt. He recalled his phone conversation with Alexander Sperber as follows: “He spoke English with me…. Right away he told me, ‘Well … you’ll have to start a club first. …Call me again when you are done’ and [then he] hung up.”

Wondering what he should do next, Leichtenstern ordered a book on football from America and set out to find potential teammates. His story sums up what took place in dozens of West German cities in the late 1970s and early 1980s:

I put on my football jersey, which almost nobody had then except for Americans. I went through the discos and right away found seventy-seven people for the first practice [in the English Garden]. Next I looked up what you needed to form a club. [I found out that] you needed seven people to register a club. I lived in the center of Munich. There was already an American store, and I knew [the owner] pretty well. He was a German skateboard champion or something like that. And they knew somebody who was a lawyer, and I said, “Exactly, that’s who we need.” I don’t know anything about laws, at least back then I didn’t. So we got seven people together and had [the club] registered. 37

37 Angelo Leichtenstern, translated phone interview by author, tape recording, Munich, Germany, 16 July 2002.
Franz Bayer was among those who joined the Munich Cowboys, whom he led as quarterback during their premier season. At the time the twenty-six year old businessman had already spent a year and a half for his company, Phillip Morris, in America. Bayer’s first introduction to football came through a friend who was already fascinated with American sports and listened regularly to basketball, baseball, and football broadcasts on AFN radio in Munich. Without ever having seen football himself and simply going by the American commentary, the friend imagined what the game looked like and explained the rules to Bayer. “Because of his explanation, the way he described it to me, I got into it,” he remembered. “I liked the rules and the flow of the game, the way he had explained it to me. I found incredibly fascinating.” Next, Bayer discovered by coincidence that he was able to receive AFN television, bought a special TV set, and started to watch college football. Being able to actually see the action on the screen, Bayer was most impressed by the physical contact. However he said he couldn’t appreciate the impact of two players colliding until he saw his first game in person, which was a game of the American University in Munich. Even though he knew the caliber of game was low, he says, “That was the final piece. You realized that it crashes a good deal, and that impressed me a lot in the beginning.” After watching Terry Bradshaw’s heroics in Super Bowl XIII on Germany’s ARD and seeing the number for the Frankfurt Löwen on screen, Bayer heard that people in Munich were looking to start a football team and were looking for players. At that point, Bayer says, he knew his days playing soccer were over.38

38 Franz Bayer, translated phone interview by author, tape recording, Munich, Germany, 16 July 2002. Bayer became the quarterback of the Munich Cowboys and the German national team and played until 1987, after which he became Munich’s head coach. “Munich Cowboys,” Huddle, 11 April 1991, 16.
Catalyzed by the first American football programs on German television, as well as the sustained presence of American military, and as the result of coincidences as well as personal initiatives, there was an unprecedented interest in American football in Germany in the late 1970s. Although Americans played an important role in the process, especially on the field, it did not take long for the German football pioneers to adapt the sport by organizing it in the traditional structure of league competition governed by regional and national federations. In March of 1979, the growing interest led to the formation of the American Football Bund Deutschland (AFBD), the first federation to govern the sport in Germany and the first of its kind in Europe, with Alexander Sperber as its first president. Five months later, the first full season of American football in Germany was underway with teams in Frankfurt, Düsseldorf, Berlin, Ansbach, Bremerhaven, and Munich, while several other clubs were being formed. The first official game of the American football Bundesliga took place between the Düsseldorf Panther and the Frankfurt Löwen on August 4, 1979. Although it failed to win a single game, Düsseldorf led the league in attendance with an average of 2,000 spectators in 1979. Such attention was the exception as other teams struggled to attract more than a few hundred onlookers. In most places, American football was not designed as a spectator sport. At best, those who volunteered to run the clubs looked for some sources to help with the club’s budget. Few teams had access to enclosed fields that even allowed them to charge at the gate. During the 1980s, American football quickly developed into a participant sport for Germans and a handful
of Americans stationed in Germany, as the number of American players on the field for a team at any given time was gradually limited to only two by 1986.39

**Gridiron Amerika**

**Violent Amerika**

When Germans formed the first long-term football organizations in the 1970s, much of the football coverage in the German press reflected traditional heterostereotypes of violent, aggressive, and materialistic Amerika.40 These images echoed earliest accounts

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40 For a discussion of these negative heterostereotypes see Peter Freese, “America” Dream or Nightmare? *Reflections on a Composite Image*, 3rd ed. (Essen: Verlag Die Blaue Eule, 1994), 24. The depictions of football in the German press reviewed here typically did not directly use *Gewalt* or *Gewalttätigkeit*, German words. In my analysis of the German media coverage of football, I understand the term violence in the broadest sense as defined by Jay Coakley: “Violence is the use of excessive physical force, which causes or has the potential to cause harm or destruction.” Coakley further defines aggression as “verbal or physical behavior grounded in an intent to dominate, control, or do harm to another person” and intimidation as “words, gestures, and actions that threaten violence or aggression…used as a means to dominate or control another person.” While aggression is often associated with violent behavior, not all violence necessarily includes intent to injure another person, according to Coakley’s definition. This understanding is different from that proposed by Michael Smith, for whom “violence is physically assaultive behavior that is designed to, or does, injure another person physically” (my emphasis). In my opinion, Coakley’s broader understanding of violence fits the German context of the last quarter of the twentieth century better than Smith’s. As Coakley points out, violence may be seen as either acceptable or positive “when violence occurs in connection with the enforcement of norms, the protection of people and property, or deviant overconformity to widely accepted norms.” I argue that German press depictions of football, especially in the 1970s and early 1980s, often regarded its physical impact as negative and, at times, morally questionable, even if it occurred within the rules and/or the norms of the game. For example, when Germans used war terminology to describe football in 1970s and 1980s, it was done in a specific political climate in which many people questioned the moral legitimacy of warfare. Speaking about the peace movement of the early 1980s in East and West Germany, Fritz Stern noted, “This time the German soul combines a universalist appeal—against war, against nuclear lightheartedness—with a nationalist note that speaks to the division of the country.” Jay Coakley, *Sport in Society: Issues & Controversies*, 7th ed. (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2001), 174-5; Smith, *Violence and Sport*, 7; Fritz Stern, *Dreams and Delusions: National Socialism in the Drama of the German Past* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 234. Also see the discussion of violence, aggression, and assertiveness in William J. Morgan, Klaus V. Meier, and Angela J. Schneider, *Ethics in Sport* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 2001), 339-43.
of the New World “as a hideous and desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts and wild men,”\(^4^1\) During the eighteenth and nineteenth century, European visitors to the southern seaboard and western frontier reported on the fierce violence of backcountry fighting. These all-out contests often climaxed in one combatant poking out an eyeball from his opponent’s head. These fights and the subsequent triumphant displays of the captured organ clearly insulted modern sensibilities of bourgeois northerners and Europeans alike. Elliott Gorn finds that these “rough-and-tumble” fights became a symbol for both promoters and critics of “America’s expansive national ego.”\(^4^2\)

The reported violence certainly nurtured persistent negative heterostereotypes of America. Shocked by a brutal display of eye gouging, Charles William Janson, an English traveler to Georgia, wrote, “The savage crowd applauded, while, sick with horror, we galloped away from the infernal scene.” According to Gorn, such and similar accounts of the savage Wild West dramatically confirmed the belief of European observers “that evil lurked in the deep shadows of America’s sunny democratic landscape.”\(^4^3\)

Similar accounts also reached readers in Germany. According to a newspaper article from 1859, some of the more established German immigrants to America got a kick out of scaring fellow countrymen, who upon arrival in the New World commonly sought

\(^{4^1}\)William Bradford quoted in Freese, *Dream or Nightmare*, 37.


their advice. Ottilie Assig reported from New York, “Based on all cases of poisoning, murder, robbery, swindle, and bribery, all train accidents and steam boat explosions, which may have happened over the course of a year, my friend enjoyed putting together such an image of horror and terror that it took the poor people’s breath away.” After hearing these grim stories reportedly more than one new arrival returned to Germany on the next available vessel. Undoubtedly those accounts did not help to improve the American image in Germany.  

By the last decade of the twentieth century this negative Amerikabild reverberated in the words of Winter, former editor-in-chief of magazines Stern and GEO, who described the United States as “a country developed from violence and injustice; that raised violence to cult status and has never turned from violence and injustice.” Appalled by the brutality depicted in American produced movies and television shows on German screens, Winter laments:

Since Hitler, nobody has been allowed to advertise violence as successfully and unchallenged and obtrusively like the movie makers of the country, whose President George Bush once called attention to himself with the insight: “We have enlightened the world with our culture;” and since Hitler nobody has been turned more willingly into a Propagandist of violence than German television.  

Until the mid-1980s, much of the commentaries about football in West German newspapers was not unlike the sensationalized accounts of football’s carnage in turn-of-

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the-century papers like the *New York Herald* and the *World*, which regularly brought stories about injured and killed players.\(^{46}\) As early as 1893, the German press took notice of football’s bloodshed when the *Münchener Nachrichten* painted the following gruesome picture:

> The football tournament between the teams of Harvard and Yale, recently held in America, had terrible results. It turned into an awful butchery. Of twenty-two participants seven were so severely injured that they had to be carried from the field in a dying condition. One player had his back broken, another lost an eye, and a third lost a leg. Both teams appeared upon the filed with a crowd of ambulances, surgeons and nurses. Many ladies fainted at the awful cries of the injured players. The indignation of the spectators was powerful, but they were so terrorized that they were afraid to leave the field.\(^{47}\)

The German newspaper account of the game caught the attention of Parke Hill Davis, who coached at Wisconsin in the 1893 season after his playing career at Princeton had ended and later became a member of the Intercollegiate Rules Committee. In his 1911 history of intercollegiate football he had the following to say about the 1893 season:

> Unfortunately, this season of exceptional tactical brilliancy was fraught with many mishaps. Perhaps these were due to that peculiar operation of chance which ever seems to accumulate an excess of misfortunes at one time. Perhaps it was due to the fact that the generals of the game had devised plays too powerful for their sturdy soldiers to execute and withstand. Perhaps these accidents were not so numerous or as serious as alleged, but rather the product of exaggeration. As usual there was much of the latter.\(^{48}\)

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\(^{46}\) According to Oriard, the height of the sensationalized concentration on violence in 1897 was caused by a circulation war in New York’s press. For Oriard, “These cannot be considered campaigns to clean up football; they were campaigns for circulation.” Michael Oriard, *Reading Football: How the Popular Press Created an American Spectacle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 203.


\(^{48}\) Ibid., 97-8.
Despite efforts to make the game less dangerous, accidents continued to occur on the gridiron; a fact that was embellished not only by the press at home. In 1910 the Rhein-Westfälische Zeitung summarized the scenes of a Fußball game in New York: “7 players seriously injured. Two died a few minutes later. …Casualty list: 29 members killed, 19 seriously injured, cripples for life.” Though probably little noticed, this piece not only foreshadowed the tone of much of German football coverage for the next seven decades, it also reflected contemporary American concerns about the perceived and real brutality of football. The American press reported that thirty football players had been killed in 1909 alone. The same year the Rhein-Westfälische Zeitung noticed the death toll in America, the “football crisis” forced the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) to issue a number of major rule changes in an attempt to make the game less vicious. While in America the public outcry over football’s violence largely subsided as the game rose to one of America’s principal sporting spectacles, the game’s brutality remained a major theme in German commentaries.

49 Rhein-Westfälische Zeitung quoted in Kistner and Schulze, Spielmacher, 56.

50 In 1905/06 previous controversies about gridiron’s brutality had already brought about the formation of the Intercollegiate Athletic Association, known since 1910 as the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), and a series of major rule changes in 1906, 1910, and 1912. In 1906, the required distance for a new first down was extended from previously five yards to ten yards in three attempts and new rules allowed the limited use of the forward pass. In 1910, the NCAA disallowed interlocking interference and required at least seven men on the line of scrimmage when the ball was snapped. The latter was a move in response to the earlier practice of guards and tackles lining up in the backfield to push and pull the ball carrier forward. The new rules also allowed a more liberal use of the forward pass. Finally, in 1912 teams were given four downs to cover ten yards, and the value of a touchdown was increased from five to six points. Rader, American Sports, 182, 185, 187. For a detailed history on the rise of college football and the NCAA see Smith, Sports and Freedom.
By 1954, a cover of the German magazine Der Spiegel informed its readers about the essence of football: “Gewalt geht vor Gehirn” (Violence over Brain). With this liberal translation of “Brawn over Brain,” the writer’s depiction of football unknowingly delivered a stunning blow in the face of Walter Camp, football’s chief architect, for whom the game’s greatest lesson had been that it “teaches that brains will always win over muscle.”

Der Spiegel opened by describing a scene that “did not take place in the backyard of a loony home, where the bad cases practice a self-invented form of therapy sport,” but on the sport field of the university of Notre Dame:

Giants with huge helmets and high-arching robot shoulders are squatting in two rows opposite of each other. A whistle sounds. With a pre-historic roar (like ‘Jaaahhhrrr ’), the armored men charge each other with obvious murderous intent, smash into each other with a muffled crash, roll around in a wild tangle. A new whistle. Thirteen giants untangle their extremities and straighten out. One stays on the ground, more motionless than a frozen haddock. “Okay,” thunders the man with the whistle, “blocking looks good. And Mike here—carry him to the locker room.”

In the center of the article, a lengthy but not always correct explanation of the rules revealed the lack of familiarity with football of both readers and writer. In the eyes of the German author, American football had as little in common with European soccer as it has with ping-pong. Another comparison exposed a classical *Kultur-versus-Zivilisation*

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51 The cover of Der Spiegel featured a headshot of Eddie LeBaron with a scene of a football game in the background. The Washington Redskins’ quarterback was shown wearing his football helmet, which at that point did not yet include a facemask. The caption underneath the picture read “Gewalt geht vor Gehirn” (Violence over brain). “American Football: Der Gegner ist ein Feind,” Der Spiegel, 7 April 1954, 28.


53 “American Football: Der Gegner,” 27.
perspective: “The difference is that fanatics idolize European soccer players, but only as athletes and not like in America as symbols of the strength and bravery of an entire nation. In more than one sense, these armored boys…are admired and celebrated in song as sort of Coca-Cola-Nibelungen.” It is noteworthy that the author chose a metaphor that juxtaposed a twelfth century German epic and a modern icon of American mass consumption. The German writer apparently intended for the prefix “Coca-Cola”—and thus American pop culture—to connote football’s cultural inferiority. 54

The article further criticized the overemphasis of sport at American colleges and high schools. In accounts similar to those American readers would later find in Peter Gent’s North Dallas Forty (1973) or Jim Dent’s Junction Boys (1999), the writer described the corrupting element of influential alumni, falsified grades, forty-hours practice weeks, and forcing players to play hurt. The disapproval even contained a hopefully unintended insult at Germany’s eastern neighbors, who had suffered from German occupation only ten years earlier: “Before colleges risk a slide in the football rankings, they would rather sacrifice the intellectual standard and get muscular guys from Pittsburgh’s coal minds disregarding their tiny shrink-brains (a disproportionate number of gridiron heroes have obvious Polish names).” 55

Der Spiegel gathered further evidence of football’s appalling qualities from excerpts of statements Allen Jackson, a former University of Michigan player, had made in the monthly magazine Atlantic. One passage in particular echoed the gloomy visions of

54 Ibid., 28.
55 Ibid., 30.
modernity some German observers had brought back from their American excursion during the 1920s: ‘“Every spontaneity of players gets suffocated in endless and tedious practices… Coaches use all means in trying to get players into a cold, dark, mechanical battle mood.’ They do it with bloodthirsty catchphrases: ‘If Michigan loses, heads will roll.’”56

Twenty years later the magazine Stern published an article on women’s football titled “The Rough Girls.” It described a professional women’s football game between two Los Angeles-based teams. Two themes emerge from this 1974 piece: first, violence as the prime characteristic of the game, and second, money as the prime motivation of its players and owners. According to the author, twenty-nine football players had been killed and almost 650,000 players injured during the previous season alone. The article referred to football as “the toughest game you can imagine” and “the brutal variation of rugby.” It explained that the large number of substitutes on the sidelines was necessary “since injured players are constantly carried out of the arenas in these battles.” At the end of this particular women’s game, reportedly sixteen of the “female pros” had been hurt, five had been hospitalized, and a dozen said “never again.” The article further described that the women were not primarily motivated by storming the last bastion of masculinity, but rather “the anticipation to quickly make big money.” The players reportedly each received $350, and the managers promised the women “golden mountains” once attendance would pick up.57

56 Ibid., 31.

57 “Ruppigen Mädchen.”
In October 1976, Stern published a richly illustrated eighteen-page article on football. The title and the opening picture spreading over two pages set the tone for the article: “American Football—the world’s toughest sport. O Lord, let us live…” A caption explained the scene of praying players: “In each game their health is on the line, at times even [their] lives. Summary of a football season in America: 1.3 million injuries, ten dead.” According to the article, the rules allow almost anything: kicking the opponent, hitting with fists, and head butts. “Football is a mirror of life in the American society,” author Peter Petschull explained, “Everyone wants to advance to the front, the competitors want to keep [the opponent] from it, but everyone has to prevail. It’s brutal in football and in life.” That everyone involved in football, including the manager, has to constantly fear for his job confirms what every German had long known about the merciless struggle in America. A quote attributed to Joe Namath captured the reporter’s impression of the sport, “Nach Football gibt es nur noch eine Steigerung—Krieg.” (There is only one step up from football—war.)

Interwoven in this depiction of football’s brutality the reader found another familiar theme: the marvel of America’s economic dimensions. Petschull’s report of meeting Joe Namath combined these two conventions, as an extensive list of the thirty-three year old’s injuries was immediately followed by an account about Namaths’ rise to an astonishing income of $10 million over ten years. “Compared to the football star the big-time earners of Germany’s soccer look like poor suckers,” concluded Petschull. The

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writer depicted football’s economic power through apparently awe-inspiring facts and figures: Miami stadium’s capacity of 80,000; the league’s $210 million annually in merchandize sales; the fact that American television showed all games in full-length, and that each interruption of the game was filled with expensive commercials for up to $250,000 per minute while seventy percent of Americans watched big games on their televisions. America’s larger-than-life image and America’s violence once more came together when Petschull reported that “Doctors’ bills for the entire sport of football from boys’ to adult leagues come up to $300 million annually.”

The NFL’s financial muscle must have been astonishing for a German observer in the late 1970s when the economic figures of professional team sports in Germany paled in comparison to those of the NFL’s premiere showcase, the Super Bowl. The period between the mid-1950s and the 1980s marked the NFL’s ascend from an only marginally profitable enterprise to a leader in the sporting industry. Compared to Germany’s professional soccer, professional football’s figures had not always been so overwhelming. When Germany’s first professional soccer league finally opened its gates in the 1963/64 season, 5,909,776 fans walked through turnstiles of the Bundesliga for an average of 24,624 per game. Although the National Football League and the American Football League together averaged about 10,000 fans more for their 154 games (34,885) their

59 Ibid.
combined attendance in 1963 was over 500,000 less than that of the Bundesliga (5,372,340).  

However, by the late 1970s soccer’s distant cousin had decidedly turned the comparison into its favor. In the 1976/77 season, the soccer Bundesliga drew an average attendance of 25,464 per game for a total of 7,792,028 spectators. At an average ticket price of DM9.86 this meant a record of DM76,859,264 in gate receipts. Although the ice hockey Bundesliga also set a new attendance record with 1.07 million spectators and an average of 4,573 per game that year, König Fußball’s reign in Germany was uncontested.

While soccer’s dominance of the German market was indeed impressive, its numbers could not keep up with King Football’s growth spurt in its much larger kingdom. In 1977 over 11 million spectators paid to see the 196 regular season games in the NFL. The average attendance of 56,218 more than doubled that of the soccer Bundesliga. Even more than the attendance in the stadiums, it was the NFL’s successful liaison with

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60 Deutsche Presse Agentur, “Mehr als 100 Millionen Zuschauer seit dem ersten Spieltag im Jahre 1963,” Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 4 October 1978, 22; Rader, American Sports, 267, 271. On the rise of the NFL, see: Michael MacCambridge, America’s Game: The Epic Story of How Pro Football Captured a Nation (New York: Random House, 2004). My intent here is not to provide a sophisticated comparison of the relative economic power of professional soccer in Germany and football in the United States in the late 1970s. The purpose here is simply to gage the impression the NFL’s absolute figures may have made on German observers. Relative to market size and share, the success of professional soccer in Germany is quite impressive. For example, in 1977 the population of West Germany was 61,400,000 while the 1980 census of the United States was 226,542,199. The potential American market was thus roughly 3.5 times the size of the German. Germany’s soccer Bundesliga clearly towered over other spectator team sports like ice hockey, team handball, and basketball, while the NFL competed not only with professional baseball, basketball, and ice hockey, but also the respective college sports. Statistisches Bundesamt, Statistisches Jahrbuch 1980 für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1980), 50; US Census Bureau, Urban and Rural Population: 1900 to 1990 (1995, accessed 2 February 2005); available from http://www.census.gov/population/censusdata/urprop0090.txt. For the causes and conditions of the introduction of professional soccer in Germany, see: Sigfried Gehrmann, “Keeping Up with Europe: The Introduction of Professionalism into German Soccer in 1962/63,” in Sport in the Global Village, ed. Ralph C. Wilcox (Morgantown, WV: Fitness Information Technology, 1994), 145-57.
television that made football’s dimensions so impressive to German observers. According to Benjamin Rader, between 1967 and 1977 the “average audience for televised games leaped from 11 million …to nearly 20 million.” In 1977 America’s three major networks paid a then astonishing $656 million to secure the broadcast rights to the NFL’s two conferences over a four-year period. The magnitude of these numbers amazed even Americans and may well have reinforced German notions about America as “the country of unlimited opportunities.” Nevertheless, in the football coverage of the German press the theme of “America’s opportunities” was still overshadowed by the competing theme of “America’s violence”.61

The basic “violence formula” became widely accepted and copied in the German newspapers in the late 1970s. In August of 1977, a headline in the _Berliner Zeitung_ announced “82 Million Dollars for a Legalized Battle.” The article mentioned that American television and radio paid $82.5 million for the broadcast rights for what American lawyer Willie Brown referred to as a legalized battle enjoyed by 80 million American viewers.62 A year later, the _Deutsche Presse Agentur_ distributed an article that was picked up by the _Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung_ und _Die Welt_. Describing scenes from a game between Oklahoma and Notre Dame, journalist Werner Baroni likened the

61 Deutsche Presse Agentur, “100 Millionen,” 22; National Football League, _2004 NFL Record & Fact Book_ (New York: Time Inc. Home Entertainment, 2004), 608; Rader, _American Sports_, 271-2; Sport Informations Dienst, “Weniger Spannung, weniger Zuschauer, mehr Skandale,” _Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung_, 13 March 1979, 19. The NFL’s reign in America was not uncontested in 1977, as baseball had made a comeback in popularity. In September 1977, NFL pollster Louis Harris found that, “For the first time since 1968, more sport fans in the county follow baseball than football.” Quoted in MacCambridge, _America’s Game_, 326.

results of American football to a war report. He described scenes of a priest blessing the 
“brave boys” of Notre Dame, and 106,000 fans joining in the words of the American 
anthem invoking “the perilous fight.” The article referred to studies reporting thousands 
of severe and fatal injuries in high school and college football. And in 1979 Germany’s 
most popular TV guide, Hör Zu, announced a forty-five minute highlight show of Super 
Bowl XIII between Pittsburgh and Dallas by writing, “These football warriors plunge 
into the mayhem like armored knights. …Just about anything is allowed in doing so: 
battering, kicking, and fist blows. Hence, the ‘list of casualties’ is long during the four-
month season. About every fifth player gets seriously injured—and there are even 
deaths.”

In August 1980, GEO editor-in-chief Rolf Winter raised the question whether one can 
learn about the character of a nation by observing its sport. For Winter the answer was 
obvious. In the words of his reporter Peter Satorius, football with its violence, joy of life,

63 Baroni’s translation of the anthem is particularly questionable: Sagt an, könnt ih sehen im Licht, was so 

64 The program aired on Tuesday January 30, 1979 from 11:00 to 11:45 p.m. on ARD, one of only three 
channels available to German viewers at the time. Host of the “Sport extra” show was Holger Obermann. 
This was only the second time German television devoted an entire show to the Super Bowl. The ARD had 
first brought a Super Bowl XI special on Wednesday January 12, 1977 (10:50 to 11:35 p.m.). “American 
football,” 54. Several interview partners identified the two programs as instrumental to either their own 
getting involved in football in the late 1970s or the foundation of their club: Franz Bayer (associated with 
Munich Cowboys; interview on 16 July, 2002), Markus Becker (Düsseldorf Panther; 16 December, 2002), 
Erich Grau (Ansbach Grizzlies; 10 June, 2001), Holger Korber (Berlin Bären; 19 July, 2002), Angelo 
Leichtenstern (Munich Cowboys; 16 July, 2002), Walter Rohlfing (Düsseldorf Panther; 20 July, 2001), 
Alexander Sperber (Frankfurt Löwen; 29 July, 2002), Udo Thimian (Berlin Bären; 25 July, 2002)
heroism, and commercialism was a nutshell of the American Way of Life. Not only in name, but also illustration and content similar to National Geographic, the monthly magazine specialized in ethnographically flavored accounts about foreign lands and cultures in long articles illustrated with a plethora of multicolor gloss pictures. This “Frontline report from a battlefield in Dallas, Texas” on twenty-nine pages, twenty of which covered by pictures, was no exception. As such, GEO is a particularly valuable source to examine the representation of American football as “the other.” A glance at other articles in this issue of GEO help to situate the piece on football both within the events of the time and the spirit of the magazine: One article featured a report from a journalist imbedded with Muslim Mudschahedin fighting the nine month-old Soviet invasion of Afghanistan; another told about the American-led destruction of the tropical rainforest in Brazil. The threat of a conflict between the Super Powers on European ground and environmental concerns weighed heavily on German minds in August of 1980.

For the readers, the opening image of a Dallas football player and the ensuing caption effectively set the tone of this introduction to football:

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66 In his analysis of social ideology in advertisements, William O’Barr writes about National Geographic: “for many people who are not privy to the more restricted discourse of academic anthropology, this magazine—both its articles and the parallel texts in its advertisements—has been their window onto the exotic and the foreign.” William M. O’Barr, Culture and the Ad: Exploring Otherness in the World of Advertising (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1994), 14.

They call themselves “Cowboys”… but they are gladiators. Steered by brilliant strategists, they march into a battle called football. America’s favorite sport is not a game, but a war with different but in no way more peaceful means. Each year, over 100 million Americans feverishly watch their heroes when they march into the final of the Super Bowl… Fought with brutal violence but also intelligence, bravery…and guile, these battles are for them a passionate witness to an achievement society that divides people into winners and losers.68

A series of other images and their captions continued to paint the picture for the reader: a taped player using an awkward contraption to stretch his leg (“Many will already be discharged as disabled after five years”); a close up of a player’s face covered by a steel apparatus to strengthen neck muscles (“the head is also used in the game—as a weapon in close combat”); scenes from the Cowboys’ practice camp in Thousand Oaks (“In the camp of thousand aches, the weak are filtered out”); and a player running unto the field past a row of Dallas Cowboys cheerleaders on their knees (“The cult of violence also has its temple dancers.”).69

The article’s narrative itself was marked by constant analogies between football and war. Wondering whether the parallel evolution of football rules and modern warfare was a coincidence, Satorius answered his own question by describing every aspect of the game using war terminology. According to the journalist, in the beginning of the game, football had been fought in the trenches, just as it had been the case in warfare at the time. And as warfare became airborne, football legalized the air assault. Just as the threat of global-range missiles characterized the cold war, so did the long bomb begin to dominate the gridiron. “Roger,” Satorius wrote referring to Dallas quarterback Staubach,


69 Ibid., 11, 13, 14, 17.
“will throw the bomb an this day—long, precise and devastating.” Satorius’s depiction of football reverberated the German concerns about the stationing of additional American nuclear missiles; an angst that swept the country following the NATO Doppelbeschluß in December of the previous year. Thus for Satorius, “The annihilating strike, executed playfully,” turned into “a wink with the apocalypse.”

Of course, as we have seen earlier in the writings of Walter Camp and the London Times’ football accounts from the early twentieth century, Satorius was by no means the first to contemplate similarities of war and football. Possibly unaware of the potential link to the “father of football,” Satorius’ narrative, took a surprising turn as the article continued and expressed the full spectrum of German ambivalence toward America. “I wanted to see monsters and describe a degenerated sport, of which I was convinced that it was popular in America only because it satisfied the perverted lust of violence,” he shared. His impression of football had been based upon a quote he thought to have read in the New York Times according to which football was the greatest madness of the Western world since human beings had been sent to fight lions in Rome. But in the end, Satorius found himself “turned around” by his research, which had taken several weeks and had included an extended stay with the Dallas Cowboys. “They convinced me that

70 Ibid., 28, 36.
football is more than roughness captured in sets of rules,” he admitted almost reluctantly. “They have given me a drug and got me to enjoy the art of warfare.”

What Satorius found both fascinated and frighten him, just as it had Weimar’s industrialists, engineers, union leaders, and professors. In both cases, the conflicting views revolved around America’s standardization, rationalization, efficiency, modern technology, dehumanizing work process, and power of consumption. Satorius marveled at the Cowboys’ ability to raise $30 million for their new “palace” and its array of luxury skyboxes. In great detail he described the vast fortunes of millionaire franchise owners like Clint Murchinson Jr. and Lamar Hunt, and the business prowess of powerful managers like Tex Schramm. The critic-turned-fan concluded, “The war in the stadium is a terrific business.”

But the journalist also informed his German readers about the down side of this American sport business with its rationality and dehumanizing aspects. Comparing football players to figures on a board directed without will of their own by chess masters, the German observer was at once intrigued and concerned by the use of personal computers and mathematical formulas in devising strategies and scouting reports. The efficiency of the computer-based recruitment system “sounds fantastic and crazy and a little scary… O America, you land of unlimited possibilities.” When presented with the idea of evaluating future talent by comparing them with statistical variables of the development of past athletes, Satorius practically shivered, “spooky… Der Mensch im

Suchraster einer seelenlosen Maschine. [Man in the search grid of a soulless machine.]

Here the experiences of century-old German ambiguity toward Western Zivilisation seem to reemerge, which according to Elias had “imprinted themselves deeply in the German tradition.” Satorius’ ambiguous response to the rationality of football mirrored traditional reactions of former German generations to Zivilisation. Its cold reason, technological advancement, and alleged superficiality countered the “inwardness, depth of feelings, immersion in books, [and] development of individual personality,” of Kultur, the quintessential German self-image. 74

In final analysis, the reporter found this vision of modernity embodied on the gridiron to be a “A fascinating, frightening glimpse into a fully programmed age. Once before I have had this feeling of simultaneous admiration and depression in Texas: A decade ago, when in Houston computers were guiding man to the moon.” Satorius’ and Weimar’s Amerikabild were in part a reflection of their own hopes and fears projected upon America. This example certainly supports the findings of the NIAS regarding the conventions Europeans have developed in their discourse, where “America is seen as a society and culture remaining on the surface, lacking Europe’s heights and depths, its

74 Norbert Elias, The Civilizing Process: The History of Manners, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Urizen Books, 1978), 19, 26; Satorius, “Endspiel,” 29, 33-4. Already in the first half of the nineteenth century, Germans expressed respect for America’s technological advancements. In 1847, German newspaper article on “Science and Technology in the United States” mentioned that. “Whereas in the first decade after the liberation wars a just slightly more sophisticated bridge construction could not be executed without a European architect, [and] even the elementary textbooks had to be brought in from schools in London, this relationship changed very quickly. Already before the end of the century America took the stage with an invention that change the Gestalt of the world—the steam boat, which celebrates its fiftieth anniversary this year. Where technology makes such progress in such a short time, it is surely more than mere empiricism.” My translation. Hofrat Meadler, “Wissenschaft und Technik.” Reprinted in: Sommer et al., eds., Was die Deutschen, 42.
soul and warmth, its inner authenticity,” and “irredeemably avaricious, materialistic, frantic, violent, culturally sterile, standardised, vulgar.”

An example from September 1981 shows that the violence narrative was also part of the coverage of the growing popularity of football played by Germans. A Stern article described scenes from a game between the Cologne Crocodiles and the Frankfurt Löwen using the headline “War in the Stadium” and the by then accepted formula of football as “the most brutal team-ball game in the world.” Alexander Sperber, American president of the German football federation, delivered the key analogy between football and war.

“Germans are born football players,” he said. “They are ambitious, tough, and love team sports. In addition, they brought forth great strategists like Clausewitz, Rommel, and Guderian, and strategy is as much a part of football as it is of war.” The article closed on a similar note with a quote of Ray Miller addressing his Cologne teammates at the after-game party, “Men, today you once again escaped death. But there has to be a little war, otherwise it’s no fun.”

A month later, Stern published three letters to the editor in response to the piece on German football. Two of them complained about the negative characterization of the


76 Hans Borchert, “Football: Krieg im Stadion,” Stern, 17 September 1981. In 1980, the Washington Post quoted Sperber as follows: “The German athlete is probably more easily trained for football than the American. … If you look back at the history of Germany, they have a history of doing battle and teamwork.” However, the article also pointed out that the violent character of the game made the sport less appealing to many Germans. Bradley, “Germans Punting, Passing,” F4. In 2002, Sperber elaborated on his view that Germans would be well equipped to succeed in football: “I simply contended that the German is better prepared to be a football player than even the American. Compared to the German, the American is more inclined to be an individualist, while the German is an outstanding team worker. … Given the more pronounced individual thinking, one would expect the American to be a better soccer player. [In soccer] you have to react more intuitively. In football you have to do certain prescribed actions in a split second.” Alexander Sperber, interview by author, tape recording, Laufach, Germany, 24 October 2002.
sport and its participants. The mother of one of the Cologne Crocodiles wrote that the “outrages article” depicted the young men as “bloodthirsty monsters.” Her son had been playing football for almost a year and only a few times had she found bruises on him. In her opinion, “potheads and drunkards cannot participate in this sport. None of these boys takes drugs, and neither do they spend much time in bars past midnight. Only very few smokers are among them. The players are all hard-working and disciplined citizen. Not a single one is unemployed.” Similar to Sperber’s ideas about the application of German military skills on the gridiron, this concerned mother seemed to believe that football players practically embodied a list of ideal conservative German virtues.77

In 1992, GEO again sent a journalist to the United States to report on the phenomenon of American football. During the twelve years that had passed since the Satorius’ article, the commercial spectacle of football had replaced the warlike character of the game as the major topic of observation for German journalists. Accordingly, this time GEO writer Jörg-Uwe Albig critically examined the NFL’s premier event, the Super Bowl, which was introduced not only as the NFL’s championship game, but also as a one hundred million dollar 100-million-dollar business for the hosting city, Minneapolis.78 Over all, Albig described Super Bowl XXVI as an overblown, made-for-TV mirage that in reality only existed in its screen persona:

Naïve positivists admired the fight for the Super Bowl…and believed it is what television is trying to make them think it is: the final for the championship in American football. In reality it was a phantom. It was an electronic,
transcontinental fata morgana; a highly effective placebo for the soul of an entire people, mixed together out of an overdose of television images, radio waves, and printer’s ink.79

For Albig, the 63,000 spectators in the Metrodome had paid between $150 and $1,000 for the privilege of becoming a throng of extras for a staged opera. Many of them, he observed, preferred to watch the game on screens in the hallways of the arena, where one could see the “real” Super Bowl.80 While Albig presented the spectators as mere backdrop of the stage, he regarded the assembled journalists as creators and creation in one:

Weeks before the game they had arrived, the engineers of fantasy: almost 3,000 media representatives from 14 countries… They all had come to report about…really nothing. No, more exactly: Their task was to create the Super Bowl in the first place. They themselves were the event. They started out by interviewing each other and wrote in their papers that almost 3,000 media representatives from 14 countries….81

In some German readers, GEO’s portrayal of the Super Bowl may have reinforced traditional notions about the superficial and artificial character of America’s culture and society. The traditional clash between German Kultur and the dreaded Zivilisation of the West was also “unwittingly reproduced” by the author’s account of an American colleague from the New York Times who, despising the Super Bowl, had once fled to see a performance the New York Philharmonic Orchestra on a “Super Sunday” only to be frustrated by conductor Zubin Mehta having to ask the audience to refrain from listening

79 Ibid., 111.
80 Ibid., 106, 124.
81 Ibid., 113-4.
to the game on their headsets. Albig’s description seems to communicate that this frivolous interruption of real *Kultur* — not only by a sporting event, but one that was simply staged for profit — would have been a serious affront for those Germans who still regarded *amerikanische populär Kultur* an oxymoron. The depiction of the scene reflects the sentiment of Germany’s eighteenth-century middle-class intelligentsia whose self-image and pride was, according to Elias’ analysis, based on *das rein Geistige* (the purely spiritual), in books, scholarship, art, philosophy, in the inner enrichment, the intellectual formation (*Bildung*) of the individual.” The economic spectacle of the Super Bowl would have been of little value for this German intellectual class, as “Mind and books [were] their refuge and their domain, achievements in scholarship and art their pride. … Commerce and the economic order [were] for them, in keeping with the structure of their life and society, marginal concerns.”

82 Ibid., 114. I am borrowing here from a phrase used by social anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen, who in his critique of the UNESCO’s concept of culture in the 1995 *Our Creative Diversity* writes that it, “unwittingly reproduces the old German distinction between *Kultur* and *Zivilisation*, which was especially popular in the interwar years. The former, sometimes associated with Tönnies’ notion of *Gemeinschaft*, is local, experience-based, unique and is passed on through socialisation and the unconscious assimilation of knowledge. The latter, the *Gesellschaft* variety, is global, cognitive, universal and passed on through reflexive learning. It was frequently said about the Jews in the interwar Germanic world that ‘they could acquire our civilization, but never our culture.’” Thomas Hylland Eriksen, “Between Universalism and Relativism: A Critique of the UNESCO Concepts of Culture,” in *Culture and Rights: Anthropological Perspectives*, ed. Marie Cowan, Marie-Benedicte Dembour, and Richard Wilson (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 127-48.

It seemed as if Albig also inadvertently attacked Western Zivilisation when he cynically described football aristocracy’s former decadence to dramatize the effects of the recession, which had hit the United States in 1990:

And those who had been present in 1988 in San Diego had tears in their eyes from remembering the triumph of excess of the legendary “Commissioner’s Party”… How the tables had been bending under [the mountains] of shrimp! How Mississippis of champagne flowed around the guests from Hollywood and Washington! For 6,000 spoiled maggots they had assembled all the bacon of the world…4,500 pounds of steak, 500 fillets of smoked salmon, 2,800 lobsters. And Frank Sinatra!84

In the eyes of Albig, the Super Bowl was only a shadow of its former self. He told of disillusioned guests of the 1992 rendition of the Commissioner’s Party who reportedly had to put up with “‘Miller Lite’-beer and Mexican fast food on plastic plates.” In a similar fashion, Albig commented on the state of America when he observed a group of children who had their pictures taken while sticking their heads through cut outs of life-size cardboard football players: “They played America in this historical moment: a nation on tiptoes that peeks out behind a enormous, hollow scarecrow—teeth clinched, but still smiling, please.” Albig’s comment on America’s forced smile reverberates long-standing suspicions many Germans harbor that American smiles and friendliness are empty promises. It is no surprise that superficiality, outward politeness, and insincerity were among the elements Elias identified as part of the eighteenth-century critique of courtly

84 Albig, “Nationalfeiertag,” 118. Compare this description of the Commissioner’s Party with the depiction of the feast of American New Years parties found in a German newspaper in 1865: “From dawn to dusk, the men rush to all their acquaintances, while the ladies sit dressed in their finest attire in their lounges and receive the guests. The large set table—loaded with fine wines, liqueurs, cold poultry, jellies, crèmes, fruits, fine salads, and all delicatessen you can find under the name of cakes, pies, and sweet confections—is the real center of attention ….” My translation. Ottilie Assig, “Weihnachten und Neujahr,” Augsburger Allgemeine Zeitung 1865. Reprinted in: Sommer et al., eds., Was die Deutschen, 328.
upper class conduct by Germany’s bourgeois intelligentsia, and which later underpinned the concept of Kultur used to distinguish German qualities from those of the West.85

Albig’s description of the overindulgence of previous Commissioner Parties would have been well received by GEO’s former editor-in-chief and publisher Winter, who in 1995 called excess an “American life principle” and “an American disease that spreads its virus in Germany.” Criticizing a wide range of alleged American pitfalls like punk and rap music, ultimate fighting championships, mass murderers, multimillion dollar lawsuits, and the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few, Winter concluded that “Excess is not an occasional exception in America, but characteristic of America and will become characteristic of Germany to the extent to which it Americanizes itself.” In America’s influence on Germany, Winter found the cause of moral erosion in Germany that manifested itself in an escalation in “tax fraud, illegal workers, corruption and ruthless group egoism, lack of discipline in traffic and in schools, hostility toward children, foreigners, and recently also toward the elderly.” For Winter, the basis of socially responsible life based on “universally accepted rules and conceptions of morality” crumbled “because too many people want to live life to the fullest according to the American role model.”86

Similar to Satorius, Albig deplored football’s dehumanizing reduction of athletes’ performance to sets of numbers. If readers thought of the United States as a cold Ellenbogengegsellschaft, a society in which individual members get lost while using their


86 Winter, Little America, 156-7, 159, 180, 186.
elbows in unrestricted competition, they would have certainly found confirmation in Albig’s portrayal of football: “Every players finds himself caught in an inescapable net of statistics, which captures his ‘average passing yardage’ or his ‘third-down efficiency’ in long, paranoid rows of numbers for the acclaim of meritocracy.” He described how computer simulations fed with massive statistics are used to predict the outcome of the game and cited a study by Andrej Markovits detailing the similarities between Frederick Taylor’s fascination with productivity and effectively and Walter Camp’s approach to football. Based on these impressions, Albig declared, “One could hardly overestimate the role numbers played in such ghostly abstract event like the Super Bowl.”87

In comparison to the way many German journalists had depicted football in previous decades, Albig’s piece was remarkably absent of a critique of football’s violence. Apart from a scattered rhetorical references like “the entrance of gladiators,” fans dressed up “as if they were prepared for a larger battle,” and the comment that “Like every place that the Super-Bowl-circus invades, Minnesota turned into an occupied zone for one week,” the author mostly stayed away from the war comparisons that had characterized Satorius’ impressions of football a dozen years earlier. This relative absence of the violence narrative is particularly remarkable given the historical context of the American-led “Operation Dessert Storm” that had ravaged Iraq little over a year before this article appeared. As the review of the football coverage in the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung in the next section demonstrates, the difference in the two GEO articles from 1980 and 1992, with a lesser emphasis on football’s violence, was not particular to this magazine.

Rather, it reflected a larger trend in German print media which deemphasized football’s brutality and increasingly included a depiction of the game as an entertainment spectacle and event. In this process, voices critical of football’s brutality remained vocal and often linked the game’s viciousness to its American heritage.

By the mid 1990s, Winter’s description of American football as “the athletic war substitute with the guideline to violently achieve or prevent the capture of land” were indeed the exception rather than the norm. However, such depictions did not completely disappear from the pages of German newspapers and magazines. For example, in April of 2002, Stern followed Patrick Venzke’s efforts as a professional football player. In October of the previous year, the twenty-six year old had become the first German who had started his football career in Germany to make the 53-man roster of an NFL team. The next spring the Jacksonville Jaguars send the former Düsseldorf Panther youth player to the NFL’s proving ground in Europe, where he fought to keep his career alive.

Reporting from Rhein Fire’s training camp in Florida, Stern conveyed its impression in telegram style:

Humiliating, tormenting, grinding till you drop. Those are the methods with which football players get drilled to flatten opponents. …Football is like war. Battle of man against man. Capturing land. The team that runs over the other team as often as possible with the ball under the arm—without regard for casualties—wins. The sport is so tough that two pros died of exhaustion in the USA.

88 Ibid., 105, 106, 114, 124.

89 Note that Winter depletes the use of English nicknames in German ice hockey, but not hockey’s violence. Winter, Little America, 100-102. “Der Rammbock,” Stern, 11 April 2002, 162.

90 “Rammbock,” 162.
In a manner reminiscent of German football accounts that were common twenty-five years earlier, the magazine referred to football as “the most popular sport in the United States—and a mirror of society. Everyone against everyone. Only the strongest survive.” and “a modern gladiator fight that’s gaining more fans in Germany as well.” The article quoted Venzke to support the grim picture it painted. The German NFL-hopeful reportedly called football “Darwinism at its highest level.” “It’s guaranteed that some of them are faster than I am. Meaner than I am, “ said Venzke describing his American competition that NFL scouts would bring in by busloads to take his spot, “They know what they are running for. Because they come from a little, rotten slum.” 91

**American Football in Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 1975-1990**

The following case study examines the extent and content of American football coverage in a German newspaper during the time of initial growth of football as a participant sport for Germans. The example of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (F.A.Z.)* shows that by the mid-1980s the focus of the football coverage noticeably shifted from the violence of the sport to the spectacle of the Super Bowl. The survey of the years 1975 to 1990 begins two years before the first significant German football team was formed in Frankfurt and ends the year before the arrival of the World League of American Football (WLAF). The review describes how football was presented and investigates how this may have influenced the way readers of this paper viewed American football during this fifteen-year period.

91 Ibid.
All About the Newspaper

*All About the Newspaper: Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, a book published in 1979, provides an excellent insight into the paper’s self-definition, audience, and even its philosophy on sport. *All About the Newspaper* was primarily a comprehensive promotional tool in which the publisher introduced the daily to English-speaking audiences. This self-representation is especially useful for the analysis of the paper’s football coverage since it was published the same year that marked the inaugural season of the American football Bundesliga. The daily defined itself as a “newspaper for Germany” and a “supra-regional” paper. Similar to other national papers like *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and *Die Welt*, the F.A.Z. appears as one nationwide issue supplemented with regional inserts in major markets. Unlike dailies like *Hamburger Abendblatt* or *Berliner Zeitung*, in which major sections of the main body primarily cover news from the respective city or region, the F.A.Z devotes itself “totally to coverage of events throughout Germany and the world.” In that sense, the F.A.Z. also differs from newspapers like *Bild*, which is not only a prime exemplar of the tabloid press, but also appears in local issues with regional content in several markets.92

From its beginnings in 1949 the paper has taken special pride in its “total independence from any outside influences” such as the Allied Occupational Forces during the post-War era or political parties throughout its history. In 1979 the paper’s self-assessment stated that it was “nobody’s ‘mouthpiece’ or ‘organ’” and that it “tries to

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92 *All About the Newspaper: Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, (Frankfurt a. M.: Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 1979), 1, 2, 73.
avoid being dogmatic. It considers its readers capable of judging for themselves, and thus gladly allows differing viewpoints to be heard.” At the same time, the F.A.Z. considered itself an opinion leader: “The paper maintains a moderate and critical position. It wants to give to the young people of today—the managers of tomorrow—some sense and meaning to Germany’s political, social and economic order. F.A.Z.’s leaders and commentaries reveal the particular stance the paper takes.”

A 1978 readership analysis proved “beyond all doubt that F.A.Z.’s readers have an above average education and income, and are mostly ‘opinion leaders.’” According to another survey, the F.A.Z. reached more decision-makers in business management and administration than any other German paper. Its circulation figures showed total net sales of over 295,000 issues and a daily reach of one million readers in 1979. Twenty-eight percent of the total net sales were distributed in the greater Frankfurt and Darmstadt region, the area that can claim to have been the cradle of American football in Germany in the late 1970s. As such the F.A.Z.’s depiction of American football had the potential to have considerable influence on the reception of the sport in Germany.

In the late 1970s the daily sport pages were located at the end of the business section, which the paper explained by suggesting: “There is a certain logical connection— isn’t

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93 Ibid., 2, 3, 9.

94 “Its 1.04 million readers belong to Germany’s top intellectual and business population group. 79% of F.A.Z.’s readers undertook further study from ‘A’ Levels to university/college. 82%… have a net household income of over DM 2,000 per month…41% of readers are women…33% of readers are under 30 years old, 39% are between 30 and 50, and 28% are over 50. This makes three quarters of F.A.Z.’s readers under 50 (38% of the total population of the Federal Republic is over the age of 50.)…46% of F.A.Z.’s readers are proprietors, company directors, members of the professions, self-employed with small and medium-sized businesses, senior employees and civil servants. 41%…are salaried employees and civil servants; 11% are farmers, skilled workers or other workers.” Ibid., 121-22.
competition in a free market economy a type of sport?” König Fußball ruled the sports pages of the F.A.Z. just as it dominated Germany’s sporting landscape. The paper justified its concentration on soccer by pointing to “the huge number of soccer fans in Germany,” and the sport was “a mass phenomenon of the first order and must be acknowledged as such.” As to the reasons for soccer’s success, the F.A.Z. noted,

It’s hard to explain why football is so popular. The excellence of the game lies in its simplicity and the appealing mix of skill and physical confrontation, perspiration and inspiration. At the same time football is like a game of roulette. The ingredient of luck can disrupt the tedious rules of logic and turn a game completely the other way. David has a much better chance against Goliath on the football pitch than on the track or in the gymnasium.95

As “luck” would have it, it had been precisely this element of chance in rugby football that had offended modern America’s sense of rationality a century earlier, especially that of Walter Camp.96 In 1880 it had been Camp’s aversion with chance occurrences in the game that sparked the key innovation of separating offense and defense through a line of scrimmage. This conscious decision to eliminate the aspect of chance eventually triggered a series of unforeseen rule adjustments that eventually led to the creation of American football in the complex form in which it now tried to compete with soccer’s excellent simplicity.97

95 Ibid., 73.
96 Oriard, Reading Football, 32-3, 35.
97 Ibid., xxii-xxiii, 37, 56.
The paper’s self-definition laid out in *All About the Newspaper* also foreshadowed why football eventually made an appearance on its pages and would later grow in coverage, while never challenging to become a mainstay.

Even the scholars can’t give an answer when asked what sport really is, and we won’t try to define it either. At any rate sport is something which is fun, or at least should be fun. ...Sport is a constantly changing phenomenon. ...there can never be a fixed popularity poll for different sports. F.A.Z. tries to respond to any signs that readers have an above average interest in one sport or another...Even articles on minority sports like billiards, bowling or curling are interesting and informative.98

While the sport pages appeared adjacent to the business section, the *F.A.Z.*’s philosophy of sport went beyond competition and profit. The paper held the German sport structure in high regard primarily because it believed that the federations and clubs both taught democracy and fostered sociability:

The German Sports Association (DSB) has a membership of about twelve million in 40,000 clubs. Members are active in about fifty different sports from motor-sports to water-polo; in their separate clubs they develop forms of sociability, and learn the rules of the game of democracy in mini-societies.99

The paper’s “impartial criticism” compelled its journalists to promote the virtues of sport and speak out against deplorable excesses:

We take a stand against doping, against football bribery and the misuse of sportsmen in advertising. ...The health advantages of sport are of general benefit to society. An outstanding sportsman is supposed to strive fanatically for maximum achievement, only to learn that it doesn’t have any value in itself. Even footballers on the school playing fields experience the idea of fitting into the system of a team, sport is personality-forming, and teaches social behaviour offering the loner a chance to know himself.100

98 *All About*, 74-75.

99 Ibid., 74.

100 Ibid., 75.
The paper thus cautioned against over-commercialization ("misuse of sportsman in advertising") and the overemphasis of competition, which leads to a perversion of sport (doping, bribery, advertising). At the same time, it championed a particular view about positive attributes of sport (health promotion, community more important than the individual, character development). As the following analysis shows, the initial violence narrative of the F.A.Z.'s football coverage thus fits into this larger philosophy as the paper’s original critique of the American sport focused on the physical harm done to its participants and the negative effects of over-commercialization.

101 The F.A.Z. opposed the emerging practice of displaying sponsors on athlete’s jerseys in the late 1970s. The paper avoided showing pictures that displayed sponsor names and logos. At times, logos were blacked out. The paper covered discussion about this new kind of sponsoring and the consequences for athletes who competed in so-called amateur sports and received federal funding in great detail in 1978 and 1979. See for example: Deutsche Presse Agentur, "Werbetrikots gefährden die Olympiateilnahme und erschweren Fernsehübertragungen," Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 16 September 1978, 20; Steffen Haffner, “In der Reklame-Klemme,” Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 8 September 1979, 21; Roland Zorn, “Das Eis ist gebrochen,” Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 3 October 1979, 24; Roland Zorn, “Mischmaschlösung zum Thema Trikotreklame: Handballklubs nicht stark auf der Werbebrust,” Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 8 September 1979, 21. In the 1970s, media resistance against product placement was widespread. In 1974, at the height of the public controversy, television stations ARD and ZDF canceled the broadcast of several international sporting events including the European Championships in swimming and track and field. Sonja Brandmaier and Peter Schimany, Die Kommerzialisierung des Sports: Vermarktungsprozesse im Fußball-Profisport (Hamburg: Lit Verlag, 1998), 53.

102 It should be noted that while the F.A.Z. was critical of violence in sport, it also voiced its criticism when German television banned live broadcasts of Formula-1 and boxing from its programs. On March 8, 1979 Heinz-Werner Hübben, program director of the Westdeutsche Rundfunk, announced that ARD television would no longer show live coverage of these violent sports. In an editorial, the F.A.Z. quoted a German sociologist who regarded the measure as a threat to the freedom of press. The paper also wondered if the ARD, one of two federally funded networks, would also cease other programming like crime shows, westerns, and horror movies. Hans-Joachim Leyenberg, “Fernsehen, Sport und Brutalität,” Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 10 March 1979, 23.
From Violence to Spectacle

In the two years before the Frankfurt Löwen were founded, the *F.A.Z.*’s national sport coverage made very little reference to the American game. In 1976, for example, it published a picture of a ball carrier skillfully escaping his defender. The illustration was simply captioned “Pas De Deux” and was not accompanied by any article. Other mentioning of the game provided only little more information. In July 1978, the paper brought a picture of Green Bay Packer’s coach Bart Starr stretching with his players. Again, the picture was not linked to an article. The two-line caption simply informed the readers that Starr was coaching in his third season. In the following years, the *F.A.Z.* continued to sporadically publish pictures from the NFL without providing additional information beyond the image itself and a caption. Often times the images and the captions highlighted the confusing and exotic characteristics the sport. In February of 1979, the paper showed a scene from the previous month’s Super Bowl captioned: “Subjected: Thomas Henderson of the Dallas Cowboys, an American pro-football team, triumphs; the opponent (Larry Anderson of the Pittsburgh Steelers) lies in the dust in front of him.” In September of the same year, an Associated Press picture depicted a ball carrier diving over the defense line in a short-yardage situation in a game between the Rams and the Buccaneers. The corresponding caption referred to the “higgledy-piggledy” scene: “Who is who—oder wer ist wo? Das Drunter und Drüber beim

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105 *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 11 October 1979, 22.
American Football.” The following month readers may have been similarly puzzled by another Associated Press picture that showed a Green Bay Packers player being thrown to the ground headfirst. The caption read, “American football turned on its head.”

Similar to the pictures, the text coverage of the F.A.Z also illustrated the exotic status the sport must have had in the eyes of most German sports writers and their readers. In addition, reports in the late 1970s stressed the violent aspects of football. In August of 1978 the paper picked up an article produced by the Deutsche Presse Agentur with the headline: “Alarming figures in the American national sport: Football increasingly claims dead and injured.” A photo showing a defender about to tackle a ball carrier was captioned “‘Amerikanischer Kleinkrieg’: Football” referring to football as an American form of warfare. In short, the text was a report about the astonishing brutality of a uniquely American sport. It opened with the description of a priest praying for divine help for Notre Dame’s players against Oklahoma and a crowd of 106,000 singing a national anthem that revolves around the description of a “perilous fight.” Content and tone of the text communicated that writer and readers alike were onlookers of apparently unfamiliar and strange customs. The author invoked an image of a bloodthirsty crowd asking for a human sacrifice. The article explained that as early as 1905 eighteen players had died playing American football and that President Roosevelt’s call for moderation was “overpowered by the outcry of millions of spectators who wanted their sacrifice.”

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106 German readers would have quite familiar with the phrase “Who is who.” A translation of the German caption might read, “Who is who—or who is where. The higgledy-piggledy of American football.” Ibid., 26 September, 23.

107 Ibid., 11 October, 22.
The article referred to several studies reporting of hundreds and thousands of severe and fatal injuries in high school and college football. The gruesome portrayal culminated in the prophecy that “as long as players, protected by helmets, can sprint into the pit of the stomach, kidneys, and shins like torpedoes the lists of brain damaged, paralyzed, and crippled players will grow longer.”108

German amateur football began its struggle for attention in the German media at a national level with the launch of the American football Bundesliga on August 4, 1979. Within the F.A.Z. local football was mostly relegated to the Rhein-Main-Sport section of the regional supplement. At the time, Wolfgang Scheffler established himself somewhat as the paper’s expert on American football especially through his early coverage of the Frankfurt Löwen.109 The day before the league’s premiere, German football made a rare appearance on the national sports pages of the Frankfurt daily when Scheffler’s headline announced, “A Bundesliga for the American spectacle.” The article informed readers how a chance meeting between American Alexander Sperber and German Wolfgang Lehneis led to the founding of the first club in Frankfurt, the first national federation, and now the first national league.110


109 See the next section for a discussion of the local football coverage in Rhein-Main-Sport of the regional supplement in the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung.

While a sidebar provided a brief summary of the “complicated” rules, the article introduced football as a martial spectacle made in America. For Scheffler football was “eine uramerikanische Sache”—a uniquely American thing:

It’s not football that came to Germany, but a little piece of America. Football is more than a ball game… Football is a spectacle that lasts for hours [and] that begins with… synchronized warm-ups accompanied by warlike screaming, [and] continues with the introduction of the players that, compared to the German soccer Bundesliga, resembles a show number.111

This piece on Germany’s amateur football league also revealed an interesting American heterostereotype of Germans as combat-loving people. According to Otis Davis, identified as the federation’s Public Relations Manager, Germans would particularly take to football because “They love the hard fight man on man.” At the time of the interview, Davis had been in charge of sports programs for the American military community in Mannheim for the previous seven years, but he was better known for winning gold in the 1960 Olympics in Rome by beating German Carl Kaufmann in the 400m final. Davis’ notion about the Germans and their relationship to the new sport was reinforced by the federation’s president, the American Sperber, who alluded to psychological evidence that was to have found that the German mentality had a particular preference for football.112

These arguments were apparently aimed to convince Germans that they were naturally gifted to succeed in this American sport and prompted Scheffler to comment, “The enthusiasm and optimism of the new football officials know no boundaries”—character traits that might have been more commonly associated with Americans than

111 Ibid.
112 Ibid.
Germans. The F.A.Z.’s own enthusiasm for Bundesliga football was short lived in 1979, as the newcomer largely disappeared from its national sports pages. The Monday following the league’s first game day was the only time during the regular season that the new Bundesliga made an appearance in the results column, where Ansbach’s win in Bremerhaven (14-8) and Frankfurt’s away victory over Düsseldorf (18-0) were cushioned between results from soaring and professional boxing.113

On the occasion of Frankfurt winning the very first German championship in American football, Scheffler’s coverage of the inaugural Bundesliga season, largely relegated to the pages of the regional Rhein-Main supplement, culminated in a three-column, fifty-line report accompanied by a large picture showing the celebrating Löwen: “German-American celebration of a German championship title in a very American sport.” The article was as much a game report of the “almost three-hour long Geraufe” (brawl) as it was a summary of football’s status in Germany. Unbeaten Frankfurt won over Ansbach 14-8 (“somewhat like a 2:1 win in soccer”) but only 400 spectators came to see the historic game on a cold and damp Saturday November 10.114

Despite the disappointing turnout, the overall tone of the article was optimistic. At the time of the league finale, the AFBD reported a membership of twenty-four clubs with almost 1,000 individuals. Probably relying on “air-brushed” numbers released by the federation, Scheffler reported that the Bundesliga had averaged 1,200 spectators per


game during its premier season, and plans for the next season allegedly were to expand from six to twelve teams that would play in a southern and northern conference. Not surprisingly, American teams continued to be the measuring stick for the German upstarts. AFBD president and captain the of German champion team Sperber shared with reporters that the Bundesliga’s top teams would be able to hold their own against teams from small American colleges. Such comparisons were clearly aimed to convince readers of the quality of the performance level of the German teams, although few Germans—German journalists included—may have known about the difference between small and large colleges and where these might rank in relation to professional football.115

In March of 1980 Scheffler’s review of Jack Tatum’s autobiography They Call Me Assassin did not paint a favorable portrait of football. Tatum had gained notoriety for vicious tackles, especially one that left New England’s wide receiver Darryl Stingley paralyzed. Through Tatum’s words American football was introduced to the readers “as war”, and “a violent and brutal game.” Tantum was cited speculating that this kind of violence fulfills psychological needs of the American society, and comparing the function of boxing, hockey, and football to Roman gladiators. The author of the article made no effort to contest this negative image of American football. Furthermore, the reader was informed that nineteen former professionals were forced to watch the Super Bowl paralyzed in their wheelchairs that year.116


An article from January 1981 portrayed football along the similar lines. The headline “Violence according to the needs of a large audience: The more blood, the more spectators.” appeared on the occasion of Super Bowl XV. Next to an ad, this major article filled an entire page with its six columns and two pictures. The story focused around two themes that highlighted the apparently foreign character of American football for the paper’s readers: the degree of violence, and sport as big business. The opening paragraph outlined the magnitude of the upcoming Super Bowl. Almost as many journalists would cover this “American media spectacle par excellence” as the entire soccer 1974 World Cup in Germany. Black market ticket and hotel prices seemed equally impressive to the German observer. The article then focused on American football as a serious business in which the end justifies any means. Once again, Tantum’s book was used to make the point, and Vince Lombardi was quoted to have said that one couldn’t win in this sport without ruthlessly using violence. Anecdotes of late hits and personal fouls completed the picture. With head coaches acting like generals and players awarded stars on their helmets, the parallels between war and football seemed all too obvious for the writer. To support this notion, undefined observers of the American sports scene were quoted explaining the rising popularity of American football in the United States: “eventually this only proves once again the violent character of this country and the inability of the country to cope with social and economic shifts.” Further unnamed sources pointed to American football’s alleged function to distract domestic attention away from the consequences of the Vietnam War. The text also mentioned an honorable but hopeless opposition formed by concerned parents, a couple of fair players as the exception to the
rule, and a few honest politicians seeking protective legislation. The tenor was that all of these people were basically fighting for a lost cause, since “those for whom the American football sport is just regular business, believe that the commercial value of the game increases with the bloodshed. The more blood, the more spectators.”¹¹⁷

In April 1981 the F.A.Z. picked up an article from the German news agency Sport Informations-Dienst (sid) previewing the beginning of the third season of Bundesliga football made in Germany. The report’s focus on the “growing spectator interest” in Bundesliga football had a decisively different tone than the usual articles written for the paper’s national sport coverage by F.A.Z. staff writers. The article featured the accomplishments of the Cologne Crocodiles’ public relations team, whose club had managed to outdraw the local competition in form of second division soccer club Fortuna and German basketball champion Saturn. The sid-writer seemed particularly impressed with the public relations efforts of Alexander Leibkind, the twenty-eight year old who started his work in sports promotion with the Crocodiles in 1981. Among the Crocodiles’ publicity stunts was a convoy of vintage American cars through downtown Cologne followed by a football exhibition in front of the city’s trademark cathedral.¹¹⁸ At least for this journalist, only the continued power struggle between the two rival federations AFBD and AFV appeared to cast a shadow on football’s future.¹¹⁹


Three months later, the *F.A.Z.*’s enthusiasm for local football had once again faded from their national sports coverage. On July 17, 1981, the paper published a devastating article about the status quo of football in Germany. In its very first appearance at home, the national team had decisively lost the first of two contests against the selection of the *Associazione Italiana Football Americano* (AIFA). The Germans failed to score in a lopsided game, which ended 22-0 for the Italian visitors. The pathetic performance “at times caused laughter in the stands; that’s how helpless the German players looked,” commented writer Jörg Hahn.¹²⁰

In addition to the loss, the game turned out to be a public relations disaster. Overblown expectations raised by German officials backfired when far less than the projected 6,000 came out to see this first game between national teams in Germany. Less than two thousand spectators gathered in the stadium on Bornheimer Hang, home of soccer club FSV Frankfurt. The AFBD had promoted the game through newspapers, radio, and ten thousand flyers, “but the majority of the pamphlets must have ended up in the dust of the streets or in trashcans,” ridiculed the paper. AFBD president Paolo Wölker

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hoped for a better turnout for a second game on Sunday in Cologne, “where the enthusiasm for this sport, for whatever reasons, is much bigger.”

The readers’ enthusiasm for football might have been seriously stifled after reading Hahn’s description of the scenes on the field:

What both teams were doing on the field already before the kick-off appeared to the onlooker like a ballet or a military parade. Ninety players marched in unison out of the locker rooms; they did their warm-ups in synchrony, accompanied again and again by wild screaming that already gave a taste of the scuffle and duels during the game. …When the ball came into life, the real mystery began for many spectators. Players ran wildly around according to an often-unrecognizable system. …Despite the explanations over the speakers from an expert commentator, who also appeared surprised at some of the actions, the happening remained for the majority of the two thousand a colorful tumult of broad-shouldered male bodies, who drove their helmets into each others stomachs, every now and then—seemingly unmotivated—burst out in jubilation and finally crawled off the field with their heads hanging down—at least as far as the German players were concerned.

After the game, Ray Semko, American head coach of Team Italy, told the journalists that he believed that the performance on the field would have a positive impact for football in Europe. Hahn’s conclusion was less optimistic: “Whether the numerous spectators who left the stadium long before the final whistle shared [Semko’s] view is doubtful.”

In summary, the sparse accounts American football received at a national level in this particular paper between 1975 and 1981 hardly provided the kind of promotion that American and German football enthusiasts would have liked to see. Three

121 According to a history of the Cologne Crocodiles, the local organizers of the return match, 12,000 spectators watched a 15-15 tie after overtime between Germany and Italy in Cologne’s Süd-Stadion. Michael Baumeister, Die Geschichte der Cologne Crocodiles (Cologne: privately published, 2003), 8-9. The attendance figure was also mentioned in newspaper reports like Klaus Blume, “American Football — Vom Boom überrollt,” Die Welt, 21 July 1981.

122 Hahn, “Football-Länderspiel.”
heterostereotypes of America in general and football in particular emerge from these accounts: violence, militarism, and materialism. However, by 1984 the football coverage in the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung shifted its focus from the violence on the field to the spectacle surrounding the game and especially the Super Bowl.\footnote{For an example for this transition from a different paper see: Blume, “Boom.” While the article uses the story of Jack Tatum (“They call me assassin… Football is war… I’m a hit man.”) as bookends—and thus uses the violence narrative—, the main part of the text focuses on the rapidly growing popularity of “the world’s most demanding team sport in terms of strategy” in Germany.} In 1984, the paper brought two short articles with pictures from Super Bowl XVIII. Ten days before the game, an article pointed out that the excitement and media attention made the Super Bowl the “sport event of the year,” outshining the tennis masters in New York and the summer Olympics in Los Angeles. Following the game, the report marveled over the magnitude of the game documented in figures: DM 100,000 for players of the winning team and half of that on the losing side; 150 million television viewers in the United States, Canada, Japan, and Great Britain; and DM 1.3 million for a one-minute commercial. For the first time, the text mentioned the actual game result and commented on players’ performance as Marcus Allen of the Raiders received particular attention.\footnote{Deutsche Presse Agentur Sport Informations Dienst, “Die Super-Bowl - ein super Geschäft,” Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 24 January 1984, 19. (“The Super Bowl - a super business”) The article was based on texts from Sport Informations Dienst (sid, sport information service) and Deutsche Presse Agentur (dpa, German press agency).}

One year later, the paper devoted half a page to Super Bowl XIX. Once again, it was the spectacle rather than the athletic event that impressed the authors. One article was probably based on official press releases and offered the standard ingredients for what was to become the dominant narrative of the football coverage for the years to come: “the
sport event overshadowing every other event in the United States;” bonus payments for
players; international TV ratings (reported 150 million viewers in 30 countries); the price
for a one-minute commercial and broadcast rights; attendance in the stadium; black
market price for tickets; and the number of journalists present. A second article appeared
to be written by a correspondent in San Francisco and described the celebrations and
festivities following the 49er win. The only attention the game itself received was the
mentioning of the result and in the caption to an action shot of 49ers’ running back Roger
Craig, incorrectly referring to Craig as a wide receiver. The text also mentioned Joe
Montana as an outstanding player. The fact that the terms “wide receiver” and
“quarterback” were translated into German in parenthesis suggests that the average reader
was expected to be unfamiliar with the terms. Different from previous practices, the
writers referred only once to violence on the field when football was labeled “America’s
most brutal sport.”

In 1986 and 1987, the annual Super Bowl reports added more substance to the
standard descriptions. In 1986, one journalist made an attempt to explain the game itself
to the readers after watching the game in Germany until 3.30 a.m. on the American
Armed Forces Network (AFN). The author also commented on the perceived parallels
between the American way of life and American football: “Football is not only a sport,
football is more, a perspective on life that projects life’s struggle on the green rectangle.
Only the strongest, the truly strongest, make it through.” The at times awkward

Herz von San Francisco: Eine Stadt ausser Rand und Band,” Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 22 January
1985, 18.
formulations used to describe William Perry’s touchdown run revealed how foreign the
game still was to German eyes. “American football is less widely spread in Europe than
the American way of life,” commented the writer, “The rules of the latter are easier to
understand.” In 1987 for the first time, the summary included some statistical information
comparing Phil Simms’ and John Elway’s completion rates.126

The article in 1988 followed the trend toward detail with most of the story line
focusing on the underdog win of the Redskins and their quarterback Doug Williams
against John Elway and the favored Broncos. The text pointed out that Williams was the
first black quarterback to lead his team to the championship. This tendency toward more
substance and detail may indicate a growing interest in and familiarity with the game, as
well as an extended publicity push from the NFL. By 1988, the NFL’s market expansion
towards Europe was well underway. Great Britain had been the first target of this drive.
London had hosted the first American Bowl exhibition game in 1983 and then annually
since 1986. NFL games had been shown regularly on England’s television since 1982.127
By 1988, the Super Bowl was reportedly broadcasted in 55 countries, up from only four
in 1984 and 30 in 1985.128


E. Peartont (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1993), 209.

128 The rapid expansion of the NFL would continue through the beginning and middle of the 1990s. Super
Bowl XXX was broadcasted to a record 187 countries. Even more telling than the one-time-event Super
Bowl was the growth of regular season games. By 1996, weekly telecasts reached 174 countries, compared
Football.
By 1989, the Super Bowl was important enough for the F.A.Z. to produce an article before and after the game. It was also the last Super Bowl before the NFL once more intensified its international media campaign to promote the intercontinental professional World League of American Football. The first article is a good example that German journalists were by no means taking an uncritical approach towards this latest American export product. They were hardly succumbing to an all-powerful American influence.

The article prior to the game focused on the fact that the Super Bowl would be played despite three days of riots that cost the life of three in a predominantly black district of the host city Miami. The sarcastic comment was, “The climax of the football season is much too important and much too profitable to become a victim of the expression of social abuses.” The writer further acknowledged that the Super Bowl had become a sport event with international importance. According to the author, its fascination could not be attributed to the sport itself but rather to the perfectly staged spectacle and the appearance of machismo as demonstrated by its giant-like athletes.129

1990, the last year of this review, was the first year the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung paid attention to the games leading up to the Super Bowl as it brought the results


of the AFC and NFC championship games in the “results” section accompanied by a picture. An article published before the Super Bowl once again paid tribute to American football as the astonishing multi-billion dollar business. According to the author, the fees for television licenses in German professional soccer would look like pocket change by comparison. The reporter stressed that unlike in Germany professional teams had been run like business entities for a long time in America. The text also pointed out that American football and its professionalism was reaching Germany. Super Bowl XXIV was available live to viewers in Germany via two cable stations, Tele 5 and Sportkanal. The article also foreshadowed the arrival of professional football in Germany by mentioning for the first time the upcoming “Weltliga” (world league) and informed is readers about a possible team in Frankfurt.130

Besides the commercial aspects, the article highlighted the match-up between the 49ers and the Broncos as well as the success of super-star Joe Montana. The exceptional role of San Francisco’s quarterback at a time when professional American football was given more exposure to a broader audience in this country probably made him the first recognizable figure of the sport for many Germans. The article following the game, exemplified the change in commentaries since 1976. Instead of describing American football as a form of legal assault, it was now presented as “a rough contact sport that required a mixture of toughest physicality and the agility of a ballet dancer.” Much like in later World League coverage, the author praised the thrilling sport accompanied by

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spectacular sideshow with “music, ballet, and girls”, as well as the emotional performance of the national anthem “culminating in spectacular indoor fireworks.” And whereas reports ten years earlier had not even mentioned the games’ results, two thirds of this article consisted of an actual account of the game itself.\textsuperscript{131}

The increasing emphasis the German press placed on the spectacle surrounding the game itself was neither a German imagination nor invention. From the late nineteenth century and the dawn of the “golden age of print” to the newsreels of the 1920s through the 1940s, the American media played a decisive role in both capturing and creating the spectacle of football for a national audience. By the late 1880s college football’s Thanksgiving Day game had developed into a major social event in New York. From America’s media capital, football’s pageantry and the journalistic formula that highlighted it spread across the nation. The representational character college teams could take on has been a major impetus for the cultural significance of intercollegiate sports in America since its early days. As the New York Thanksgiving Day games show, especially non-college-educated, “respectable” members of the middle class desired to emulate the social elites of prestigious colleges by associating with their sports teams. Oriard stresses, that the public press showcased and fostered this dynamic. In papers like the \textit{New York Herald} and the \textit{New York Times} “virtually every account of every big game made the men and women in the grandstands as much part of the story as the players on

\textsuperscript{131} Case in point, on January 26, 1990 the paper brought a picture showing Montana confidently looking forward to the game. The picture was not linked to an article and the subtitle contained very little information. Yet with this, American football made a record total of four appearances surrounding the Super Bowl that year. Fehr, ”American Football - vom Millionengeschäft zum Millardengeschäft,” 31; Fehr, “Mehr als einhundert Millionen,” 26.
Increasingly, the coverage included reports on pre- and post-game pageantry. The identification of members of the social elite in attendance became a conventional element that tied “not only the game but also the game’s enthusiasts to the social elite.” Through its narratives the press created a shared rhetoric that allowed an entirely new segment of the population to associate with the growing importance of colleges and universities as social status symbol. On the pages of New York’s papers, which significantly influenced how people in America came to understand the sport, football as social event became as important as football as an athletic contest.132

In the first half of the twentieth century, a broader range of media became available to shape the narratives of football in America. Nonetheless, pageantry and spectacle continued to be major themes. By the 1920s, for example, newsreels reinforced the notion of college football as spectacle by its spotlight on the hoopla surrounding the game. Flickering images of bands, cheerleaders, cheering sections, and the ubiquitous celebrities defined for many the experience of college football. An example from the late 1930s shows that football’s pomp and circumstance had by no means disappeared from the sporting pages. On October 8, 1939 L.H. Robbins of the *New York Times Magazine* welcomed another season on the gridiron not by concentrating on what happened on the field but on the sights and sounds surrounding it:

> The cheer leaders turning cartwheels on the turf. The mascot mules, lion, cub, bulldogs and what not. …The water-wagon squads, the bands and the banners. The scoreboard scouts flashing their signal cards. The mysterious hut atop the west stand where the fourth estate writes and broadcasts. The brewery-sponsored plane circling overhead. Then the spectator throng. Beauty in fox and mink, and

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132 Oriard, *Reading Football*, 61, 95, 97, 100-1, 110, 112-4.

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chivalry in coonskin. … People eating sandwiches. People in other people’s seat. … Here’s a whole lot of watching to be done all in a couple of hours of a pleasant Autumn afternoon.

In many ways, this description was strikingly similar to accounts of the show surrounding the NFL’s Super Bowl, which half a century later would gradually replace depictions of football’s violence as the major narrative in the German press. In both cases the writers appeared to be more smitten with the atmosphere around the stadium and in the stands than the action on the field. For Germans who in the 1980s and 1990s became fans of the NFL because of its wall-to-wall entertainment, it might have been a surprise that professional football in America was once known and appreciated for its lack of extravaganza. Pro football fans “proclaim that what they see is football played for football’s sake,” wrote Robert Kelly in a piece about “another kind of football scene” in the same New York Times Magazine exactly a week following the earlier article praising the total experience of a college game. He continued, “They say they approve, rather than deplore, the absence of such colorful but irrelevant trimmings as college pennants and cheer leaders.” Thus, in the fifty years between the start of World War II and the fall of the Berlin Wall professional football not only crossed the Atlantic but also underwent a major change in its public image.133

An example from January 2005 demonstrates that the critique of football as an American glorification of aggression did not completely disappear from the pages of the F.A.Z. In the Sunday edition of the paper, reporter Jürgen Kalwa found an explanation for the love affair of the American public with the gridiron in the relationship between warfare and football. In his opinion the key to this relationship is not in the gladiator image of the individual player, as in the recent hero worship surrounding former NFL player Pat Tillman, who after giving up his lucrative NFL career to join “the war on terror” was killed by friendly fire in Afghanistan. Rather, the true connection could be found in the similarity of the command structure on the battlefield and on the gridiron. According to Kalwa, football shows “that there exists in the United States an astonishing enthusiasm for a Menschenbild in which the individual is nothing, yet his coach is everything. They are generals, who with staff of more than ten assistants, purge as much spontaneity as possible from the game.”\footnote{Jürgen Kalwa, “Taktik: Foorball oder Fußball-Lernen für den Krieg,” Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung, 9 January 2005, 14. Kalwa was born in Germany in 1952 and lives in the United States since 1989, from where he regularly reports about American sports for German newspapers. Also see: Jürgen Kalwa, Faszination American Football (Munich: Copress, 1995).}

The journalist found that “Much has been written about why structures of order and subordination attract millions in stadiums and in front of televisions in a land that stresses individual freedom.” Thus, Kalwa supported his argument with quotes from former baseball commissioner Bart Giamatti, British philosopher Bertrand Russell, and most of all material from an article published in the November 2003 issue of the Armed Forces Journal titled “Football vs. Soccer: American Warfare in an Era of Unconventional
Threats.” In the latter, authors Joel Cassmann and David Lai argued that the American forces should prefer the flexible tactics of soccer players over football’s static maneuvers in fighting terrorism.\textsuperscript{135} Such innovative ideas, however, had been rejected by the American military establishment since “Football, which hides under its surface a fascinating tug-of-war between machismo and mathematics, between chess and chore, belongs to the DNA of the American armed forces.” All of this lead Kalwa to conclude that “It is no coincidence that each year the two officer schools West Point and Annapolis proudly carry out their football classic Army against Navy in front of 80,000 spectators.”\textsuperscript{136}

A sidebar to the article also provided an unapologetic homage to Sepp Herberger, who had led the West German soccer team to a surprising World Cup title in 1954 that renewed German pride and put the country back on the global stage. According to Kalwa, the legendary coach had been a keen student of the Prussian General Carl von Clausewitz. “Herberger,” wrote Kalwa, “is credited with a militarily precise preparation of game strategies especially for the World Cup 1954.” Referring to German triumph, Kalwa concluded, “The miracle of Bern was [well] thought-out.” Had Kalwa known of


\textsuperscript{136} Kalwa, “Taktik,” 14.
Sperber’s 1981 statement that Germans were made for football since, “they brought forth great strategists like Clausewitz, Rommel, and Guderian,” he would have surely quoted the founder of the German football movement.137

While Kalwa’s commentary was reminiscent of the violence narrative that had dominated much the depiction of football in the German press during the 1970s and early 1980s, it was juxtaposed with an article that appeared less than a month later in the online edition of the F.A.Z. This piece sung the praises of the awe-inspiring financial event of Super Bowl XXXIX: “As unaware and unimpressed some foreigners may look upon the football final, for the Americans it’s the ‘game of games.’ It is also ‘big business’ and a bubbling source of money for the host.” What followed was a litany of numerical superlatives describing the “big business” of the Super Bowl: “Previous-year host Houston enjoyed more than 300 million additional income from 75,000 spectators, more than 3,000 media representatives, and around 200,000 spectators without tickets.” The year before San Diego supposedly even made out with $367 million. True to the formula that had emerged in the F.A.Z.’s Super Bowl coverage in the mid-1980s, the article announced that 800 million viewers around the globe would watch thirty-second commercials for which FOX television charged a record of $2.4 million. In light of such monetary incentives for cheating and the betting scandal involving referees that rocked German soccer at the time, the article credited the NFL’s severe punishments for

137 Ibid. For Sperber’s statement see: Borchert, “Krieg.”
preventing similar disgrace. Overall, the piece read like a German affidavit confirming the American motto that “bigger is better.”

The survey of the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung from 1975–1990 shows that football was not a regular part of the national sports coverage in this particular paper. During the early years of this period, scattered reports painted a grim picture of the sport that reinforced German heterostereotypes of rampant violence and materialism in America. As such these reports also reflected American homostereotypes of football from turn-of-the-century debates about football’s violence and the discourse about players’ drug abuse in the 1970s. By the mid-1980s alternative narratives emerged as annual reports about the spectacle of the Super Bowl increasingly introduced positive heterostereotypes that associated entertainment and economic success stories. Toward the end of the 1980s the game itself with its results and stars slowly entered the picture. It is plausible that this expanded coverage was partially due to increased public relations efforts to expand the NFL’s international visibility and to tap into new markets. Yet, to assume that this shift in perspective was due to “brain-washing” Americanization would neglect decades of experience in adapting American popular culture to German life.

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Rhein-Main-Sport: Local Football Coverage in the F.A.Z.

On the national stage football fought an uphill battle over space on German sports pages against more established rivals. However, as local contests began to regularly provide their own story lines and narratives, football increasingly received attention in local sports sections. Compared to the nation-wide editions, local papers offered a more detailed and intimate coverage that resembled reports of other, more familiar sporting events. In a variation from the violence formula, these accounts initially also highlighted the game’s physical aspects and toughness.

As we have seen earlier, Wolfgang Scheffler had published occasional football articles on the national sport pages of the F.A.Z. since 1978. However, the majority of his articles covering the Frankfurt Löwen appeared in the regional supplement of the paper. Following his studies in psychology at the University of Mainz, Scheffler moved to Frankfurt in 1977, where he started as a freelance writer and photographer for the F.A.Z. The dawn of his own carrier and that of football in Germany traveled similar paths, as his efforts to become a full-time journalist coincided with the emergence of American game in the Rhein-Main region. Born in 1948, Scheffler was only four and six years older than Alexander Sperber and Wolfgang Lehneis, the co-founders of the German football movement. As a young writer carving out his niche in the newsroom of the F.A.Z., taking on a sport largely unknown to colleagues with more seniority may have been a logical
move for Scheffler, who by the start of 1980 earned a full-time position in the sports department.\textsuperscript{140}

Over the years, Scheffler’s articles chronicled the development of football in Germany, and by November 2003 the increasing concentration of the NFL Europe League on the German market caused him to ask why American football worked in Germany work although it had failed in the rest of the world. In language similar to the one he used to describe the first football Bundesliga championship game almost to the day exactly twenty-four years earlier, Scheffler referred in his commentary to football as the “amerikanischer Raufsport” (American brawl sport).\textsuperscript{141} But unlike his neutral, if not positive, coverage of a quarter century ago, this time Scheffler’s critique clearly expressed his disenchantment with the “expansion-greedy American team owners” and their “European bridgeheads.” For Scheffler, the NFLE was an “artificial product with second-class American pros and a few alibi natives.” Scheffler admitted that his commentary was unable to provide an explanation “for so much love for an athletically questionable American spectacle” but felt that “our American friends should at least appreciate this German enthusiasm for an American sport with lots of Americans in ‘Good old Germany’.” In the political context of the recent rift between former partners Germany and the United States caused by the Iraq invasion led by President George W.


\textsuperscript{141} In 1979 Scheffler had described the game as “almost three-hour long Geraufe.” Scheffler, “Schlußpunkt,” 17.
Bush, Scheffler sarcastically noted, “When it comes to football, Germany is almost the last [one left] standing faithfully by America’s side.” A look at Scheffler’s own reporting on the first sprouts of grassroots football in Germany may shed some light on why Germany was a relatively receptive soil for the NFLE in the 1990s.142

Almost a year prior to his aforementioned article that announced the inaugural football Bundesliga season to a national audience in 1979, Scheffler had already introduced football to the readers of the F.A.Z.’s Rhein-Main supplement. On Sunday October 1, 1978 the Frankfurt Löwen played the Kitzingen Colts, an American military team from Würtzburg, on the sports ground on Hahnstraße in Frankfurt-Niederrad. Two days later, Scheffler’s headline paraphrased Löwen PR Manager Jürgen Kampf describing the game’s alleged attraction: “The spectators want to see how strong men get hurt.” Similar to the later piece from August 1979, the article conveyed how the Frankfurt team came into being first as the Hot Dogs and later as the Löwen. Scheffler provided an explanation of the rules that by the standards of the day was quite nuanced: “Pulling down opponents…is allowed as is blocking with the body. Striking, kicking and holding are forbidden (the ball carrier, however, maybe held).” His observation suggested a higher degree of insight than other more sensationalized descriptions like the one a leading national television guide delivered a few months later. “Just about anything is allowed…” the Hör Zu claimed, “battering, kicking, and fist blows.” Despite his more nuanced account, Scheffler informed his readers about “shocking statistics” according to which football had cost the live of thirty people in America during the previous year

alone. Statements by German footballers showed that they apparently walked a fine line between promoting football as a tough, manly sport on one side and being labeled as mindless thugs on the other. “You practically only have deaths with ill-equipped teams,” reasoned the American founder of the Löwen, Alexander Sperber, “I’ve been playing for eleven years and I’ve seen only two fatalities. We mostly have bad contusions, rip- and finger fractures, as well as knee injuries. In reality it’s only half as bad as it looks to the spectators.” Thus, Scheffler perceptively noted that the football players seemingly enjoyed their “tough guy image.”

In 1979, Scheffler once again told the tale of the beginnings of football in Germany, this time in the form of a love theme: “They met two and a half years ago in a park in Frankfurt. The brief encounter, which six young German men had with American football one Sunday morning, has in the meantime developed into real love that even has already produced some offspring.” While this incomplete tale did not tell of the initial encounter between Sperber and Wolfgang Lehneis, Scheffler identified Sperber, whom he described as a German-American, as “the man with whom everything began” and “the mentor of German football.” The article’s headline thus proudly referred to Frankfurt as “the navel of the German football world.”

Scheffler must have assumed that his readers in the Rhein-Main region were largely unaccustomed with the American game, as gridiron jargon either had to be translated

143 “American football,” 54; Scheffler, “Die Zuschauer,” 34.

(“Middle Linebacker (Abwehrorganisator)”) or explained as in the case of the phenomenon of cheerleaders: “young ladies who are supposed to stimulate cheering by dancing and singing.” Occasionally, the spelling of the foreign terminology also appeared to cause headaches (“touchd-own”). In stark contrast to some of the F.A.Z.’s later commentaries on its national sports pages, this article did not stress the new sport’s violent aspects. Scheffler alluded only once to football’s ruggedness when he mentioned that it was mostly German athletes disappointed from other sports who turned to “the toughest sport in the world.”

Instead of violence, this account featured football’s complexity, spectacle, and commercial ambitions. The writer’s assessment that football was “completely incomprehensible for novices” was balanced with Sperber’s defense that likened the strategy of the gridiron to that of the chessboard. Sperber declared the American game superior to Germany’s favorite pastime: “football with its clever tactical moves offers much more than soccer.” According to Scheffler, “the American sport giant (three million players)” set out to put fear in its competitors, soccer and rugby, by using new marketing ploys like the performances of an upstart disco band “Lions.” Named after the Frankfurt team the band donned uniforms borrowed from the Löwen and promptly put out a single called “Football.” Following the example of the sport’s commercial success in

145 In fairness it should be mentioned that articles that appeared in the Rhein-Main supplement included several editing oversights at the time. Thus the occasional misspelling of English words may not have been due to their foreign origin.

146 Scheffler, “Rugby und Fußball.”

147 Fans were able to order the Lions’ single for DM 6 from Footballverlag in Frankfurt, the same publisher that produced the football guide Touchdown under the auspices of Paolo Wölker in 1979. See American
America, Germany’s football enthusiasts apparently had big designs for their assault on the country’s established sports. “The industry, and here especially American companies are already counting on the advertising strength of American football in Germany,” reported Scheffler. An American company allegedly had offered $10,000 to a German club for the right to display their logo on the team’s jerseys for the next four years. However, Sperber explained why the club refused the alleged offer: “It would be dumb to commit for four years now. After the first season we might already be worth much more.” In words similar to his conclusion to his national article from August 3, 1979, Scheffler closed this piece by stating: “The optimism of Germany’s American football fans knows no boundaries.”

Since the article also identified major obstacles for football’s grassroots development, Scheffler’s observation about the gridders’ confidence may be understood as a tongue-in-cheek remark. According to Scheffler, next to the complexity of the rules football’s impediments included hefty equipment costs (“from DM 300 upward”), limited access to playing fields (“I believe the rugby and soccer federations are concerned about our competition”), and the dependence on American participation. The majority of the Löwen team consisted of Americans and the Kitzingen Colts “originally an all-American team,” who only recently had begun to recruit Germans. The article pointed out the dilemma that only cities with American military facilities had access to the coveted Americans: “In

Football Bund Deutschland, “Der Härteste Sport der Welt in Noten,” Touchdown: Fachzeitschrift für den Footballsport in Deutschland. A guide for Football in Germany, 10 October 1979, 8.

Scheffler, “Rugby und Fußball.” Compare the conclusion of this article with Scheffler, “Eine Bundesliga,” 20.
Düsseldorf, for example, football is ‘ein rein deutsches Vergnügen’ [an entirely-German amusement] apart from two exceptions.” Desirous of increasing German participation, the AFBD reportedly decided to “drastically reduce the amount of foreigners on the teams for the [upcoming] Bundesliga season. No more than 40 percent of the eleven players on the field and no more than twenty Americans on the teams of up to 45 players.” Whereas the critique of the game’s violence soon disappeared from most of the sports pages in Germany, it was the four obstacles, already mentioned in this 1979 article, became reoccurring themes haunting football’s development not only in the coverage of the F.A.Z., but throughout of the sport’s first three decades in Germany. 149

On July 29, 1979 the Frankfurt Löwen played another game against the American airmen of the Wiesbaden Flyers in Frankfurt’s “Am Bornheimer Hang” stadium. Scheffler’s ensuing report continued several of the themes of the previous article. Although he acknowledged that Frankfurt’s surprisingly win over the American military team was a sign for the improvements the “Germans” had made—the headline used the English noun in quotation marks—Scheffler also pointed out that the Löwen continued to rely on American help. A third of the Frankfurt team reportedly consisted of American players. As in the earlier article, the author mentioned that the rules of football were “complicated at first glance” and had to be explained to novice spectators through flyers that were passed out at the gate and announcements made throughout the game. Scheffler provided an introduction to the game. He not only translated the score for its German audience by saying that the 18-14 Löwen win compared roughly to a 3-2 in soccer, but

149 Scheffler, “Rugby und Fußball.”
also with a sidebar titled “Football und alles, was dazugehört” (football and everything about it). The same sidebar accompanied his “Eine Bundesliga für das amerikanische Spektakel,” an article that appeared during the same week on the national sport pages of the FAZ. Both articles featured almost identical pictures showing teams lined up on the line of scrimmage with the ball about to be snapped from the center to the quarterback.\footnote{Wolfgang Scheffler, “Die ‘Germans’ haben sich im Football gemausert,” Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung 1979, Rhein-Main-Sport. For a comparison with Scheffler’s similar article on the national sport pages of the FAZ see: Scheffler, “Eine Bundesliga,” 20.}

Finally, the article also touched on the third obstacle that plagued football in Germany from the very beginning: competing with soccer over access to limited number of public grass fields. Following the Waldstadion, the stadium “Am Bornheimer Hang” was the city’s second-best location. The municipal stadium with a capacity of 24,000 spectators was home to FSV Frankfurt, who during the 1978-79 and 1979-80 seasons spent most of the time in the bottom of the southern conference in soccer’s second division.\footnote{FSV Frankfurt, Im Fahrstuhl zwischen Zweit- und Drittklassigkeit (FSV Frankfurt, 2004, accessed 6 March 2005); available from http://www.fsv-frankfurt.de/cms/typo360/index.php?id=178.} Just about half the size of soccer’s premier sites, this stadium may have been the ideal location for football’s aspiring managers, some of whom still dreamt of games in front of 20,000 spectators.\footnote{An article from March of 1979 in Sperber’s collection of newspaper clippings mentioned that Wolfgang Lehneis hoped for 20,000 spectators for the July game between Frankfurt and Wiesbaden. “Zehn Vereine gründeten in Frankfurt ihren Dachverband,” 1979.} Such lofty plans, however, were quickly shattered as a city official from the Frankfurt’s Sport- und Badeamt, Gustav Hofmann, told the newspaper immediately after the game that “They won’t get back on this [field]. We can’t do that to the FSV.” From the very beginning, football developed a reputation for destroying the

\footnote{Wolfgang Scheffler, “Die ‘Germans’ haben sich im Football gemausert,” Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung 1979, Rhein-Main-Sport. For a comparison with Scheffler’s similar article on the national sport pages of the FAZ see: Scheffler, “Eine Bundesliga,” 20.}


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playing surface. In the eyes of the soccer establishment, football enthusiasts began a turf war when they dared to draw the chalk lines of the gridiron on precious soccer greens.  

In this battle, Germany’s football upstarts had to settle for playing the majority of their games on smaller sport fields designed mainly for participatory rather than spectator sporting events. In an interview with the Frankfurter Rundschau in April of 1979, Sperber and Lehneis mentioned that the city of Frankfurt had not yet assigned them a field for their regular season home games. Without additional support by city officials they feared that they could “close up shop” before the first season got underway. An article that appeared a week before the July 29, 1979 game between Frankfurt and Wiesbaden mentioned that the Löwen management said it was “probable” that Frankfurt’s Sport-und Badeamt would make a field in the Bezirkssportanlage in Nieder-Eschbach available for home games. Team officials described the solution as less than ideal, as the field was located far from Frankfurt’s center. With only two weeks to go until the start of the inaugural Bundesliga season, the remaining uncertainty about the location of the Löwen’s home field shows the difficulties some teams and in finding permanent homes. In Germany, football was clearly the new kid on the block in the late 1970s and the soccer establishment was not going to share its turf without a fight.  

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153 Scheffler, “‘Germans’.”

154 alw, “In Frankfurt werden die “Lions” in Zukunft kämpfen,” 9 April 1979. Harald Stenger, “Frankfurter Football-Team mit hohen Zielen,” Frankfurter Rundschau 1979. Interestingly, the same parties also battled over facilities in Amerika. However, as Timothy Chandler describes, the roles of the established and the challengers were reversed: “Within the USA since 1975 the challenge of both association and rugby football to the gridiron game has caused turf wars of a new sort in colleges and universities—turf wars for time and space, for facilities and equipment.” Timothy Chandler, “Recognition through Resistance: Rugby in the USA,” in Making the Rugby World: Race, Gender, Commerce, ed. Timothy Chandler and John Nauright (Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 1999), 45.
In addition to describing the Löwen’s early struggles and successes, Scheffler introduced the game explicitly as a piece of Americana to his readers. His *Amerika* narrative conveyed impressions of collectivity, aggression, and fast food:

*Stichwort Amerika*: Not only football, but America was visiting on Sunday afternoon in Bornheim. It started with the team warm-ups. In contrast to soccer, where everyone uses drills with or without the ball to warm up more or less individually, it’s all done together in this collective sport—from running on the spot to stretching. And on top of that there’s martial yelling. Motto “Who are we gonna beat?” answer “The Wiesbaden Flyers.” This is how it goes on for half an hour; then the players are aggressively charged enough to be a man on the field in this toughest team ball game in the world. Whether Germans or Americans, they speak one language: American. The game is as American as Hamburgers and Cola (which by the way was of course served in booths).\(^{155}\)

Apart from the description above, the article made no additional reference to violence in football. Instead the sidebar on the rules of the game distinguished clearly between what is allowed (tackling and blocking) and what isn’t (holding of a player who doesn’t have the ball, kicking, and “touching the head gear”).

After the start of the first Bundesliga season, the Rhein-Main supplement of the FAZ regularly kept its readers informed about the fate of the local football team, which usually dominated the inexperienced opposition. After the third regular season game on August 26, Scheffler announced that the Löwen had claimed the top spot in the standings with a road win in Ansbach, the team that turned out to be its toughest opponent. The short one column, twenty-two lines article very much resembled a regular report typical for more established sports. Neither the tone, nor the content revealed that football was still an exotic and bewildering sport for most Germans. The reporter distinguished Frankfurt’s

\(^{155}\) My emphasis.
Freddy Little as the best player for rushing for ten points and passing for one touchdown and highlighted an interesting side occurrence: “In the last quarter, the game almost got out of hand, when two Ansbach players took on a Frankfurt player, but the prudent referees were able to prevent a looming mass brawl between the two teams.”

The report following another Frankfurt away win, this time over Berlin on September 15, confirmed the previous trend toward regular coverage of football on the regional sports pages. The Löwen won a surprisingly close game against the Bären when Frankfurt stopped a conversion attempt in the final minutes that would have tied the game for Berlin. Frankfurt ended up winning this last game of the first half of the regular season 14-12 in heavy rain in front of a reported 500 spectators. Parenthetical translations of football terminology—“Extra-Points (Erhöhung)”—were the only hint that this short report was describing a new sport.

For the first game of the second half of the season Frankfurt hosted the Panther from Düsseldorf. The F.A.Z. article, accompanied by a picture captioned “exchange showing a center snapping the ball to the quarterback during warm-ups, referred in English to the “magic line” of sixty points the Löwen failed to reach in their 59-0 victory. The reporter noted that Düsseldorf was without a chance despite their recent reinforcement in the form of four American players (“Thus far Düsseldorf has been an entirely German team.”) The


157 Wolfgang Scheffler, “Die ‘Löwen’ müssen kämpfen,” Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung 1979. The article is also remarkable for what it didn’t mention, as Alexander Sperber later admitted in an interview that the close outcome of this particular game was a result of his own “design.” According to Sperber, the manipulation was intended to make the game more attractive for spectators and to lift the moral of the Berlin team. Alexander Sperber, interview by author, tape recording, Laufach, Germany, 24 October 2002.
article further showed that American military teams were still the standard against which German teams measured their performances as Frankfurt coach Flanders was quoted saying, “Our team keeps getting better. We are already strong enough to keep up with the strongest American military teams.” Despite the overall positive coverage of Löwen football on the regional sports pages and the success of the team, football in Frankfurt apparently was not a run-away hit with local sport fans. Only 400 saw the return game in Frankfurt compared to the attendance record set on the first game day when Düsseldorf hosted Frankfurt in front of reportedly 4,500 onlookers. According to the reporter, the majority of the 400 left before the end of the game, which he attributed to cool temperatures and the lopsided game. Officially, 18,800 spectators had watched thirteen games during the first half of the season, an average of about 1450 per game.158

The F.A.Z.’s Rhein-Main-Sport coverage of the Löwen continued with a one column, twenty-eight-line report of Frankfurt beating the Seahawks in Bremerhaven. The article contained information one would expect in any sports report: score, attendance, point scorers, information about standings in the league table, and interesting occurrences during the game (Bremerhaven left the field before the end of the game protesting the performance of the referees). Once again, the only obvious difference between this football article and those featuring soccer or team handball were occasional parenthetical translations and lengthy explanations of terminology: “Conversion (Zusatzpunkt)” and “Safeties (pulling down of ball-possessing opponent in the opponent’s end zone).”

Spectator interest in the new sport also continued to be a topic for the paper. Düsseldorf again had the top attendance on this game day with 2,200 for their home game against the Berlin Bären. The Panther lost the contest, prompting the paper to comment that Düsseldorf achieved something “that is probably pretty unique in German sports: complete lack of success…and an spectator record on each game day.”

Scheffler titled the match between Frankfurt and the visiting Ansbach Grizzlies the “game of games.” The example shows that the paper’s coverage was not limited to post-game summaries but also included previews of upcoming games, which could arouse interest of those following the development of the seemingly up-and-coming American game. The paper informed its readers that on the first October weekend the clash of the number one and two ranked teams would take place on the field of the Bezirksstportanlage Nieder-Eschbach. Kick-off was scheduled for 3pm, but the paper explicitly mentioned that the gates would open an hour early allowing spectators to take in the whole spectacle of football: “in the service of both teams 45 Cheerleaders from American high schools will stimulate cheers with swinging legs” and thus turn the game into “a real celebration.” For on-the-field attractions, readers also learned that Ansbach would be unable to field the strongest squad as several Americans did not get released from their scheduled maneuvers. Seven American Grizzlies still planed to make the game against their rival, assured the writer.


Following the weekend, the *F.A.Z.* devoted two columns with seventy-two lines and a picture to this “game of games.” The Löwen held off Ansbach in a 29-12 win that secured the top rank at the end of the regular season and thus a spot in the championship game. According to the reporter, several Americans were among the 1,200 spectators who saw a contest that was close until the final minutes. The article described that Ansbach kept Frankfurt to a three-point lead before Little and Dozier scored two more touchdowns for the Löwen. The role of Americans in this new sport continued to be a theme in the football coverage. According to the article, the club in Ansbach had been founded in April 1979, and by October it counted 55 members, of whom 35 were Americans. As the pre-game coverage had indicated, four of Ansbach’s best Americans did not arrive for the game in Frankfurt until halftime as one of the best German players had to pick the American teammates up from a maneuver in Grafenwöhr. Outside the lines, it was displays of American spectacle and easygoing masculinity that caught the journalist’s attention: “Disco music hammered from the speakers, some of the tough men swayed very softly with the tender female followers in the rhythm,” while “the American high school girls (‘Cheer-Leaders’) stimulated particularly the numerous American spectators to brisk cheering.”

Scheffler’s descriptions of the scenes of this particular American football game echo Kaspar Maase’s observations about the German rock and roll *Halbstarke* of the 1950s. Maase finds that “informal manners [and] casual appearance… had fascinated the minds

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of Germans since they were first confronted with American troops in 1945.” By the 1950s, selective appropriation of American rock and roll models allowed German working-class youths to challenge the traditional cultural elites of the propertied and educated classes. According to Maase, the Americanized style of these German rock and rollers “can be seen as a self-expression of features of working-class culture. …They chose to adapt some symbolic features of the American way of life and entertainment for their self-expression and self-exaggeration.” German Halbstarke creatively adapted “real or imagined US models” and integrated rock and roll symbols and behaviors that “were homological to traditions and rituals of German workers’ culture.” Maase goes on to say, “Rock’n’roll and motorbikes provided opportunities to display the language of masculinity: physical strength and dexterity, a devotion to rhythm and velocity, the mastery of machines.” Thus, by making references to popular American music, rhythm, and male toughness, Scheffler’s depiction of the game between the Frankfurt Löwen and the Ansbach Grizzlies played on familiar elements of this “language of masculinity.”

The survey of the first Bundesliga season on the sport pages of the Rhein-Main supplement of the F.A.Z. shows that the local coverage of football quickly adopted a style similar to the reporting about familiar sports in the region. As the young journalist Scheffler claimed his territory in covering a young sport, the successful season of the Frankfurt Löwen provided its own story lines and narratives, which gradually replaced

the emphasis on violent aspects of the game. While football’s violence remained a theme on the national sports pages of the *F.A.Z.*, on the local pages it increasingly was portrait as tough, rather than brutal. Among the emerging narratives was football as an American spectacle and entertainment. For many Germans Scheffler’s observation may have indeed been true that “Not only football, but America was visiting on Sunday afternoon.” But for those who became attracted to American football it was not violent but entertaining *Amerika* that was visiting.¹⁶³

Scheffler and other journalists, who reported on the ups and downs of local amateur teams since the late 1970s, provided much needed publicity for a new sport and taught not only football’s rules to their readers, but also its varied meanings. In doing so, they joined amateur players and club officials in supplying the groundwork for the later arrival of the World League and the NFLE. Thus, one of the answers to Scheffler’s question as to why some people in Germany had been relatively receptive to the NFLE lies in his own work. “We now have rootage below. …We are no UFO that hovers above the city,” said Kathrin Platz, first female general manager in the NFLE in 2005, when she explained the reason for the cooperation between the latest NFLE team, the Hamburg Sea Devils, and the local amateur team, the Hamburg Blue Devils of the German Football League. Scheffler was among those who prepared the field for the roots that made the pigskin less of an unknown flying object in Germany.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ Scheffler, “‘Germans’.”

By the mid-1980s a shift in the *F.A.Z.*’s football coverage was underway from a focus on violence to a focus on the spectacle of the entertainment business starting with the annual coverage of the Super Bowl.\(^{165}\) A similar emphasis was also evident in the commercial production of football in Germany in the 1980s and 1990s. According to a study by Ien Ang on the reception of *Dallas*, by the 1980s many European viewers had come to expect pleasure and entertainment from American television programs. Such expectations would give “any new American product a certain advantage.”\(^{166}\)

For decades, advertising agencies had worked diligently to convince consumers that American products were a source of pleasure. Coca-Cola’s “Coke Adds Life” campaign made this point very directly. Unveiled in May 1976 after three years of consumer research, its aim was to persuade viewers that the soft drink provided an extra element of pleasure to life. The television ads depicted happy people sipping Coke in various everyday situations. As the campaign ran worldwide, the ads’ images and slogans were adapted for local markets. In Germany, the local office of Coke’s advertising agency McCann-Erickson transformed the slogan into “Coke macht mehr draus.” While this

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\(^{166}\) “A stubborn fixation on the threat of ‘American cultural imperialism’ can lead one to lose sight of the fact that since the 1950s the mass consumption of American popular culture has been integrated to a greater or lesser degree in to the national ‘cultural identity’ itself, especially in Western Europe. … we must not forget that people have become so used to American television programmes—their production values, their style and pace, their language—that merely the expectations they arouse and their familiarity give any new American product a certain advantage.” Ien Ang, *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and Melodramatic Imagination*, trans. Della Couling (London: Methuen, 1985), 3, 5.
campaign still used the vernacular, advertisers soon realized that German customers had come to associate American catchphrases and images with enjoyment. Beginning in the second half of the 1980s, Coke ads for the German market increasingly relied on the use of American slogans intended to convey that Coca-Cola is the “real thing” and something to be enjoyed.\textsuperscript{167}

In the 1990s, the makers of the NFLE tried to build on these attributes as they marketed their product as a mixture of sport and entertainment with a distinct American flair. For example, Rhein Fire’s Marketing Director Engels recruited potential American business partners by offering them the possibility of presenting their products with “typical American image components.” According to her, “‘The american [sic] way of life’ and ‘having fun’ are elements, which are imported from the USA.” And she goes on to describe the “American way of life” as a time-tested assurance for German customers to be “trendy and up-to-date.” The following examples show how Amerika has been re-imagined as part of the commercial production of football in Germany.\textsuperscript{168}


After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the NFL spearheaded its expansion to continental Europe by staging pre-season exhibition games in Berlin. Many familiar American icons associated their products with the so-called American Bowl games. The magazine for the third game in 1992 featured an ad for Gatorade. The title announced in bold black on white letters “Born in the USA.” The German text below the image of the bottle reads like a shortlist of classic American icons: “Everything good from America: Rock’n’Roll, chewing gum, Elvis, the surfboard, Muhammad Ali, and American football. Gatorade is part of it.” The message just falls short of stating that everything good comes from America. The German text “Alles Gute aus Amerika” can also have a double meaning as it can be translated as “Greetings from America.” In this sense, it resembles the beginning of a letter written home from a German visitor or emigrant perpetuating the wonders of the Promised Land.

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170 NFL Football Magazin. Das Heft zum Spiel, August/September 1992, 33. Although actual letters of nineteenth century German immigrants often described the hardships they encountered in the New World, legends of those who struck gold in America persisted among the German public. For example, in 1843 an article in a German newspaper entitled “Good Advice for German Emigrants to America” warned, “We regard it completely useless to discourage the German from emigration; to tell him he would be better off staying at home. He wouldn’t believe us if we told him how thousands, who came over with shining hopes from all cities, spend their live living on alms or even pine away in misery. He has heard how A., the poor trade servant became a rich merchant; how, B., the apprentice became a master employing one hundred people; how C., the smallholder became an independent land owner. That’s what he has heard, what he believes, and why should not a similar fortune await him?” My translation. Wilhelm von Eichthal, “Guter Rath für deutsche Auswanderer nach Amerika,” Augsburger Allgemeine Zeitung 1843. Reprinted in: Sommer et al., eds., Was die Deutschen, 219-20.

There was no shortage of enticing reports from America. For example, in 1852 Amalie Schoppe told a classic tale of rags to riches. Handy craftsmen could quickly make a little fortune in America, she wrote, “since work here is paid quite unusually well.” German maids “receive a wage they could not dream of in the fatherland,” she added. Further, as long as a German could convince Americans that he is an honest worker he could, within a month, move up from selling miscellaneous goods door to door to becoming a barkeeper in a “splendid store,” where he would make eight to ten dollars a week. Soon “he commands
The magazine further featured advertisements for two American icons that have a history of evoking specific associations. The ad for Lucky Strike, placed prominently on the second page, shows the graffiti of an iconic cigarette box either dancing or jumping for joy. The English text in the upper left corner reads “American Graffiti” and a smaller German text underneath the image states “Lucky Strike. Nothing else.” While graffiti may be seen as symbolizing lawlessness and destruction, the producers clearly aimed at young target groups with more positive associations such as spontaneous, expressive, unrestricted, and even rebellious youth cultures. While probably not intended by the makers of the advertisement, the graffiti may also have reminded the audience in the Olympic Stadium of the nearby leftovers of the Berlin Wall and its spray-painted images. As such, it could have communicated a sense of liberation.171

The makers of the Coca-Cola ad seemed confident that the image of their product would speak for itself. The page is filled with a close up of a chilled, glistening Coke bottle and a freshly filled glass. Both carry the well-known Coca-Cola script. A relatively small English print declares, “Official Softdrink of the American Bowl Games.” The designation “official” reminded readers who had been long familiar with the product that real Coke comes from America. By way of image transfer between Amerika, Coke, and the NFL, the label “official” convinces consumers not only of the genuineness of the product itself but of the authenticity of the entire event. The American Bowl gives fans


171 “Football Magazin,” 2.
the “real deal”—American football with teams from the NFL, not cheap copies in the form of German amateur teams. Beyond these interpretations, a full appreciation of the meanings of these icons in the construction of *Amerikabilder* requires a more historical perspective.  

As described earlier, American consumer goods and popular culture played an important role in the way many West-Germans experienced their country’s integration into the Western Alliance. Stories about first encounters with the tastes and sounds of America became an enduring part of German *Amerikabilder*.  

For example, in his biography Hellmuth Karasek remembers what American cigarettes meant for him at the time: “Smoking was pleasure, *Lebensfreude* (enjoyment of life), freedom… was belonging to the new world, was *Aufbruch* (beginning, awakening).” And it all was the imagined and legendary American way of life that also manifested itself in form of root beer, hot dogs, corn on the cob, and ginger ale. The American Forces Network (AFN) brought American music through which young people “began to see the light at the end of the tunnel.” Karasek recalls that, “Not even when every one was protesting against Vietnam, later, end of the sixties, have I forgotten what the American music did for me, back then, beginning of the fifties.”

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The following commercial which aired on German television during the broadcast of Super Bowl XXXI in 1997 is another classical example of how ideas and images about America have been retold and re-imagined as part of the commercial production of football in Germany: A teenage boy nervously sneaks into the American-style locker room, where helmets and football uniforms cover benches and closets. As he suspected, the players and their coaches are out on the field, so he has time to snoop around. He picks up one of the jerseys and is amazed at the sheer size of it. Three bold yellow letters shine on the blue shirt: XXL. A nearby helmet also bears the signature. A broad-shouldered player who walks in on him startles the boy. The man tosses the kid a candy bar, as with a deep voice and a broad American accent he says in German: “Ey, probier’s mal hiermit! [Ey, try this!]” The player looks surprised as the kid catches the candy bar with ease. In the next shot, the man and the youngster are sitting side by side on a bench in the locker room. The boy shares a piece of his new chocolate with the man who had given it to him. The athlete bites off a piece of the candy bar and laughs out loud.

Another deep male voice announces: “Extra viel drin; extra viel dran. Ritter Sport XXL—Gigantisch gut.” The catchy slogan for the traditional German chocolate brand Ritter Sport communicates that its latest product, XXL, is “gigantic good” and offers an extra amount in it and about it.175

175 The commercial appears to be a take off on Coca Cola’s “Mean Joe Greene” television ad, which premiered in the United States on October 1, 1979. The ad was part of a larger advertising campaign, “Have a Coke and a Smile,” and featured a twelve-year old Tommy Okon next to the defensive lineman of the Pittsburgh Steelers. The ad was very popular with American audiences and won the CLIO award, the world’s largest advertising competition, in 1979. Commercials in Brazil, Argentina, and Thailand adopted the ad’s plot by casting local soccer stars in the role of the athlete. In November 1981, NBC aired a made-
The language in the entire next commercial was English—American English to be exact. It appears unimportant for the German audience to understand the exact meaning of the conversation. The American English conveyed meanings beyond words. The spot focuses on the label of an ice-frosted bottle of beer. We see how someone pulls a bottle out of a cooler and we eavesdrop on a conversation between men in a bar. One of them begins telling a story, “Cold? It was so cold that …” A young attractive woman with long blond hair turns her head towards the camera, as the faceless voice seems to catch her attention. The scene is followed by a series of close ups of beer bottles. In the background the rather insignificant conversation continues. At the end of the apparently original U.S. commercial, an American voice announces, “You just had a taste of cold filtered Miller Genuine Draft.” Next, we are informed that American football is presented by TV Spielfilm, your television guide. With that Deutsche Sport Fernsehen, the German all-sport cable station, cuts to its live coverage of Super Bowl XXXI between Green Bay and New England. The Super Bowl logo dissolves into close ups of players and coaches, who listen intently to the words of the American national anthem.

Germans have a long history of imagining America. The description above illustrates how Amerikabilder have been constructed in and around football in Germany. The candy bar commercial draws on a post-World War II iconography that had evolved since the first contacts between German civilians and American troops, as it is retold in accounts like the following:

for-TV movie based on the ad that told what happened after the commercial ended. Highlights in the History, (accessed).
Shortly after that I saw the Americans. Finally they were here! We knew that the nightly bombardments would come to an end now. Relief and fear rose within me… They were sitting in open cars. For the first time in my life I saw a Negro. He stopped and with a smile gave me a piece of chocolate. My grandmother had taught me that everything would be poisoned. But I was so hungry—it tasted amazingly.  

Freese begins his study of German heterostereotypes of America by describing his own experiential background:

I met my first American in the spring of 1945. …When the war was finally over and one day my friends and I played hide-and-seek in the ruins of a bombed-out street, and American tank rumbled around the corner, the lid opened, and a man stuck out his head and said something incomprehensible. My friends and I stood frozen in horror, but the men laughed and threw something at us—then the lid closed in the tank drove away. After a long time of hesitation we inspected the little parcel and took it home because we could not make out what it was. There we learned it was a bar of chocolate, something we have heard about but never seen. It was judiciously divided between us, and when the chocolate melted in my mouth, I knew two things: Americans were immeasurably rich because they could afford to give away chocolate to strangers, and they were unimaginably kind because they did so.

Winfried Fluck similarly recalls his first encounter with America at the age of five. At the time, the taste of chocolate—American chocolate—was for him “the taste of a different, a better world.” In his biography, Hellmuth Karasek remembers that even before the war was over, many Germans had already formed their new allegiances: “You chose the lesser of two evils, the Tommys and the Amis against the Ivan.” Those who

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177 Freese, *Dream or Nightmare*, 23-4.


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planed to leave the Russian occupied zone had a ranking system of possible destinations: “Amis very good, Brits good, French O.K.” Chocolate, chewing gum, cigarettes, nylon, Coca-Cola, and rock and roll—they all were powerful symbols of a new and sweeter life. For a whole generation of Germans in the American occupied zone and West Berlin, they became part of their collective memory and their own version of the “American way of life.” Freese refers to the encounter with the chocolate dispensing G.I.s as an archetypal experience for his generation. 179

Thus, the image of the benevolent American was rooted in real experiences and the stories told about them. Kaspar Maase asserts “Informal manners, casual appearance, and what seemed to be somewhat unauthoritarian behaviour towards superiors had fascinated the minds of Germans since they were first confronted with American troops in 1945.” Memories of Care packages, which reached German families from the United States from 1946 until 1952, and the “raisin bombers” of the 1948/1949 Berlin airlift also added to this mystic. As Freese puts it, “Uncle Sam was the benevolent elder brother who had liberated us.” The traditionalized image of the gentle American soldier who wins over German children by giving them a sweet taste of the American way of life became a metaphor for the integration the Federal Republic into the Western alliance and the ensuing economic recovery. 180

How well this impression had been cultivated becomes evident when one considers the fact that the vast majority of the viewers of the 1997 Ritter Sport commercial

179 My translation. Karasek, Go West, 40, 42. Freese, Dream or Nightmare, 24.
180 Freese, Dream or Nightmare, 67-8; Maase, “Halbstarke,” 153.
certainly had never personally experienced American soldiers passing out candy. Even the producers themselves may not have been aware of the connection with post-war Germany. They may have been more inspired by the classic 1979 Coke commercial in which Mean Joe Green tosses his jersey to a wide-eyed kid in exchange for his soft drink. Whatever may have inspired the commercial; the makers of Ritter Sport XXL clearly counted on a positive image transfer between American sports and their candy bar. They don’t simply chose to associate their product with athletic images, but they link it to a sport that is distinctively identified with the United States. More specifically, I argue that the intended image transfer takes place between the product and Amerika.

The image of the kind G.I. is certainly only one side of the German post-war perception of the United States. Its opposite is the violent and aggressive American. Once again, Freese illustrates this image with an account of his own memories. When American military police searched for black market goods after the war, "two huge M.P.’s entered our apartment and said something which we of course did not understand." Not finding any evidence, "they turned towards the door, but then one came back, moved to our living-room cupboard, a valuable old piece of handmade furniture inherited from my grandparents and carefully guarded through all the war, slowly lifted his huge boot and smashed, with two fast kicks, first one and then the other door. Then they left."¹⁸¹

Freese’s personal journey continued when he worked as a tour guide for American tourists while studying at Heidelberg University. Here he was "struck by their

¹⁸¹ Freese, Dream or Nightmare, 24.
unbelievable lack of historical perspective." And later, America’s role in the Vietnam War caused "a painful reversal of my Amerikabild" and left him in "disbelief, disgust, and enraged rejection." Over time, through his academic interest in the subject and extended stays in the United States, Freese learned to find a balance between "the unconditional love of my childhood and the unconditional rejection of my student days." By the mid-1990s, his picture of America "remains puzzling contradictory, with fascinating and infuriating aspects existing irreconcilably side by side." The generation that followed Freese’s age group grew up with images of Americans killing in Vietnam and news about political scandals in Washington. From their earliest days, they were accustomed to mass demonstrations against the American military presence in Germany. Within two decades, the “beloved elder brother” transformed into the hateful Big Brother of Orwellian connotations, who practices a “daily fascism” and is responsible for Vietnam and Watergate as well as for Cruise Missile and Pershing-2s; who invaded Grenada, supported the Contras in Nicaragua, and answered terrorist bomb attacks by bombing the civilian population of Tripoli; who engaged in undercover arms deals with the Iranian ayatollahs.

An “American” Party Around the Gridiron

By 1988, Germans had participated in American football in their own clubs, leagues, and federations for over a decade, and in the United States the NFL was inching closer to a decision to introduce a professional league in Europe. When American Football… vom

182 Ibid., 25-7.
183 Ibid., 27.
184 Ibid., 68-9.
Kick-off zum Touchdown was published that year, Germans football players and organizers have had plenty of practice in responding to claims that football was a brutal, if not violent, sport. Not surprisingly, the German guidebook addressed football’s unfavorable reputation. Its authors were a longtime board member of the Bonner Jets, a self-described “fan of the first hour,” and a sports journalist. In response to their own question, “What is American football?” the writers stated that it was not a game without physical contact (“kein körperloses Spiel”), it was “chess with contact” (“Kontaktschach”). In American football not the most physical team would win, but that with mental superiority: “As in only a few other sports mind and body become a unit in football.” Most of all, football would be a team sport where “the individual player must be willing to fight for the other player unselfishly at all times.” This team unit would extent from the players to the entire club including the board of presidents, the cheerleaders, as well as the youth team and the cheerleaders. “Every participant in American football,” the authors stated, “must enjoy it to help others, and when ever it is necessary to have someone’s back. … From this perspective, football is much more than just a sport. The game virtually lives based on a philosophy and impacts on players even off the field.” This philosophy would also extent to the stands, where it would go without saying that fans of opposing teams would sit next to each other and always treated each other friendly. “Fan riots, as they are unfortunately often reported from German soccer fields, are foreign to American Football,” stressed the authors. 185

185 Bowy, Kittner, and Rosenstein, American Football, 11, 47-8.
The authors also devoted a section on the philosophy of football, in which they stated, “Football is without a doubt a typical American sport. Next to physical exercise, the goal of the sport has always been to represent a certain way of life and ideals. …Football entails many elements of the American philosophy of life.” According to the authors, this supposed American philosophy materialized in a long list of lessons the game of football taught: character, independence, fairness, goodwill, the ability to maintain one’s personality while subordinating yourself, discipline, self-confidence to master obstacles, tenacity, the abilities to lose with grace, to practice self-critique, to live with one’s shortcomings, and forgive others’ mistakes, as well as valuing camaraderie and the strength of communal action. The authors encouraged each coach to read the American Coaches Association’s 1982 list of ethical foundations.\(^{186}\)

As if turning the attention away from football’s reputation for brutality for good, the text’s final chapter highlighted football’s entertaining aspects. Earlier in the book, the authors had closed their introduction of the NFL with the header “Spiele, Spesen und Spektakel” (games, expenses, and spectacle). They wrote, “American football in the States is more than thrill limited to four quarters. The spectator is king, and the king enjoys the spectacle.” The text described tailgating, stadium magazines with latest updates given away for free, marching bands, show features, “the biggest possible electronic information comfort,” fireworks, the raising of the American flag, live performances of the national anthem, and the atmosphere of player introductions before the game. American spectators would be treated to replays on television screens and

\(^{186}\) Ibid., 185.
scoreboards of a size “unimaginable” in Germany. Standing room, customary in European soccer stadiums, would be unheard of in America, and the NFL would sell ninety percent of its seats to season ticket holders. For these authors, American football was a marvel of entertainment and comfort for spectators. The fact that the writers referred to the NFL was described as a “rundum gesunder Verband” (an all-around healthy federation) and to the aforementioned stadium magazine as a Vereinszeitung may either reveal a certain naïveté or indicate how difficult it was to explain the structure of professional sports in America to an audience that lived in a country where private ownership of sport teams was unknown.  

Having thus set up the spectacle American football, the authors closed their book by telling readers that the easiest way to get involved in German American football would be to go to a local game where fans could expect “a surrounding show in almost every stadium,” albeit on a smaller scale than described earlier. The common ingredients spectator’s would find included live music performances, jazz–dance groups appearing before the game and at half-time, attractive raffles, booths that offer foods for the whole family to civil prices, NFL and local-team merchandise, a stadium magazine with updated information, as well as an entertaining announcer. Undoubtedly, the authors’ ideal for the experience at an amateur football game in Germany was a miniature version of the way they described a typical NFL event. The NFL’s treatment of its customers was described in contrast to what was customary in other sports in Germany. It was a vision that those who wanted to establish football as a spectator sport in Germany sought to

187 Ibid., 30-1.
emulate. The authors anticipated a decline in interest in established sports and hoped their game would profit from it: “The desire for something new is big. Here, football has the opportunity to win new fans with its unique mixture of sport and show.”  

These accounts by native devotees are taken from a football guidebook published a year before the NFL send out for a feasibility study for an international league. In response to those cultural critics who see any form of American commercial culture as a Trojan horse that carries with it everything that is less desirable about the United States, this is an important point to be made. When football managers in the United States decided to promote their product in Germany, they did not force it down the throat of unwilling soccer fans. German football enthusiasts did not glorify the United States per se, nor did they collectively invite anything from that into their culture but the way sports in America were packaged and presented. One cannot evaluate American football in Germany without understanding the fascination of especially young Germans with American popular culture in general. Before American football in Germany crossed anyone’s mind, entertainment “made in the U.S.A.” had a long tradition in music, television, and movies. Coming from America, gridiron football had an almost “natural” aura of fun and excitement. It is this appeal that both American and local sport promoters identified.  

188 Ibid., 211.  
A local entrepreneur from Hamburg shared this vision, when he set out to provide just such a product. Much like in other German cities, 1979 was the birth year for American football in Hamburg. A group of young weekend warriors formed the first local team and called themselves “Harbourtown Buffalos.” The same year, Axel Gernert, a former sports writer for two major newspapers in Hamburg, Bild Zeitung and Hamburger Morgenpost as well as a semi-professional race car driver, saw an NFL preseason game between the New England Patriots and Los Angeles Rams. He was convinced that the sport had a future in Germany if it was supported by a professional framework. In 1987, Gernert became the ambitious manager and promoter of the Hamburg Silver Eagles, a team coached by his friend Stephan Starke.190 As a partner in a promotion company Gernert marketed his American football team with a strictly business oriented approach. He treated his sport product as a commodity in the broader entertainment business:

Entertainment means the spectator leaves the field as a winner every time. For the time he is spending in the stadium, you can try to guarantee the spectator that he will feel entertained. That’s his right.191

Gernert made it clear that he had no interest in becoming a traditional volunteer club official. A true entrepreneur, Gernert was at the forefront of a new generation of German sport promoters of the 1990s when he sensed a local demand for more entertainment in


sports. His case shows that the production of American football as an entertainment event was actively embraced and adapted by local entrepreneurs.192

Under Gernert’s management, the Silver Eagles’ home games in a small soccer stadium turned into social happenings among Hamburg’s “young and beautiful” in the early 1990s. For some the beginning of the American football season in April became a certain indication of the coming of spring and another outdoor party season. Equipped with mini-skirts, tight T-shirts, sunglasses, and the latest ball-cap from the States, the “in”-crowd came to show off. They leisurely sipped the latest overpriced Mexican “in”-beers, eat “authentic” Hamburgers, and listen to thundering pop tunes while a game was in session that barely reached top-level American high-school standards. Gernert’s formula offered instant and intense sensations to eyes, ears, and taste, all at the same time.193

Florian Raffel was amongst those attending Silver Eagles home games. Describing what motivated him to become an American football player, Raffel recalled the euphoric atmosphere at these games, “There was so much new stuff. That you would listen to music in the stadium, and that they had a public announcer explaining the game. … a

192 In 1997, the German news-magazine Der Spiegel commented on this new breed of managers using the example of Axel Banghard, thirty year old promoter and president of the hockey Berlin Capitals, “People like him ... follow only one impulse: They want to sell the sport most profitable .... Sport is entertainment, and entertainment is business, that is the modern principle.” “Eishockey: ‘Die machen alles kaputt’,” Der Spiegel 1997, 144-145. For a full case study of Gernert’s football business through the year 2000, see: Lars Dzikus, “American Football in West Germany: Cultural Transformation, Adaptation, and Resistance,” in Turnen and Sport: Transatlantic Transfers, ed. Annette Hofmann (Münster: Waxman, 2004), 221-39. Dzikus, “American Football, Deutschland und der Unternehmer,” 50-64.

bunch of new people… bomber jackets, Corona beer, that was ‘in.’ … And the proximity [to the players]. The players were monsters, of course. At half-time, they would walk through the crowd to the locker rooms.” After he had joined a team himself, he enjoyed the camaraderie between the players, being one of the “tough guys with big upper arms,” and hanging with the female groupies. “Every sport has a group, but not this feeling, this masculine image, ‘the heroes’,” he explained his fascination with American football.194

Looking to run his business independently from the restricting federation, Gernert left the Silver Eagles to start a new project in 1992. He formed the Hamburg Blue Devils with local players, a handful of former college players and a high school head coach. The new team did not play in the leagues of the German American football federation but picked its own competition. Gernert staged the “Schweppes Cool Masters” game series in a soccer stadium with a seating capacity of 60,000. Although 5,000 spectators barely filled the grandstand, the new location offered important ingredients for future growth: parking lots, press boxes, VIP areas, an electronic scoreboard with time display, and room for catering and merchandise. At this point, Mexican beer, American fast food, and American style team wear had become essential parts of the attraction and an equally important source of income. According to Gernert, the Blue Devils targeted an age group between 18 and 35, with above average spending money and brand orientation. Forty

194 Florian Raffel, translated interview by author, tape recording, Hamburg, Germany, August 1996. Raffel started playing with the Hamburg Hornets in 1991. During 1994 and 1995 he worked for Axel Gernert’s Blue Devils in promotions and as a liaison officer for the American players and coaches. At the time of the interview, he was trying to establish himself as a self-employed promotion agent under the titles “No Limits” and “American Day Events.” At the time of the interview, his objective was to raise DM 120,000 ($ 70,000) for Hamburg Wild Huskies, the annual budget necessary for the team to compete at the third division level.
percent of Devils’ spectators were women. This target group corresponded to what a
German scholar in the mid-1990s referred to the Erlebnisgeneration—14–29 year olds
for whom being “in style” had become a basic need. 195

The theme of “spectators and spectacle” also became a staple of the product the
World League provided in Germany. The following glance at the newspaper coverage of
the Frankfurt Galaxy during the 1996 season investigates how American football was
presented as “different” or “American.” 196 In this context it is important to keep in mind
that some newspapers may have functioned, at least to some degree, as a promotional tool
for the league since journalists and event organizers may have shared a mutual interest in
pushing a desired image. Such symbiotic, interdependent relationships develop when
local media and event organizers try to tap into similar target groups, which may possibly
result in more favorable coverage. On the other side, one should not overestimate the
control the Frankfurt Galaxy, for example, had over the nature of the commentaries.

Having said this, two themes stand out after reviewing written reports of Frankfurt’s 1996
season: First, American football was presented as a party event. And second, the fans

195 In his studies of leisure-behavior and consumerism, Horst Opaschowski called the nineties the time of
the Erlebnis (event, experience) consumer opposed to the traditional Versorgungs (supply) consumer. The
pleasure associated with spending money had replaced working and making money as the center of live. As
the credit card became more popular in Germany it symbolized a growing buy-now-pay-later mentality that
had already been common in America, Australia, and England. Opaschowski warned that an uncontrolled
consumer society would lead to unfair distribution of wealth, food, energy sources between countries and
within societies. In the light of the 1992 riots in Los Angeles, Opaschowski pointed to the social injustices
in the United States as a nightmare vision for Germany. His solution urged for a limitation of consumption
instead of its renunciation. Opaschowski, Freizeitökonomie, 133, 290-96. Axel Gernert, translated
interview by author, tape recording, August 1996, Hamburg, Germany.

196 This survey is based on a extensive collection of paper clippings provided to me by the Frankfurt
Galaxy. Created by Thomas Hackbarth, Galaxy’s public relations director, and Lorenz Gemper, “The
Clipping Book contains an almost complete collection of the articles published before and during the 1996
season.”
were portrayed as central to the event, if not its real star. Together, these two notions characterized football as being different from other sporting events.

Before the start of the 1996 season, World League strategists had realized that the party image its games had developed might have been attractive to some, but annoyed others. In an effort to be taken seriously by traditional sports fans, Frankfurt’s general manager Christoph Heyne told a newspaper, “Our fans come to watch football and they accept the ‘Power Party’ and the great atmosphere as a pleasant encore.” The message appeared to be lost on journalists who looked for a continuous narrative for the short eleven-week season. Especially early in the season, it would have been difficult for writers to latch on to any storyline. Apart from a handful of so-called national players, the vast majority of the players had been replaced. The party and the fans were some of the few constants that had carried over form the end of the previous season nine months ago. The local edition of the notorious tabloid Bild celebrated Frankfurt’s opening win in Düsseldorf with the headline “Giga-Galaxy: Frankfurt’s Biggest Party Begins.” A large picture showed young, face-painted Galaxy fans cheering into the camera. The article itself resembled a party invitation:

Specialties: A flying ‘egg’ - spare ribs, popcorn, bratwurst, cola, beer, and ice cream. Guests: Next to the London Monarchs, 30,000…as spectators, singers, and dancers in the stands. Program: Fun, fun, and more fun.198


Other newspapers described Galaxy home games as a “typical American mixture of sport and show,” involving fireworks, cheerleaders, rock music and popcorn.\textsuperscript{199} A headline in the \textit{Frankfurter Rundschau} announced that the party at Frankfurt’s home games would only be interrupted by the consumption of German sausages. Praising the spectators in Frankfurt as the real phenomenon of the World League, the article introduced readers to Thomas Wessa, who was presented as a “typical” Galaxy fan. The 36-years old family father and college graduate reportedly organized the “Skyboosters”, a club of forty male and twenty female Galaxy supporters, and “loves America.” As the title of the article suggested, the only thing Wessa seemed to bother about Galaxy games was the presence of traditional German cuisine. “The fans want spare ribs,” the paper wrote. Wessa also shared that he enjoyed the “peaceful feeling” (he used the English word) and the non-violent party among the football fans, compared to the atmosphere he used to encounter when he was still a soccer fan. In contrast to those soccer crowds, the article highlighted the sportsmanship of Galaxy fans who cheered for the visiting Dragons when one of their players suffered a severe neck injury. The article also commented on the perceivable “U.S. affinity” among fans of American football. According to the reporter, “American football with American players fits into German everyday life, where cultural elements (bars, movies, clothing) are direct imports from the United States or copied of models from there.”\textsuperscript{200}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{199} “Im Waldstadion steigt wieder die Powerparty,” \textit{Gießener Allgemeine}, 18 April 1996.

\end{flushleft}
Several newspaper reports in and around Frankfurt presented the fans and their behavior as an integral part of the show. Post-game headlines, like “Frankfurt Galaxy excites 34,000 fans in Waldstadion,” often-highlighted attendance figures. Underneath this particular headline in the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, the result was mentioned in smaller print. Author Leonard Kazda devoted almost half of the ensuing text to the events around the “Power Party” outside the Stadium, and the “perfectly staged ‘pre-game show,’” which offered “cheerleaders, American old-timers on broad wheels, fireworks, and a lot of loud rock music.”

The Fuldaer Zeitung, a smaller regional paper, devoted an entire article to the experience of a Galaxy home game and called it “A Party American Style.” It appeared as if the writer meant to give the organizers the highest possible compliment when it stated, “The atmosphere in and around the stadium came close to American standards at NFL games.” Quite possibly the author had never seen an NFL game other than the Super Bowl on television.

The report described in detail the ingredients of the Power Party outside and the pre-game show inside the stadium: the moderation and cheerleading by announcer Werner Reinke, the marching band, a spectacular delivery of the game ball that had a look-a-like of World League president Oliver Luck hang by one hand from a helicopter, the entrance

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201 The article contained eighty-eight lines. The first thirty-seven lines described the Power Party and pre-game show, followed by the scoring sequence of the game. Leonard Kazda. “Frankfurt Galaxy begeistert 34 000 Fans im Waldstadion,” Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 22 April 1996.

of the cheerleaders in old-timers, and the introduction of the players. All of this would only be followed by more party:

A little later the almost three hour long party begins, during which there is no single lull in the atmosphere. …During each break there is music, the cheerleaders dance, the marching band goes from one block of spectators to another, the fans celebrate their team with songs, “Galaxy” cheers, and again and again with the La Ola wave. When 30,000 voices sing songs like “Alice, who the…is Alice,” the mood is at its peek, the atmosphere is contagious.  

A week later, another article by Kazda made football almost look like a battle of the parties. Following a Galaxy game in Barcelona, the commentary took thirteen lines to complain how disappointing the Spanish show had been:

Those who had expected a fiery pre-game show form the Spaniards were badly disappointed. Before the game, the Dragons had hardly anything to offer the 17,000 fans. Neither power party nor spectacular performances, only booming music coming from shrill sounding speakers, the appearance of the cheerleaders, a few rockets into the overcast evening sky over stadium Montjuic, and yellow, unhealthy looking smoke coming form the mouth of an inflatable dragon—that was the entire show.”

For this journalist, the show was apparently a part of the competition and Frankfurt had won no only on the field. This article was symptomatic for many others. Especially the description of the “party ingredients” almost seemed to follow a certain standard.

After Düsseldorf Rhein Fire lost a decisive game late in the season, the local Bild edition brought three pictures, one from the game and two showing fans. The headline called the game a “Super-Fire-Party: Hot Music, Hot Girls.” Given the American flavor

203 Ibid. The reference to the sing-a-long song is to a number by the 1970s band Smokey, which was frequently played in the stadium. Fans filled a pause in the song’s chorus by screaming in English, “Alice? Who the fuck is Alice?” The revised the version was later released as a recording.

of the event it may not surprise that title referred to “girls” in English, not German. Half of the actual article also focused on the atmosphere and the fans rather than the game.  

And when Frankfurt again defeated Barcelona, Bild in Frankfurt celebrated in huge letters: “Victory of the Fans: Galaxy 24:21 against Barcelona, because Frankfurt’s spectators were so loud.” At other times, reports pointed out that Frankfurt’s fans would continue their party even when their team lost. “8 to 31 doesn’t spoil a pleasant evening,” commented one journalist and added that any die-hard soccer fan would be unable to understand such behavior. Another headline decided that the fans were simply not affected by the events on the field, even though it had been “a home game to run away from.” They simply ignored the blowout. With American football looking for a local identity in Germany, it may not be surprising that the fans become “local heroes.”


CHAPTER 5

THIRD AND LONG: FROM PAPER TO PEOPLE.

AN EPILOGUE

In *King Football*, Michael Oriard wrote, “Unfortunately, this book cannot be a history of what football meant to its actual fans—that would be my wish—but only of the media universe within which they lived.” Similarly, the vast majority of my own study has focused on the presentation of American football as it was written in newspapers and magazines, or designed by managers, who like the journalists became co-authors of the text of football. The other co-authors were the audiences and readers who brought their own interpretations to the game. Although what football meant to them still remains to be fully explored, football’s professional producers could certainly not neglect their audience.¹

Throughout the 1990s, the Galaxy carefully cultivated its entertainment concept to cater to its customer base. The World League’s own market research allows us to compare the press accounts with actual responses by fans. According to marketing research done for National Football League Properties toward the end of and after the conclusion of the 1995 World League season, the first following the league’s two-year hiatus, media coverage and word of mouth promotion had given Frankfurt’s party concept a significant platform. For example, in June and July 1995 Target Management conducted street and mall intercept surveys in the WLAF cities of Frankfurt, Düsseldorf, Edinburgh, Amsterdam, Barcelona, and London. The targeted research group was limited to males, ages 16 to 45, sports fans and truly aware of the local WLAF team and the sport it plays. Among the respondents from all cities, who had not attended a World League game in 1995, 10.1% mentioned “Pre game entertainment” as the most appealing event or part of the game. However, in Frankfurt 25.8% cited this influence among those were aware of the game and its surrounding events but had seen a game in person. A second study surveyed spectators in the stadium, who were “required to have seen at least the first half of the game during the day of the survey; to be at least fourteen years of age and attending the game using a ticket that was purchased rather than ‘free.’” The study found that the atmosphere at the game was the most compelling reason for attending a game. 2

The report concluded,

The World League has taken the unique approach of offering a variety of music and entertainment events at most, if not all, of the games. It is clear that many

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fans find this aspect of the game important and it certainly seems to add to the fan’s level of enjoyment.

It is clear that each city has a different level of fan expectations regarding music and entertainment. In Frankfurt, the need seems very high while in London and Edinburgh, the need for entertainment is less pronounced. … the fans clearly like this aspect of the event and it does set the World League apart from other sports.³

The results of an additional focus group study told Galaxy management that the party concept was indeed an important part of their product, but also one that could get in the way, and could not overcome a sub par performance of the team. The stated objective of the focus group study was “to explore reasons why season purchasers from the 1991 and 1992 season were not purchasing season tickets in 1995 or attending games on a regular basis.” Among those who participated in the study, reasons to attend in 1991 had included, “You just don’t go to a game, the whole day is Galaxy day;” “The special songs …it was simply super;” “Unbelievable atmosphere and a super ambiance;” “Even before the game, everybody was in a brilliant mood and the party;” and “Good games, super gags and the helicopter action.”⁴

Some fans in the focus group had experienced a let down after the first season. The disappointment was related to the organization’s performance on and off the field. While their impressions of the 1991 team were that it was devoted to the game and Frankfurt; provided an excellent standard of play; and was professional and competitive, these fans were less convinced of the 1992 team. In comparison to the previous year, the team was

³ Ibid., 9.

characterized as less committed to the sport and the organization, and showing a lower standard of play. Regarding the atmosphere some felt that the party overshadowed the game itself. Responses included, “I don’t go to the football just for the party” and “the atmosphere got worse with each game. The audience only cheered for the fun of it. Nothing to do with game or performance. It was just a 30,000 person party. That is so stupid.” For these fans the primary product they came to see was clearly the game itself.

Echoing the games’ depictions in the press we had seen in the 1996 season, overall reactions to features and events surrounding the game given by focus group participants highlighted the following positive features: “Fireworks, parachute jumps, special songs, singing along, American Rock classics, and helicopters.” Among the dislikes mentioned by focus group participants were “music dominating the game; events at inappropriate times; and same events at every game.”

By the end of the century Frankfurt’s management had fine-tuned its event presentation and continued to advertise it to potential commercial partners. A 2000 Galaxy marketing brochure answered its own question, “What makes a home game of the Frankfurt Galaxy so unique?” The makers of the Galaxy saw three cornerstones of the success: the Power-Party, pre-game show, and the game itself. The Power-Party was advertised to start four hours before kick-off and took place outside the stadium on field of 40,000 square meters. It included booths with foods ranging from traditional German sausages to American hamburgers and Mexican tacos. On stage, stadium announcer Werner “The Voice” Reinke celebrated a show that featured live bands, performances by

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cheerleaders, and player interviews. Galaxy partners presented their products in booths, trucks, and tents. Displays often included interactive contests for samples of their products. The brochure told prospective sponsors, “Die Zuschauer feiern das Werben um ihre Gunst” (The spectators celebrate the courting for their favor). 6

According to the brochure the pre-game show opened an hour before kick-off inside the stadium. Its features included “helicopter stunts, sky divers, old-timers and Harley parades, fire-acrobatics, or Frisbee-dogs.” The organizer’s aim was to offer “das außergewöhnliche Bild” (the unusual scene). About the game itself marketing-team said, “Frankfurt Galaxy ‘insziniert’ (produces) the game as a non-stop-entertainment, a combination of spectacular game scenes, explosive performances by attractive cheerleaders, stimmungsvoller (appealing-to- the-emotions) music from a 60,000 watts sound system, that turns the stands into a dance floor for thousands of spectators; in short: a party of galactic dimensions.” 7

Although the Frankfurt Galaxy had originally branded the “Power-Party,” other organizations in the league also adopted the overall concept. For example, in 2000, each of the Rhein Fire home games included a party stage outside the stadium and action packed pre-game festivities inside the arena, which opened with a countdown jingle titled “Let the Fire-Show begin!” half an hour before kick-off. Entertaining an average of 34,628 spectators per game, each show included live music acts, extensive firework

6 The brochure was part of a package with marketing materials I received when I interviewed Galaxy General Manager Tilman Engel in Frankfurt on July 18, 2001. According to the same source, Galaxy had averaged 36,327 spectators for its five home games in 1999.

7 Ibid.
displays, and its own theme. A selection of the show titles reveal that these productions provided a mix of American and local flavors: “Wild Wild West,” “Fire Wedding Party” (with four simultaneous weddings), and “Mallorca Fun Party.”

When the NFL Europe replaced the Barcelona Dragons with a new team in Germany for the 2005 season, show and entertainment again took center stage in the promotion in the new market. Asked by a local paper about the difference between the NFL Europe’s Hamburg Sea Devils and the amateur Hamburg Blue Devils, coach Jack Bicknell responded that about everything would be bigger, faster, and more exiting, including the show surrounding the game. Fans could look forward to great football parties.

After the Sea Devils had missed the opportunity to reach the World Bowl in the next to last regular season game, organizers quickly switched the focus to the show for the upcoming final home game against the Galaxy, which had been rendered meaningless for either team. A press release promised, “a gigantic spectacle, a hellish mix of mega-show, crazy games, hot performances, popular acts and an action packed game.” When Sea general manager Kathrin Platz later described her team’s fans as “the soul” of the Sea Devils, the Hamburger Abendblatt commented, “Necessarily so, since the team won’t be recognizable in 2006.”

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Despite the overall positive coverage professional football has received as an entertainment event over the years in Germany, the concept has not been without critics in the press. After the NFLE replaced the Great Britain Monarchs with the Berlin Thunder for the 1999 season, Der Spiegel criticized the league’s use of former professional soccer players as “celebrity kickers” and the staging of elaborate pre-game parties as follows:

No sport has been sold more consistently as show: An American consortium wants to conquer the German market with an artificial league—it’s latest location: Berlin. …Sport matters to the Thunder only peripherally. They are a test-tube club, cloned by an American consortium that wants to open up the German market. Unscrupulously the crusaders make use of methods that are not even imaginable in the USA.11

In the long run, elaborate shows may not be enough to sustain spectator interest in Germany, as Neues Deutschland noted at the conclusion of the 2005 season:

The entire league is under pressure and thus tires to lure spectators into the stadiums by any means. Whether Power Parties…with a show consisting of stunts, dance, and singing music-stars on the rise will fill the large soccer stadiums seems doubtful. It might be much more effective if the football companies of the NFLE would go for a long-term establishment of player personalities, instead of presenting fans with a completely new random group as a “home team” every year.12

The league’s current practice of replacing almost the entire cast on the field ensures that the only encore performance is delivered by the party and the fans who celebrate it. In writing the text of football as it migrated eastward from America to England and Germany, local fans, players, and coaches have been both audience and author. What


they made of American football has yet to be fully explored. It may virtually be impossible to access how actual audiences received American football in England before the end of World War II. However, we can still listen to those who participated in the presentation and reception of the game in Germany during the second half of the century. Interviews I have already collected, transcribed, and translated wait to be analyzed. As I prepare to more fully embrace the concept William O’Barr calls the interpretive triangle of author, audience, and critical interpreter, I share the following thoughts on the next chapter to be written about the reception of American football abroad.13

**Future Research**

Toby Miller et al define Americanization as “The export of products, symbols, ideologies, and organizational practices from the US, producing an America-centric view of how the world should be, including the ways people should act, and the icons and symbols they should admire.” In his study on football in England, Maguire found Richard White’s application of the term Americanization most useful: “Americanization ... refers to the fundamental reference points of a culture, and the extent to which they can be located in the United States rather than in the culture itself; not just cultural change, but

what it has transmitted; not just the measure of American content, but its impact, (if any) on behaviour and ways of thinking.”

Given these definitions, it appears to me that scholarship on Americanization should deal with two interdependent components: structure (i.e., emergence of sport forms and their organizational and business practices if they historically originated in the United States) and meaning (i.e., associated ideologies). On the one hand, the Americanization debate is about the power of American culture to influence structure, meaning, and authenticity of cultures abroad. On the other hand, it is about “the capacity of local cultures to absorb major elements of the global culture, adapt them to the local context, and redefine them in a way that is supportive of local values.”

Based on this, I propose that those who want to examine the diffusion of football to Germany in the context of the Americanization debate need to pursue the following interrelated questions: Has the emergence of American football in Germany eroded local autonomy or has it been redefined to support local culture? Has American football in Germany added to the production of “an Americo-centric view of how the world should be” and have Germans involved in the sport as producers and/or consumers acted accordingly? How has American football in its various forms in Germany impacted on behaviors and ways of thinking of those associated with the sport as producers, practitioners, and/or consumers? How have American football and its German host


culture influenced and informed each other? How (if at all) has football in Germany been
different from football in the United States? Have Germans transformed, adapted, or
resisted American football and if so, how? Why have people played football in Germany?
I believe that the key to all those queries lies in a historical perspective and the
exploration of the three main questions of my this study: how the sport came to Germany
in the first place, how it has changed since, and how the historical actors saw themselves
and their involvement—their self-understanding. This in turn raises the problem of how
we come to understand the experiences of those who participated in the events and
processes. To get to the bottom of these issues, I plan to apply principles and methods of
historical research informed by ethnographic insights.
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