

Swiss Soccer

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Objekttyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK**

Band (Jahr): **- (1969)**

Heft 1582

PDF erstellt am: **29.04.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-696696>

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SWISS SOCCER

The information for the following exposé was supplied to me by Heinz Müller, a young bank employee from Zurich, but currently doing a spell in one of London's Swiss insurance companies.

The topic of football probably does not mean a lot to a great number of the "Swiss Observer's" readers. One must admit however that it plays an important role in our modern way of life, one need only open a paper or switch on a television set. This has seemed to me a sufficiently good excuse for introducing the subject in these columns.

Football is big business involving large crowds and portentous finances, even in Switzerland, where it is organised in the following way.

There are two series of 14 teams called the "A" and "B" or national leagues. They correspond to the four divisions that make up English professional football. Then come the first, second, third and fourth leagues, the first containing 36 teams, the other league containing many more and this gives a chance of being represented to practically every village team.

Two types of matches take place around the year; championship matches and cup matches. In the first, the games that are going to be played and the teams that are going to meet are chosen following a toss and fixed in advance. The teams of each league are ordered according to their performance, and the array can vary from weekend to weekend. The team which (bluntly put) has the greatest number of wins during the season is the champion. The last two teams in league A slip back into league B, the last two teams of league B slip back into the first league and so forth. Conversely, the first two of any league except league A climb into the following league. In this way an enterprising team in a low-lying league can climb up and make the grade. On the other hand, there is a stiff struggle among the

lesser favoured teams of each league for survival. Cup matches are fought on an eliminatory basis and are run rather more democratically than championship matches, since they theoretically give the possibility of being cup-finalist to any backwoods team. A series of matches in the lower leagues decides which of the teams in that sector will meet the national league teams. A series of matches at this level eliminate the contenders to the cup and the finalist is the team that remains unbeaten.

Swiss footballers are non-professionals. The only other countries in Western Europe where footballers are non-professional are Finland and Norway. Russia and Iron Curtain countries don't have professional football, but the terms under which they play and the backing which they enjoy make them greatly favoured with respect to Swiss players. To be precise, there are five professional players in Switzerland. They are foreign players that have been bought by the wealthier Swiss Clubs and some of them play in the teams of their home-country in international matches.

It is important to realise that when a Swiss team meets a British team, non-professional footballers are meeting professionals. The British professional is on the pitch like an accountant at his ledger, from nine to five. When the work is done, he can go home to his wife and go to the pub in the evening. Not so with the Swiss footballer. After a weary day at the office he must head for his clubs' training grounds and train from five to nine five days a week. The first of the five days are often taken up by a sauna in which he loses four kilograms but feels wonderfully fit. When he comes home at ten o'clock he is whacked and can spare little time for his wife and children. He has to go to bed if he hopes to remain in shape. A footballer cannot afford to go tomcatting in bars and dancing to the early

hours of the morning. If he is seen at it once too often by his coach or the president of his club, he can be severely admonished and even demoted to the reserves. Matches take place mostly on Sunday afternoons, although they can take place on Saturdays, evenings or afternoons, at the beginning of the season in Summer. This means that if the match is to take place on Saturday, he can't relax on Friday evening because he has to stay fit for the morrow; if the match is on Sunday, he may have to be on his way on Saturday already if the host town is far away. At all events, serious Swiss footballers have very little free time to spend and their wives have to be saints. Sometimes their family lives get destroyed. Grasshoppers' centre-forward, one of the best scorers of the country, got a divorce from his wife and the quality of his playing plunged impressively. He was transferred to another league-A team and is now gradually regaining his previous form.

Under those circumstances, the quality of Swiss football is remarkable. Switzerland has been qualified five times to the World Cup Championships. By comparison, Scotland and Portugal, two countries maintaining professional football, have only made it twice. Unfortunately, Switzerland recently lost her chances of going to the World Cup Championships in Mexico next year by getting beaten by Greece and Rumania. To be qualified, she had to be the best of a group of four countries comprising Switzerland, Greece, Rumania and Portugal. The Swiss team only managed to beat Portugal (who, you may remember, achieved a brilliant third place at the last World Championships, which took place in this country in 1966).

The question of professionalism in Swiss football and in Swiss athleticism has naturally been raised for a long time. How can the Swiss shine more in athletic contests without getting considerably more "athletic support"? This is one question. Another is why the Swiss can't have professional teams if countries like Greece and Belgium manage to maintain professionalism?

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The reason is predominantly of financial order. National league matches are attended by an average total of 85,000 spectators on weekends, television keeping countless others at home to watch the same matches. This attendance is apparently not enough, given the number of clubs, to finance professional football completely. An important national league match may draw between 8,000 and 15,000 spectators. A comparable game in England would draw 50,000 people. It is interesting to note that this disparity in attendance is not due to bigger stadiums in Great Britain. Many small British stadiums contain more spectators than larger Swiss ones since the practice here is to pack spectators far more densely than is the custom in Switzerland. Zurich F.C. has tried to work on a semi-professional or half-time basis, but the attempt misfired and had to be given up. Apparently, the players could not get used to so much free time and they spent too much time being tempted and mollified by the pleasures of the capital of the Limmat.

Even though the means of Swiss football clubs may not be comparable to those of larger countries, a successful footballer can make an enviable packet through football. He receives a fixed income from his club. The amount depends both on the player and the club. In the best cases he makes about 2,000 francs fix a month. Then he receives premiums according to the successes of his team. This also depends on the club. Zurich F.C. had a

high-incentive system consisting in giving a fixed 300 francs per match increased by fifty francs following each victory. After having won fifteen matches, the players were making not far from 2,000 francs a game. Fortunately for the treasury of the club, they lost a match and their packet jumped down to 300 francs. In the heydays of this particular club, some two years ago when it rose to semi-finalist of the European cup, it was reckoned that its best proponents were making 6-7,000 francs a month out of football. It is almost impossible to know whether British football stars make yet more money but it is a safe bet to say that they do. George Best, Manchester United's best attacker has recently bought himself a £30,000 mansion. One indice of the wealth of clubs (or the backing which they receive from sponsors) is the price they are prepared to pay for top-notch players. Xamax, a B-league team in Neuchatel, paid 500,000 francs to buy the German international Brunnenmeyer from 1800-Munich. In such a transaction, the Munich team receives about nine tenths of the amount and the player himself gets a lump sum of around 60,000 francs. The money is scooped from a club kitty which is topped up by wealthy supporters. Xamax is supported by the union of vine-growers and by a locally well known contractor. Unfortunately, the club had little success with its highly publicized acquisition. Brunnenmeyer was wounded and had to stay out of the

field for two months. Football connoisseurs were saying that these highly prized and blandished internationals were ideal targets by the opposing teams, which have good reasons for making them inoffensive. 500,000 francs is a lot of money, yet it is small change compared to the £220,000 which has recently been offered to West Ham United for the forward Martin Peters. Wealthy football enthusiasts not only play an important role in the life of Swiss commercial football, but they accept to help the players of the clubs they sponsor in their professional lives. Footballers usually have office jobs or professions which involve little physical exertion. It is rare that a wood-cutter or a builder make the grade in football because they would be too tired physically at the end of their day's work. One finds that many high-ranking players have jobs as salesmen, junior executives or employees, and work in firms controlled by club supporters. This is essential since a footballer may be called to leave his job in the middle of a working week in order to play in an international or other match. Football constantly interferes with his professional life and only a comprehensive and sympathetic boss could be ready to accept the situation.

As in Great Britain, Switzerland has a football pool, called the "Sport Toto". People hoping to win the jackpot can get at any newsagent's Sport Toto cards on which are printed a column of 13 weekend matches, 7 in

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league A and 6 in league B. For each of these matches there are three possibilities: one team wins, the other wins and the two draw. The idea is to put down for each match which of these possibilities one thinks might materialise. One must have ten or more correct answers in order to win anything. One has to pay a franc to fill a column. Naturally one can fill many columns and thus increase one's chances. The record win at the Sport Toto was 210,000 francs for a franc, not quite as good as the British record, which was a £64,450 win for a penny (in 1947). The Sport Toto is run by an efficient private company bearing the same name and which has used its considerable means in supporting sport throughout Switzerland.

There have so far been 8 matches fought between England and Switzerland. It is rather sad to have to say that Switzerland only won two of them, 2-1 in 1938 and 1-0 in 1947, both matches taking place in Zurich. The last time Switzerland played against England, in Basle back in 1963, is remembered with distress as the most humiliating Swiss defeat ever. She was battered 8 to 1!

If ever the English team manages to reap the same fruits as it did at the last World Cup Championships, it will partially owe this to its newly elected goal-keeper, Peter Bonetti, from Chelsea F.C., whose grand-parents were Ticinesi. Swiss vigour will be contributing to the honour of British football.

(PMB)

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Three years later the Grutli-Verein created the first Health Insurance Scheme. (This society is still operating to-day, under the name of "Grutli-Krankenkasse".) During the years that followed the society became smaller and smaller, its members resigning to join the Social Democratic Party. By the end of 1925 only some 2,700 members were left. In that year the dissolution of the association was brought about.

It would appear that the "Rutli-Feier" is more historic than the 1st of August Celebration. Indeed, Rutli Celebrations were held during the whole of the 17th and 18th centuries, mainly during the month of October or November since the Oath of the Rutli was taken in November. During the course of the 19th century some Rutli Celebrations still took place but ultimately disappeared in favour of the 1st of August Celebration. The latter is therefore less historic. It is held because the first "Bundesbrief" carried as a date: "in the first days of August".

Mr. Born was warmly thanked for his brilliant piece of work, exposed to us in such an able way, in the right place and at the right time, and of great interest to our Club.

After this the first tunes of the excellent band invited us to the dance floor. At first the response was rather slow, perhaps due to the influence of some Bernese amongst us? However, more liveliness quickly set in and there was practically no more rest for the remainder of the evening.

During the few intervals, quite welcome to some of the not-so-young, we were invited to the Tombola, where everybody could admire a large selection of prizes, and the response was enthusiastic and complete. Let us compliment our Committee, and especially Mrs. Martha Themans, the soul behind it, for the very hard work put into the organisation and the avoidance of any possible disappointments. We were also glad to know that financially the event was a great success.

Slowly the evening passed by, and only too quickly, and much to everybody's regret, the time had arrived for the last Waltz and the Anthem. It was a lovely occasion indeed, and we shall all gladly remember it, hoping to see each other again soon on some similar function.

E. Berner

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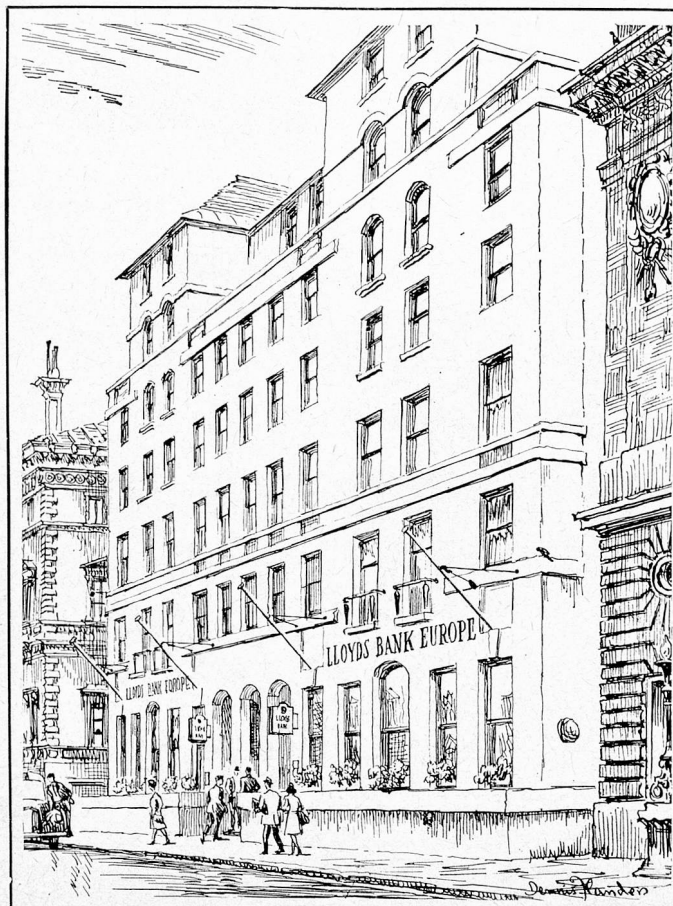
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