

**THE GERMAN MODEL FOR SUCCESS**

*This year's Champions League Final between two German sides seems to have been a summation of how football history has gone since 1863. The Bundesliga has arguably become the pre-eminent league in Europe. Germany is reaping rewards planted 14 years ago. Dortmund had won the Champions league, Bayern missed out by a few seconds in 1999. The German national team had won Euro 96, with a team bolstered by players from the east, who had been predicted to make Germany unbeatable. But beneath the shiny surface there were concerns and the German authorities were wise to tackle them.*

*Following lucrative television deals in 1992, newly rich clubs looked abroad for transfers. Some of the players brought in were top-class, but many were signed just because they were cheaper than domestic players, whose price had become inflated, while others offered little beyond off-the-shelf shine. Over the following five years foreign players' in the Bundesliga rose from 17% to 34%. This obviously impacted on players' development and national team selection. Desperation crept in and moves to fast track foreign players into the national team took place. This resulted in poor performances at the 1998 World Cup and at Euro 2000 when for the first time in 34 years Germany lost a competitive match to England. Changes in the DFB and Franz Beckenbauer assisted by Dietrich Weise, director of youth development outlined a scheme to ensure development of young German players. All clubs in the top two divisions were required to build academies, and 121 national centres were established to help 10 – 17 year olds with technical practice.*

*That was part of it, but German football had also benefitted from two other factors which the DFB had no control. As the centres were established, the citizenship laws were relaxed, and as a result a number of top-class German-qualified players from immigrant backgrounds have emerged. The economy helped as well by falling and rising at the right time. By 2002 60% of all players in the Bundesliga were foreign. But then the TV deal collapsed and the clubs faced ruin and had to sell off their expensive foreign players and invested in cheaper local youth. This year, only 47% of players are not qualified for Germany.*

*Now with Germany's economy at least stronger than most, the top German clubs are able to hold on to talent for longer and to be more selective about buying foreign talent. Dortmund have achieved something extraordinary in recovering from near bankruptcy in 2005 (aided by a loan from Bayern) to win the Bundesliga in each of the past two seasons, but their wage bill is less than half that of Bayern's. It is hard to believe they can continue to fight that inequality. Even if Dortmund do somehow manage to cope with selling their best players each season, there are concerns in Germany that the Bundesliga faces a "Spanish problem" – a distribution of wealth so unequal that two sides inevitably dominate, not just winning the league but crushing their opponents every week. It is a similar picture in England, France and Italy.*

*The big worry is that the economies of the game are such that the cycle of one country dominating and then another has been replaced by the emergence of super-clubs that are outgrowing their domestic leagues.ft*