

GERMAN CULTURE COURSE

The Bundesliga: A History

10 Chapters

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The Bundesliga: A History

Course 1 · Chapter 1 · Why the Bundesliga? Scope & Sources

The Bundesliga is Germany's top men's football league, begun in 1963, and it is often counted among the best-supported leagues in the world (check the current attendance figures). It is also unusual for its ownership rules, its standing terraces and its fan culture. This opening chapter explains why the league is worth a course, how German football is organised, what the course covers and leaves out, and which sources to use. Names, dates and figures are from general knowledge and flagged for checking, since they change every season.

Why It Matters

A national institution

Matches are a weekly fixture in the lives of millions of people, and the league is a main subject of television, radio and newspapers (check the audience figures).

Large crowds

German stadiums are among the best attended in the world, helped by low ticket prices and standing areas compared with some other leagues (check the averages and how they compare).

A distinct model

Clubs are traditionally owned by their members, and the "50+1" rule limits outside control (Chapter 7). Whether this model works is debated (check, neutral treatment).

How German Football Is Organised

- **The DFB.** The German Football Association governs the game nationally, including the national teams and the cup (check its present role).
- **The DFL.** The German Football League organisation runs the Bundesliga and the second division on behalf of the clubs (check the name and the split of duties with the DFB).

- **The pyramid.** The Bundesliga sits at the top, with the 2. Bundesliga, the 3. Liga and then regional leagues below, linked by promotion and relegation (check the current levels).
- **The season.** Usually 18 clubs play each other home and away over 34 matchdays, with the lowest clubs relegated and a play-off for one place (check the format).
- **Europe.** The top clubs qualify for European competitions such as the Champions League (check the number of places).

What the Course Covers

- **The men's Bundesliga.** From the build-up to the founding in 1963 through to the present, in roughly chronological order (Chapters 2 to 6 and 9).
- **Themes.** Ownership and the 50+1 rule (Chapter 7), fans and stadiums (Chapter 8), and a closing assessment (Chapter 10).
- **East and West.** The league began in West Germany; Chapter 6 covers reunification and the East German clubs.
- **Left out.** Detailed season-by-season tables, individual transfers and the national team except where they explain the league. The women's league and the lower divisions are noted briefly where relevant (check).

> **The right question**
>
> A better question than "is the Bundesliga the best league?" is "how did this league come to be organised this way, and what are the trade-offs?". The chapters that follow answer that period by period, with Chapter 10 returning to the question of whether the league works.

Sources and How to Check Them

- **The DFB and the DFL.** Publish rules, licensing details, official records and history sections (check the websites and the archive sections).
- **The league's own site and club sites.** Hold results, tables and club histories, with the caution that clubs present themselves favourably.
- **Statistics archives.** Independent archives such as RSSSF and match databases keep historical tables (check, and compare with the official record).

- **Newspapers and magazines.** German football weeklies and the sports pages give contemporary accounts and opinion (check, and note the viewpoint).
- **Histories and fan writing.** Books and supporters' publications; useful for culture, but check facts against official records.

A British comparison

The Premier League is mostly owned by individuals, companies or investment groups, whereas Bundesliga clubs are traditionally member-owned under the 50+1 rule (check). Attendances, ticket prices and standing areas also differ. Comparing the two leagues is a good way to see how ownership shapes a league, and it returns in Chapters 7 and 10.

Check the details

Tables, attendances, club numbers and rule details change from season to season, and different sources use different counting rules. Verify against the DFL or the DFB before quoting any figure.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Explain the difference between the DFB and the DFL and say what each does.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Describe how promotion and relegation work in a league pyramid and say why they matter.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Pick a claim about any football league ("the best supported", "the most competitive") and list three things you would check before repeating it.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **The league:** Germany's top men's division, from 1963 (check)
- **Bodies:** the DFB (the game as a whole) and the DFL (runs the top two divisions)
- **Season:** usually 18 clubs, 34 matchdays, promotion and relegation (check)
- **Themes:** history, the 50+1 rule, fans and stadiums
- **Sources:** DFB, DFL, statistics archives, newspapers, histories

The Bundesliga: A History

Course 1 · Chapter 2 · Before the Bundesliga: Regional Football to 1963

Germany had no national football league until 1963, a late start compared with England, which had one from 1888. For decades the sport was organised by region, with a national champion decided by a knockout competition at the end of the season. This chapter explains that system, why it lasted, and why by the early 1960s many people thought it had to change. Names, dates and details are from general knowledge and flagged for checking.

Organising the Game

- **The DFB.** The German Football Association (Deutscher Fussball-Bund) was founded in 1900 and governed the game nationally (check the date and the founding clubs).
- **Regional associations.** Clubs belonged to regional federations that ran their own leagues, so German football grew as a patchwork of regions.
- **The championship.** From 1903 the national title was decided by a knockout tournament between regional champions, with the first winner usually given as VfB Leipzig (check).
- **Why no league?** Long travel distances, regional loyalties and a strong tradition of amateur sport all argued against one (check each).

Regional Leagues After the War

The Oberligen

After 1945 West German football was organised in regional top divisions called Oberligen (north, south, south-west, west and Berlin), with the champions and runners-up entering a national play-off (check the regions and the format).

The knockout finish

The national champion was still decided at the end of the season in a short competition, so a club could win the title after losing many league games (check).

The 1930s and 1940s

Football was reorganised under the Nazi regime and then disrupted by the war, with

clubs and players affected in many ways; the course notes this and does not cover it in detail (check, neutral treatment).

Amateurs and Professionals

- **The amateur rule.** The DFB did not allow open professionalism, so players could receive only limited payments, such as expenses or a modest allowance (check the rules and how they changed).
- **Hidden payments.** Clubs were widely believed to pay more than the rules allowed, and scandals followed (check examples).
- **The cost.** Good players could be tempted to move abroad, where professionals were paid openly, as in Italy (check).

1954 and After

- **The 1954 World Cup.** West Germany beat Hungary in the final in Bern, an upset known in Germany as the "Miracle of Bern" (check the score, usually given as 3-2). For the other side of that match, see The Golden Team & Hungarian Football.
- **Effect.** The win lifted the game's profile and attendance, but did not change how the domestic game was organised (check).
- **The 1962 World Cup.** A disappointing performance in Chile, with an exit in the quarter-finals, strengthened calls for reform (check the stage and the result).

The Case for a National League

- **Standard.** Playing the same strong opponents every week would raise the level of play (the argument made at the time).
- **Competition with other countries.** Other leagues were professional or semi-professional and attracting German players (check).
- **Income.** A national league could bring larger crowds and television interest (check).
- **The objections.** Clubs feared costs and travel, and some feared the loss of local identity and amateur ideals. The decision was taken in 1962, and Chapter 3 covers it.

A late start with reasons

The absence of a national league was not simply neglect. It reflected geography, regional pride and a view of sport as amateur. The same arguments return in later chapters, for example in the debate over club ownership (Chapter 7).

A British comparison

England's Football League began in 1888 with professional clubs from the Midlands and the North, and Scotland's league followed in 1890 (check). Britain's early start came with clubs that were already paying players, which Germany's amateur rule did not allow. The result was a decades-long gap in organisation.

Check the details

Dates, formats and scores vary between sources, particularly for the early championship and the post-war play-offs. Verify against the DFB's records or a reliable football history before quoting any figure.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Explain how the German championship was decided before 1963 and name one weakness of that system.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Give three reasons why Germany had no national league until 1963.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Set out the arguments for and against creating a national league in 1962, and say which side you find stronger and why.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **DFB:** founded 1900; national championship by knockout from 1903 (check)
- **After the war:** regional Oberligen with a play-off for the title
- **Amateur rule:** limited payments; hidden payments and players leaving
- **1954 and 1962:** World Cup win in Bern; disappointment in Chile (check)
- **Case for a league:** higher standard, competition with other countries, income

The Bundesliga: A History

Course 1 · Chapter 3 · Founding the League, 1963

After decades of regional football, the DFB voted in 1962 to create a national league, and the first Bundesliga season began in 1963. This chapter covers the decision, how the first sixteen clubs were chosen (and who missed out), and how the first season went. Names, dates and results are from general knowledge and flagged for checking.

The Decision

- **The vote.** At a DFB congress in Dortmund in the summer of 1962, delegates voted in favour of a national professional league, by a clear majority (check the date and the vote count, often given as 103 to 26).
- **The context.** The poor World Cup showing earlier that year and the earlier arguments in Chapter 2 helped the case.
- **The timetable.** Only about a year was allowed to set up the new league, choose the clubs and settle the rules (check).
- **Professionalism.** The rules now allowed clubs to pay players openly, within limits at first (check the early wage and licence rules).

Choosing the Sixteen

The criteria

Clubs were judged on playing record over earlier seasons, the quality of their stadium and finances, and a spread across the regions (check the exact criteria and any points system).

The founding clubs

The first league included sides from every region, among them Cologne, Dortmund, Schalke, Hamburg, Werder Bremen, Eintracht Frankfurt, Kaiserslautern, Nuremberg, Stuttgart, 1860 Munich and Hertha Berlin (check the full list of sixteen).

The absentee

Bayern Munich were not among the first sixteen, with the Munich place going to 1860

(check the reasons given, which are debated).

Fair or not?

A selection by record, stadium and region will always leave out some clubs that felt they deserved a place. Disagreement over the choices is part of the founding story, and it is described here without taking a side (check what clubs and the DFB said at the time).

The First Season, 1963-64

- **Kick-off.** The first matchday was in the late summer of 1963 (check the date, usually given as 24 August). The first goal is credited to Timo Konietzka of Dortmund, scored very early in a match against Werder Bremen (check the details).
- **The champions.** 1. FC Köln won the first title, coached by Hennes Weisweiler (check the points and the margin).
- **The format.** Sixteen clubs played each other home and away, with the bottom clubs relegated (check the number going down).
- **Crowds and money.** Attendances were encouraging, though smaller than later years, and the league's finances were modest by later standards (check).

Early Coaches

- **Hennes Weisweiler.** Coach at Cologne and later Borussia Mönchengladbach, known for developing young players and an attacking style (check the clubs and dates).
- **Max Merkel.** A strict Austrian coach linked with success at 1860 Munich and Nuremberg in the mid-1960s (check, and the nature of his methods).
- **The role.** Coaches became full-time professionals in a way that had been unusual before, with training methods and tactics getting more attention (check).

A British comparison

England's Premier League was created in 1992 when top clubs broke away from the Football League to gain control of television money (check). The Bundesliga came from above, as a decision of the national association, and was formed to raise standards rather

than to secure larger earnings. The origins show how the two leagues came to be organised differently.

Check the details

The vote count, the list of founding clubs, the date of the first match and the first-season table are all given differently in some sources. Verify against the DFB or the DFL record before quoting any of them.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

List three criteria used to choose the founding clubs and say how each could be unfair.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Explain why professionalism was a turning point for German football.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Compare how the Bundesliga and the Premier League were created and what that suggests about their aims.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **The vote:** DFB congress in Dortmund, 1962 (check the count)

- **The sixteen:** chosen by record, stadium, finances and region; Bayern not among them (check)
- **First season:** 1963-64; first champions 1. FC Köln (check)
- **Coaches:** Weisweiler and Merkel among the early names
- **Aim:** raise the standard of German football

The Bundesliga: A History

Course 1 · Chapter 4 · The Seventies: Bayern, Gladbach and the Golden Era

The 1970s are often called the golden era of German football. Bayern Munich rose from outside the founding clubs to dominate at home and in Europe, Borussia Mönchengladbach became their great rival, and West Germany won the 1974 World Cup. The decade also had a serious scandal. This chapter follows the two clubs, the national team and the scandal. Names, dates and results are from general knowledge and flagged for checking.

Bayern Munich

Promotion

Bayern joined the Bundesliga in the mid-1960s (check the year, usually given as 1965) and won the title for the first time at the end of the decade (check).

The core

A group of home-grown and local players formed the heart of the team: Franz Beckenbauer in defence, Gerd Müller as the scorer and Sepp Maier in goal (check their roles and career dates).

Success

Three league titles in a row in the early 1970s (check the years) and three consecutive European Cup wins in the mid-1970s (check the years and opponents).

Borussia Mönchengladbach

- **The rival.** Gladbach, a club from a small city, built an attacking team under Hennes Weisweiler (Chapter 3), with players such as Günter Netzer, Berti Vogts and Jupp Heynckes (check the squad and years).
- **Titles.** The club won several league titles in the 1970s, including a run late in the decade (check the count and years).

- **Europe.** Gladbach won the UEFA Cup and reached a European Cup final (check which seasons and results).
- **The contrast.** A small-town club against a big-city one is part of why the rivalry is remembered as a golden age (check, and see Chapter 10).

The National Team

- **European champions.** West Germany won the European Championship in 1972 (check the final and score).
- **World champions.** They won the World Cup at home in 1974, beating the Netherlands in the final in Munich (check the score, usually given as 2-1).
- **The link to the league.** The squads were drawn largely from Bayern and Gladbach, which helped the league's reputation (check the numbers).

Why it counts as a golden era

The league had talent, rivalry and success in Europe at the same time, and television carried it to a wide audience. Whether it was golden because of the football or because of how it is remembered is a question to bear in mind (see the method in Chapter 10).

The 1971 Scandal

- **What happened.** At the end of the 1970-71 season, evidence emerged that some matches had been fixed, with players and officials accepting money to affect results (check the clubs, the matches and the sums).
- **How it came out.** The case became public after a club official spoke about it (check the individual and the sequence).
- **The consequences.** Players, officials and some clubs were punished with bans and fines, and the league's reputation suffered (check the sanctions and later reductions).
- **The aftermath.** Stricter rules and controls followed, and the case is a reminder that open professionalism raised new risks (check).

A British comparison

Liverpool dominated English football and Europe in the late 1970s and 1980s, much as Bayern did in Germany (check). Britain also had match-fixing cases, such as the 1964 betting scandal that led to prison sentences for players (check). The Bundesliga case belongs to a pattern in which a new professional system found out where its controls were weak.

Check the details

Title years, final scores, European results and the details of the scandal differ in some sources, and the story is often retold in simplified form. Verify against club records, the DFL or a reliable history before quoting any figure.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Describe the rivalry between Bayern Munich and Borussia Mönchengladbach and explain why it was good for the league.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Explain how the success of the club sides and of the national team supported each other.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Discuss why professional football can create new risks of match-fixing, and what rules could reduce them.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Bayern:** promoted mid-1960s; Beckenbauer, Müller, Maier; league and European Cup success (check)
- **Gladbach:** Weisweiler, Netzer, Vogts, Heynckes; titles and the UEFA Cup (check)
- **National team:** European champions 1972, World champions 1974 (check)
- **1971:** a match-fixing scandal with bans and fines (check)
- **Question:** was it golden because of the football or the memory?

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Course 1 · Chapter 5 · The Eighties and the Rise of the Business

In the 1980s the league spread its winners more widely than in the previous decade, with Hamburg, Bayern, Stuttgart and Werder Bremen all champions. It was also the decade in which football became a larger business, with sponsorship, television money and rising wages, and in which crowd trouble forced a rethink of safety. This chapter follows the football, the money and the fans. Names, dates and results are from general knowledge and flagged for checking.

The Clubs

Hamburg

Hamburger SV won several league titles around the turn of the decade and the European Cup in 1983, beating Juventus in the final (check the years, the score and the coach).

Bayern Munich

Bayern remained the biggest club, winning more titles in the first half of the decade and again in the mid-1980s (check the count and the years).

Werder Bremen

Under coach Otto Rehhagel the club from Bremen became a regular challenger and won the title at the end of the decade (check the years and later successes).

Others

VfB Stuttgart won the title in 1984, and clubs such as Cologne and Mönchengladbach remained strong (check).

Sponsors and Television

- **Shirt sponsorship.** A German club, Eintracht Braunschweig, put a drinks company's name on its shirts in the early 1970s, and the DFB at first resisted before accepting sponsorship (check the club, the firm and the dates). By the 1980s sponsors were common and a major source of income.
- **Television.** Public broadcasters showed highlights, with the main programme becoming a Saturday fixture (check the programme and its history). Private channels arrived later in the

decade and the 1990s (Chapter 9, check).

- **Rising wages.** As income grew, so did players' pay, and the best players could earn far more than before, though less than in Italy at the time (check).
- **Stars leaving.** Some German internationals moved to richer clubs abroad, especially in Italy, as the league competed for talent (check examples).

Crowd Trouble and Safety

- **Hooliganism.** The 1980s saw violence at and around matches in many European countries, and Germany had its own organised groups of troublemakers (check examples and how serious it was).
- **The European context.** The 1985 disaster at the Heysel stadium in Brussels, where fans died, led to a ban on English clubs in European competition and a wider rethink of security (check the details).
- **Responses.** Fences, closed-circuit cameras, tighter policing and stadium bans, with debate about how far they were fair and effective (check, neutral treatment, and see Chapter 8 for the fan side).
- **Fan projects.** Social work programmes with young supporters began in Germany in this period (check the origin and name).

A league growing up

The 1980s show the league becoming more like a business: sponsors, television, wages and security all grew together. These changes laid the ground for the arguments over money and ownership that dominate Chapters 7 and 9.

A British comparison

English football in the 1980s had its own troubles with hooliganism, the Heysel ban, and the Hillsborough disaster of 1989, which led to the Taylor Report and all-seater stadiums in the top divisions (check). Germany took a different route, keeping standing areas in many grounds with safety measures, a difference Chapter 8 returns to.

Check the details

Title years, European Cup details, sponsorship dates and the history of television coverage vary between sources. Verify against club records, the DFL or a reliable history before quoting any figure.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Describe three sources of income that grew in the 1980s and explain the effect of each on clubs.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Explain why crowd trouble in other countries could change policy in Germany.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Argue for and against fences and strict policing as a response to crowd trouble, and say what evidence would help decide.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Clubs:** Hamburg (European Cup 1983), Bayern, Stuttgart, Werder Bremen (check)
- **Money:** shirt sponsorship, television, rising wages
- **Talent:** stars moving to richer clubs abroad (check)
- **Safety:** hooliganism, Heysel 1985, tighter security (check)

- **Result:** football becoming more of a business

The Bundesliga: A History

Course 1 · Chapter 6 · Unification and the East German Clubs

The Bundesliga began as a West German league. When Germany was reunified in 1990, the football systems of the two states had to be joined, and the clubs of the East had to find their place in a league that was far richer than their own. This chapter describes East German football, how the merger worked, and how eastern clubs have fared since. It is a sensitive subject and is treated neutrally. Names, dates and results are from general knowledge and flagged for checking.

East German Football

The league

The top division of East Germany was the DDR-Oberliga, run under the state's sports system, with clubs linked to organisations such as the army, the police and industry (check the structure).

Successes

1. FC Magdeburg won the European Cup Winners' Cup in 1974, a rare East German triumph in Europe (check the opponent and the score). Dynamo Dresden and others had European runs too (check).

Dynamo Berlin

BFC Dynamo won ten league titles in a row in the 1980s. The club was linked to the state security service, and many people believed it was favoured by officials, which is a continuing subject of debate (check the years, the claims and the evidence).

1990 and 1991: Joining the Leagues

- **Reunification.** Germany was reunified in October 1990, and the East German football association joined the DFB (check the dates).

- **The last East German season.** The 1990-91 season was the last of the DDR league, played under a new name (check), and it decided which clubs would move up.
- **Places in the Bundesliga.** Two eastern clubs, Hansa Rostock and Dynamo Dresden, joined the Bundesliga for 1991-92, and other eastern clubs went into lower divisions (check the clubs, the number of places and the criteria).
- **The league's size.** The Bundesliga grew for a season to include the new teams (check the number of clubs).
- **Players.** Many leading East German players moved west for better pay, in some cases before the merger (check examples).

The Eastern Clubs Since

- **Struggles.** Eastern clubs faced loss of players, weaker finances, smaller local economies and, in some cases, stadium and ownership problems (check each club).
- **Falls.** Dresden and Rostock were relegated from the top division in the 1990s and 2000s, and several famous clubs spent years in lower leagues (check the dates).
- **Recoveries.** Clubs such as Dynamo Dresden, Hansa Rostock and Magdeburg have returned to professional levels at different times, with strong local support (check the present divisions).
- **New names.** Union Berlin reached the Bundesliga in 2019 and later played in the Champions League (check the years), and RB Leipzig reached the Bundesliga in 2016 (check, and see Chapter 9 for the controversy).

Fair merger or not?

Supporters in the East have often said that their clubs were given a poor deal in the merger and its aftermath, and others point out the limits of what the league could do. The course describes both views and takes no side (check what clubs, officials and historians have said).

A British comparison

Britain has no direct counterpart, but the Scottish and Welsh clubs that play in English leagues, and the arrival of the "big six" clubs' wealth in English football, show how smaller

clubs can struggle within a richer system (check). For Germany, a reunified league had to absorb clubs from an economy that was far weaker.

Check the details

The merger criteria, titles and the claims about Dynamo Berlin and the state are debated, and dates and numbers vary between sources. Verify against the DFB, the DFL or a reliable history before quoting any detail.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Explain how East German clubs were linked to state organisations and why this matters when assessing their history.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Describe three problems eastern clubs faced after reunification.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Make the case that the merger was fair and the case that it was not, and say what evidence would help decide.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **East German football:** the DDR-Oberliga, clubs tied to state bodies (check)

- **The merger:** 1990-91; Hansa Rostock and Dynamo Dresden joined for 1991-92 (check)
- **Since then:** losses, falls and recoveries; Union Berlin and RB Leipzig in the top division (check)
- **Debate:** whether the merger was fair; described neutrally

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Course 1 · Chapter 7 · The 50+1 Rule

The 50+1 rule is the best known feature of German football's ownership. In outline it means that the members' club must keep a majority of the voting rights in its professional team, so that outside investors cannot take control. It is much discussed abroad and fiercely debated at home. This chapter explains the rule, its history and exceptions, and the arguments on each side, which are set out neutrally. Names, dates and details are from general knowledge and flagged for checking, since the rules and their interpretation have changed.

What the Rule Says

The structure

German clubs are traditionally associations (an "e.V.") owned by their members. A club may place its professional team in a separate company, and the rule says the association must hold the majority of the voting rights, "50% plus one vote" (check the exact wording).

What it allows

Outside investors may buy shares and put money in, but they cannot take a controlling vote (check the limits on minority stakes, which vary).

Who enforces it

The DFL, which licenses clubs for the league, applies the rule and decides on exceptions (check the process and the role of the DFB).

Where It Came From

- **Before the rule.** For most of the league's history clubs were associations and could not be sold, which in effect secured member control (check).
- **Late 1990s.** The DFB allowed clubs to move their professional teams into capital companies, to raise money and limit financial risk, and the 50+1 rule was set to keep

member control as part of that change (check the year, usually given as 1998).
- **The idea.** Members, not owners, should decide the club's identity, name, colours and location (check how supporters and officials explained it).

Exceptions and Variations

- **Leverkusen and Wolfsburg.** Bayer Leverkusen is owned by the pharmaceutical company that founded the works club, and VfL Wolfsburg by the car maker, under an exception for firms that have funded a club for a long period (check the length of time and the wording).
- **Hoffenheim.** The local businessman Dietmar Hopp, who had backed the club since its youth days, was allowed a controlling stake after a decision in 2015 (check the year and the reasoning).
- **Bayern Munich.** The club is controlled by its members' association, with minority shares held by large companies (check the shareholders and their stakes).
- **RB Leipzig.** The club is controlled by a small number of members, closely linked to the drinks company behind it, and is seen by some as following the letter but not the spirit of the rule, while others disagree (check the structure and the arguments).

The Arguments

Views differ widely; these are the main points on each side (check what each side actually says):

- **For the rule.** It protects clubs' identity and local roots, keeps decisions with members and fans, and discourages owners who buy a club, run up debts and leave. It is also credited with the league's low ticket prices and large crowds.
- **Against the rule.** It limits investment, which may hold back clubs against richer foreign rivals; it treats clubs unequally through exceptions; and some argue that clubs should be free to choose their own owners.
- **The legal side.** The Federal Cartel Office has examined the rule and has said it is in principle acceptable, subject to conditions and consistent application (check the decisions and dates).
- **Fan protest.** In 2023-24 a plan to bring in an outside investor in the league's media rights led to protests in the stands, including thrown items, and the plan was dropped (check the details and the outcome).

What is really being debated

The argument is only partly about money. It is also about who a football club belongs to: its members, its owner or the wider public. Both sides claim to speak for the future of the clubs. Chapter 10 returns to what the evidence shows.

A British comparison

English clubs are mostly owned by companies, individuals or investment groups, and there is no 50+1 rule (check). In 2020 the Premier League also debated owner rules and later introduced an independent regulator for English football (check). Fans' groups on both sides of the North Sea have campaigned for more say, but under very different rules.

Check the details

The rule's text, the exceptions, the legal decisions and the status of the investor plan have changed over time, and summaries often simplify them. Verify against the DFL's current statutes and recent reports before quoting any detail.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Explain in your own words what the 50+1 rule does and what it does not stop.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Why do exceptions such as Leverkusen, Wolfsburg and Hoffenheim matter to the debate?

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Set out the best case for the rule and the best case against it, then say what evidence would help decide between them.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **The rule:** the members' club keeps 50% plus one of the voting rights (check)
- **Origin:** the late 1990s, when clubs could form companies (check)
- **Exceptions:** Leverkusen, Wolfsburg, Hoffenheim; Leipzig is disputed (check)
- **For:** identity, member control, low prices
- **Against:** limits investment, unequal exceptions, freedom to choose owners

The Bundesliga: A History

Course 1 · Chapter 8 · Fans, Stadiums and Culture

For many visitors the Bundesliga is as much about the stands as the pitch: big standing terraces, loud organised supporters, comparatively low prices and fierce local rivalries. This chapter looks at that culture, at the disputes over safety and control, and at the separate story of women's football in Germany. Names, dates and figures are from general knowledge and flagged for checking.

The Stadium Experience

Standing terraces

Many Bundesliga grounds keep large standing areas, where supporters stand close together. Borussia Dortmund's south stand, known as the "Yellow Wall", is among the best known (check its capacity and name).

Prices

Standing tickets and season tickets are cheaper than in some other big leagues, and the match ticket often includes local public transport (check current prices and the transport arrangement).

Beer and food

Beer and sausages are part of match day, and the link to the wider beer culture appears in German Beer, Oktoberfest & the Reinheitsgebot (check the rules on drinking in stadiums, which vary).

Supporters and Ultras

- **The groups.** Organised supporters, often called "ultras", run chanting, banners and choreography in the stands, and many are independent of the clubs (check the term and what it covers).
- **What they do.** They create the atmosphere with songs, flags and displays, and organise travel to away games (check examples).

- **Friction.** Their relations with clubs, police and other fans can be tense, over pyrotechnics, banners and behaviour (check specific cases, neutral treatment).
- **Politics.** Many supporters' groups take public positions on racism and on commercialisation; others avoid politics (check).

Rivalries

- **Revierderby.** Borussia Dortmund against Schalke 04, two clubs from the Ruhr area with a long local rivalry (check).
- **Der Klassiker.** Bayern Munich against Borussia Dortmund, the two clubs that have often contested the title (check).
- **Nordderby.** Hamburg against Werder Bremen, the north German rivalry (check).
- **Others.** Cologne against Mönchengladbach, and city derbies in Berlin, Munich and elsewhere (check).

Safety, Control and Protest

- **The balance.** Clubs, police and the league must weigh safety against atmosphere and civil liberties; the right balance is disputed (check, neutral treatment).
- **The 2012 dispute.** A league safety plan led to fan protests, including periods of silence in the stands, before the plan was changed (check the name, the year and the outcome).
- **Pyrotechnics and sanctions.** Flares are banned but still used, and fines and collective punishments for clubs are debated (check examples).
- **Why it matters.** The same argument returns in the debate over money and control in Chapter 7: who decides what a club's stadium is for?

Women's Football

- **A ban.** The DFB banned women from playing in its member clubs in the mid-1950s, and lifted the ban around 1970 (check the dates and the reasons given).
- **A league.** A national women's league, the Frauen-Bundesliga, started in 1990 (check the year and the name history).
- **Success.** The national team has won the World Cup, and clubs such as Frankfurt and Wolfsburg have won European titles (check the years and the clubs).

- **The gap.** Crowds, pay and media coverage remain far below the men's game, though growth is reported (check recent figures).

More than a game

The German stadium is a place of local identity, politics, protest and argument. This is part of what outsiders mean when they describe the Bundesliga as different (check against what fans and clubs say about their own experience).

A British comparison

English top-division grounds went all-seater after the Taylor Report of 1990, with prices rising sharply after the Premier League began (check). Scotland's clubs and some English clubs have discussed "safe standing" areas, similar to the German ones (check). The comparison shows how a different response to the same safety concerns shaped the two cultures.

Check the details

Prices, capacities, rule changes and attendance figures change often, and accounts of protests and sanctions vary by source. Verify against the DFL, club sites and recent reports before quoting any figure.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Describe three features of the German stadium experience and say how each affects atmosphere.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Explain why disputes over safety rules can turn into disputes over who controls the club.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Summarise the history of women's football in Germany and name two obstacles it has faced.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Stadiums:** large standing terraces, such as Dortmund's south stand (check)
- **Prices:** comparatively low, with transport often included (check)
- **Supporters:** ultras, choreography, disputes with clubs and police
- **Derbies:** Revierderby, Der Klassiker, Nordderby (check)
- **Women's game:** ban to about 1970, league from 1990, World Cup success (check)

The Bundesliga: A History

Course 1 · Chapter 9 · The Modern League

The Bundesliga of the past twenty-five years looks very different from the league of the Seventies: new stadiums, a Europe-wide market for players, a system for training young talent, rising foreign television money, and a title race often dominated by one club. This chapter follows those changes up to the present. Names, dates and results are from general knowledge and flagged for checking, and recent events in particular should be verified.

The 2006 World Cup and the Stadiums

- **Hosting.** Germany hosted the men's World Cup in 2006 (check the result for the national team, usually third place).
- **Building.** Stadiums in several cities were rebuilt or renovated for the tournament, and the new grounds helped attendances and income in the league afterwards (check which cities and the cost).
- **The mood.** The tournament is often remembered as a friendly, well-organised event, and it changed how many Germans felt about displaying national symbols (check, and note that this is a matter of interpretation).

Youth Academies

The trigger

After a poor showing at the European Championship in 2000, the DFB and the DFL looked hard at how players were developed (check the tournament and the response).

The system

Clubs in the top two divisions were required to run youth academies to a set standard, with coaches, schooling and facilities (check the rules and the date, usually the early 2000s).

The result

A generation of technically skilled players followed, and the national team won the World Cup in 2014 (check the final and the

debate over how far the academies caused this).

Bayern and Dortmund

- **Dortmund's rise.** Borussia Dortmund, after financial trouble in the 2000s, won back-to-back titles in the early 2010s and reached the Champions League final in 2013 (check the years and the coach).
- **Bayern's run.** Bayern Munich won a long unbroken series of league titles from 2013, along with European success (check the length of the run and the Champions League wins).
- **The end of the run.** Bayer Leverkusen won the title in 2023-24, ending that sequence (check the details).
- **Buying the rivals.** Bayern also signed key players from rival clubs, including from Dortmund, which fans debate (check examples).

RB Leipzig

- **Origins.** The club was founded in 2009 by a drinks company, which bought the rights of a lower-league side (check the history), and rose rapidly through the divisions to the Bundesliga in 2016.
- **The name.** The letters stand for "RasenBallsport", a name chosen in part because of rules against company names for clubs (check).
- **The criticism.** Opponents say it is a corporate project that follows the letter, not the spirit, of 50+1 (Chapter 7), and some supporters' groups have protested against it (check specific events).
- **The defence.** Supporters say it brought top-flight football to the East (Chapter 6) and plays by the rules as written (check).

Money from Abroad

- **Television.** Foreign rights have grown in value, but the Bundesliga's total remains smaller than the English Premier League's, and the gap affects transfers (check the figures).
- **Selling players.** Many clubs make money by developing young players and selling them to richer leagues (check examples).

- **The balance.** Whether the league's cautious finances are a strength or a handicap is the subject of the debate in Chapter 10 (neutral treatment).

The Pandemic Seasons

- **Suspension.** Matches were suspended in spring 2020, and the Bundesliga was among the first major leagues to restart, with no spectators (check the date).
- **Empty stadiums.** Matches were played without crowds for months, a loss of income and atmosphere (check how long and the effect on clubs).
- **The effect on the model.** The period exposed how much clubs depend on match-day and television income, and renewed arguments about money (check).

Strengths and strains

The modern league combines real strengths (full stadiums, a strong youth system, member-owned clubs) with strains (one dominant club for years, a smaller income than England, and arguments over investment). Chapter 10 returns to how these balance.

A British comparison

The Premier League's global television income has allowed English clubs, including those outside the very top, to outspend almost every other European league (check). The Bundesliga's different model produces cheaper tickets and fuller grounds but smaller transfer budgets. The difference is a good test of what each system values.

Check the details

Recent results, finances and rules change every season, and some events of the last few years may not be in this text. Verify against the DFL and current news before quoting any figure or result.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Explain how the academy system worked and what evidence you would need to say it caused the 2014 World Cup win.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Set out the arguments for and against RB Leipzig as a fit for the German model.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Describe how the pandemic seasons showed the importance of different kinds of income for clubs.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **2006:** World Cup hosted; stadiums renewed (check)
- **Academies:** required of top clubs after 2000; World Cup win in 2014 (check)
- **Clubs:** Dortmund's rise, Bayern's long run, Leverkusen's title (check)
- **Leipzig:** founded 2009, top flight 2016; the 50+1 debate (check)
- **Money:** foreign television income, player sales, the pandemic's lesson

The Bundesliga: A History

Course 1 · Chapter 10 · Capstone: Does the Bundesliga Work?

The first chapter promised a better question than "is the Bundesliga the best league?": how did it come to be organised this way, and what are the trade-offs? With the history in place, this chapter pulls the threads together, looks at competitive balance, sets out a timeline, suggests where to watch and read, and gives a method for judging claims about any league. The assessments are offered neutrally, and figures and dates are from general knowledge and flagged for checking.

The Pattern of Strengths

Crowds and culture

Large attendances, standing terraces and strong supporters' groups (Chapter 8), helped by comparatively low prices (check the current figures).

Member ownership

The 50+1 rule keeps control with members at most clubs, though with exceptions (Chapter 7), and is credited with stability and local roots (check).

Developing players

A youth academy system required of the top clubs since the early 2000s (Chapter 9) and a record of selling developed players abroad (check).

A national structure

A national league created from regional football in 1963 (Chapters 2 and 3), later joined by the East (Chapter 6).

The Pattern of Strains

- **One dominant club.** For long stretches Bayern Munich has won the title, which some call a problem of competitive balance and others call a reflection of the club's size and management (check the record, and see below).
- **The money gap.** The league earns less from television than the English Premier League, which limits transfer spending (Chapter 9, check).

- **Ownership arguments.** The 50+1 rule is contested, and exceptions and workarounds, such as Leipzig, make it hard to apply evenly (Chapter 7).
- **East and West.** Eastern clubs have often struggled to compete (Chapter 6).
- **Fans and control.** Disputes over safety, prices and commercial deals continue (Chapter 8).

Competitive Balance: A Closer Look

- **What is it?** The idea that many teams have a real chance of winning, which keeps interest high (check the common ways of measuring it, such as the number of different champions or the points gap).
- **The case that it is a problem.** A league won by the same club for years may lose interest and sell fewer tickets and television rights (check any evidence on crowds and viewing).
- **The case that it is not.** A big club's success may come from good management and a large fan base, and the league is competitive further down the table, in the fight for European places and against relegation (check).
- **Other leagues.** Dominance appears in many leagues, including those with very different rules, so the 50+1 rule alone does not explain it (check examples).

> **Trade-offs, not a verdict**
>
> Most of the Bundesliga's features trade one thing for another: low prices and member control for smaller transfer budgets, stability for slower change, a strong youth system for the sale of its products. Whether the balance is right depends on what one values, and the evidence is open to different readings.

A Timeline

A rough guide only; every date should be checked:

- **1900 and 1903.** The DFB is founded, and the first national championship is played (Chapter 2, check).
- **1962 and 1963.** The vote for a national league, and the first season (Chapter 3, check).
- **1970s.** Bayern and Gladbach; European and World Cup success; the 1971 scandal (Chapter 4, check).
- **1980s.** Sponsorship and television; crowd trouble and safety (Chapter 5, check).

- **1990 and 1991.** Reunification and the merging of the leagues (Chapter 6, check).
- **Late 1990s.** Clubs may form companies, with the 50+1 rule (Chapter 7, check).
- **2000s and 2010s.** The academy system, the 2006 World Cup, Dortmund and Bayern, RB Leipzig (Chapter 9, check).
- **2020s.** The pandemic seasons, investor-plan protests and a new champion (Chapters 7 and 9, check).

Where to Watch and Read

- **Matches.** Attending a game, including standing areas, shows the culture better than any account (check ticket rules and prices).
- **Broadcasters.** Live matches and highlights are shown by different broadcasters in different countries (check where you are).
- **Official sources.** The DFL and DFB sites for records, rules and history (Chapter 1).
- **Books and fan writing.** Histories of German football and supporters' publications (check titles and the viewpoint).
- **Related courses.** The Golden Team & Hungarian Football for the 1954 final from the other side, and German Beer, Oktoberfest & the Reinheitsgebot for beer culture.

A Method for Judging Claims About a League

1. **Define the claim.** "Best", "most competitive" or "most fan-friendly" each mean something different.
2. **Choose a measure.** Attendance, prices, European results, number of champions, finances or fan surveys.
3. **Pick a period.** One season, a decade or the whole history gives different answers.
4. **Compare fairly.** With leagues of a similar size and a similar level of income.
5. **Separate causes.** A rule, a club, a city or a decade of luck may explain a result; one feature rarely explains it all.
6. **Check who is speaking.** Clubs, the league, fans, investors and critics each have reasons for their view.

> **A British comparison**

Applying the method to the Premier League gives a different pattern: more money and global reach, higher prices and a different ownership model, with several clubs competing for the title but a gap to the rest (check). Neither league is simply better; each reflects choices about what to value, and the same method shows the trade-offs in both.

Check the details

Records, finances and rules change every season, and some recent developments may not be in this text. Verify against the DFL and current reporting before quoting a figure, a ranking or a result.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Summarise in one paragraph the Bundesliga's main strengths and strains, using at least three chapters of the course as evidence.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Apply the six-step method to the claim "Bayern's dominance has ruined the Bundesliga", and give a verdict.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Choose a league in any country and list three trade-offs in how it is organised, then say what you would want to know before judging whether it works.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Strengths:** crowds and culture, member ownership, player development, national structure
- **Strains:** one dominant club, a money gap, ownership arguments, East-West gap, fan disputes
- **Balance:** measure it before calling it a problem (check)
- **Timeline:** 1900, 1963, the 1970s, 1990, the late 1990s, the 2000s onward (check)
- **Method:** define, measure, period, compare, separate causes, who speaks