

Can Bafana restore South Africa's Collective Confidence?

 By [Dr Nikolaus Eberl](#)

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As Bafana have concluded their second training camp held at the Adidas high performance centre in Herzogenaurach, Germany, it is becoming clearer by the day that the hosting team has a vital role to play in ensuring the success of the tournament and generating the much-needed euphoria amongst local supporters.

Incidentally, this point was driven home last week by Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva who remarked that he expected the hosts to play Brazil in the final of the 2010 World Cup. "For those who don't know, this photo reflects what will be the World Cup final," [Lula told photographers](#) during his meeting with President Jacob Zuma in Brasilia.

Zuma's Bafana pledge

Earlier this week, on the occasion of the 50 day countdown celebrations in Kimberly, [President Zuma said](#) he had great confidence that Bafana will win the World Cup. "Bafana Bafana has undergone extraordinary preparation ... I have great confidence in the team. This cup is coming to Africa for the first time... We, in South Africa, will not allow it to leave. Bafana Bafana will give everything for us to ensure the World Cup remains in South Africa."

Contrary to popular belief, Zuma's confidence in Bafana is far from playing to the crowd or being facetious - as a student of World Cup history (and a teacher of the history of South African football), Zuma has an intrinsic understanding of just how important a role the hosting team can play in uplifting the collective consciousness and paving the road to national reconciliation. Not long ago, it was his counterpart in Germany, Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, who rallied the nation around the memories of a previous FIFA World that has become ingrained in Germany's collective consciousness as the "Miracle of Berne".

'We are the world champions'

Prior to the 1954, FIFA World Cup held in Switzerland, Germany was a nation torn apart. Being occupied by the victors and divided into four zones, the country was split between those who supported the Nazi party and those who didn't. By the early 1950's, the split between the children too young to fight in the war and their parents was likewise beginning to make itself felt. In short, Germany was divided and defeated in so many ways that people were no longer keen to identify with being Germany anymore. Until the evening of 4 July 1954, when the final whistle was blown with West Germany holding a 3-2 lead over a team that, at the time, was just as feared as Brazil is today.

An entire nation went berserk. "People didn't say that the national team players were world champions", [recalls Horst Eckel](#), right forward for the championship team. "They said: 'We are world champions.' The feeling of togetherness of the Germans was suddenly there again." Rahn's goal, which clinched Germany's 3-2 win against Hungary, put an end to the supremacy of the mighty Hungarian team, built around Ferenc Puskas, who had been unbeaten for four-and-a-half years. However, for millions of people, the shot symbolically ended a much longer ordeal - the dark years of humiliation, grief and shortages suffered by many Germans after the defeat of Nazi Germany.

Recovering the collective self-esteem

'Suddenly Germany was somebody again,' [recalls Franz Beckenbauer](#), who in 1954 was practising his tricks in leather ski boots with sawn-off soles. "For anybody who grew up in the misery of the post-war years, Berne was an extraordinary inspiration. The entire country regained its self-esteem."

"After 1945, the German identity was broken and there were two things that rebuilt it," [said German MP Daniel Cohn-Bendit](#).

"One was economic growth and the other was the 1954 football championship. It was the first time the Germans were recognized in the world for a non-aggressive achievement."

"We really had no idea how important it was or what was waiting for us back in Germany," [remembers Eckel](#). "We only realized when we crossed the border." The train could hardly continue after the first stop after the border with so many people on the tracks cheering the players. In Munich, hundreds of thousands turned out for a gigantic party on the central square. The same frenzy repeated itself over and over again until the team finally managed to make it to Berlin for the biggest party of them all.

Kick-starting Germany's economic miracle

Soon after the Miracle of Bern, Germany found its economic footing and the so-called *Wirtschaftswunder* (Economic Miracle) got underway. Many economists today see a direct connection between the two, and even between 1954 and the successful, modern democracy Germany has become today. The internationally renowned historian Joachim Fest, author of many books on wartime Germany, [told the French News Agency](#) that the World Cup triumph "was in a certain way the birth of the federal republic."

Can Bafana ignite the Miracle of Mzansi and can South Africans rekindle the Madiba Magic that propelled a different team to World Cup glory 15 years ago - and bestow the world with another real-life fairy tale that Hollywood may turn into a blockbuster movie?

ABOUT DR NIKOLAUS EBERL

Dr Nikolaus Eberl is the author of *BrandOvation™: How Germany won the World Cup of Nation Branding* and *The Hero's Journey: Building a Nation of World Champions*. He headed the Net Promoter Scorecard research project on SA's destination branding success story during the 2010 FIFA World Cup, co-authored the World Cup Brand Ambassador Program 'Welcome 2010' and was chairperson of the inaugural 2010 FAN World Cup. Email nikolaus@brandovation.com and follow [@nikolauseberl](#).
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