

# Because the heart knows...

Peter Thwaites reports back from a recent visit to see 1. FC Union Berlin

**B**erlin has many attractions as a city - museums, nightlife, architecture, eating and drinking not to mention the immense history that hangs over it.

But wherever you go in the world there is always football to experience.

Most visiting football fans, I suspect, would gravitate towards Hertha Berlin. Indeed it is worth a visit if only to see the 'ground' - the iconic Olympiastadion, originally built in neoclassical style for the 1936 Berlin Olympics and, despite being refurbished in 1993, retaining much of the original architecture and stonework.

But Hertha are not the only show in town or even, in fact, the best. One Friday evening I decided to head out on the S-Bahn to Kopenick, a historic town incorporated into Berlin in 1920 and home to 1. FC Union Berlin.

Whilst Berlin is viewed historically as the seat of Nazi power, it was in fact originally a Communist stronghold, particularly among the working class of Berlin. No more so than Kopenick where, on the day Hitler came to power on January 30 1933, a red flag flew from the chimney of a brewery. The subsequent reprisal from the Nazis followed in June during the "Kopenicker Blutwoche" (week of blood) when 500 people were imprisoned and 91 murdered.

FC Union Berlin (pronounced Un-Yun) were originally a works team, metalworkers, hence the nickname 'Eisern Union' (Iron Union). They play at level 2 Bundesliga and their ground is the Stadion



An der Alten Forsterei. No matter what name we eventually decide on for our ground in Moston, I can guarantee we will not get anything nearly as evocative as the 'Stadium near the old Forester's house'. They are a fan-owned club, with a very similar ethos and outlook to FC United, particularly in their opposition to the commercialisation of football.

Kopenick turns out to enjoy a picturesque setting, indeed by a forest and on the banks of the Spree. (I later discover that you can take a boat trip out here from Treptower Park. While you're at it, visit the fantastic Soviet War Memorial at Treptower, then enjoy a drink on the boat cruise to Kopenick before going on to an Union game - perfect day...)

I walk from the Altstadt (old town) out to the ground. The first thing I notice is that, despite the capacity being only 17,000 or so, there seems to be a disproportionately high police presence. Union are

playing Eintracht Braunschweig but I don't know whether this is normal or whether the clubs have 'previous'.

There are some Eintracht fans congregating with cans bought from the garage next to the ground but they don't seem in any way

threatening. I wander around and walk into what I think is the ticket office but is actually the main reception where a nice lady directs me to the next door along.

Despite my 'BBC Steps' attempt at the language the guy in the ticket office immediately spots that I'm not German, "Dutch...? Oh, English.. great to have English people here."

He advises me that Block P in the main stand would be a good place to stand and sells me a ticket for €11. I didn't know this at the time but the ground I'm about to go into was refurbished in 2009 and rebuilt by the fans.

I don't mean just through financial contributions - they actually built it. 75,000 man-hours, up to 1,600 different volunteers supervised by six professional builders and saving the club €2.5m. As I come to realise, there are fans' clubs in Germany but

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In fact the first competitive game between the two didn't occur until 2011 when Hertha found themselves in 2 Bundesliga, an event which is now repeated this season. The same cannot be said of Dynamo Berlin however.

If Kopenick stuck two fingers up at the Nazis, they were equally at odds with the old East German, GDR regime. FC Union's bitter rivals were the state sponsored Dynamo Berlin who won 10 consecutive league titles between 1979-1988 due to state sponsored favouritism that extended to fixed transfers and crooked referees.

However, once the Wall came down, the patronage that Dynamo had enjoyed from Erich Mielke, head of East Germany's Stasi (the secret police), could no longer help them.

If you find yourself at a football ground in Berlin, you may be taken in by the architecture and the scale and the history of the Olympiastadion but you will surely find your spiritual home closer to the house of the old forester. Eisern Union.

● For more information on 1. FC Union Berlin, see Mark Wilson's excellent blog 'I'm an FC Union Berlin Man' at [anberlinman.blogspot.de/](http://anberlinman.blogspot.de/)



Union really are a 'fans' club! So it's a warm spring Friday evening by the forest, food stalls, drink stalls, plenty of red and white in evidence. The ground inside is very like an old English Division Three ground, but none the worse for that.

It's mainly standing with the long main stand and the area behind one of the goals being the more populated areas. It's a very relaxed atmosphere, much more down to earth than the grandeur of the Olympiastadion.

Supporters stand on the terraces enjoying a beer or a fag (the attitude to smoking in Berlin is so relaxed, it's almost compulsory) I haven't really read up on the club at this point so I'm unprepared for what happens next

As the teams come out, something is starting to happen over the loudspeakers and music starts to swell. Behind the goal, a huge transparent flag begins to rise, outlined with black and white images of what I presume are famous players.

Then the 'Union Hymn' begins. This is 'Eisern Union' sung by the East German punk singer, Nina Hagen (not to be confused with Nena who sang '99 Red Balloons'). It's a surreal mixture of hymn, anthem and heavy rock but an impressive spectacle as the whole crowd joins in.

Some other interesting banners on display, 'weil das Herz weiß, was du tun musst' - 'Because the heart knows you have to do' and 'unsere Liebe, unsere Mannschaft, unser Stolz, unser Verein' - 'our love, our team, our pride, our club'.

In the meantime, the Eintracht fans, who are penned into what is appropriately Block Z, set off around a dozen flares simultaneously to welcome their team onto the pitch. They're completely obscured by smoke for about five minutes and any asthma sufferers should look away now.

The atmosphere throughout the match is very

similar to what we experience at FC. The actual game itself can hardly live up to that spectacle but is enjoyable nonetheless as Union run out 1-0 winners with mazy dribbling midfielder, Chinedu Ede, catching the eye

I hoped to be able to come back for their final home game (v Hansa Rostock) but unfortunately it was restricted to 'members only' and was a sell-out, not to mention a 5-4 victory for Union. There doesn't appear to be any serious rivalry between Hertha and Union. During the time of the Berlin Wall, Hertha were in the West and Union were in the East. In the East but not of the East.

When the Wall came down, one of the first things they did was to play a friendly against each other.

# TODAY'S TEAMS

## FC UNITED OF MANCHESTER

Red shirts, white shorts, black socks

CHRIS AMADI  
CHARLIE ANDERSON  
PAUL ARMSTRONG  
DAVID BIRCH  
MATTHEW CARR  
SCOTT CHEETHAM  
JAKE COTTRELL  
GREG DANIELS  
TOM FISHER  
RHODRI GIGGS  
RYAN HOWLEY  
KYLE JACOBS  
ADAM JONES  
CEDRIC KROU  
PHILIP MCGRATH  
KARL MUNROE  
LEE NEVILLE  
MICHAEL NORTON  
NICKY PLATT  
CARLOS ROCA  
JAMES SPENCER  
DEAN STOTT  
MATTHEW TIERNEY  
MATTHEW WOLFENDEN  
JON WORSNOP  
JEROME WRIGHT

## V EASTWOOD TOWN FC

Green and white shirts, green shorts and socks

RIKKI TURNER  
ALEX TROKE  
CHRIS SHAW  
PAUL RILEY  
JOSH RAVEN  
ROMAINE GRAHAM  
MITCHELL HANSON  
DANNY ELLIOTT  
TRAVIS MUNN  
PAOLO PILLIERO  
CURTIS SHAW  
PERRY MARRIOTT  
REAGAN MARRIOTT  
JEVAISE CHRISTIE  
ADAM SOMES  
TJ NIGHTINGALE  
GRANT RYAN  
GREGG SIMMONS  
PARIS SIMMONS

REFEREE: IAN GITTINS  
ASSISTANT: STEVEN TAYLOR  
ASSISTANT: ROBERT DENTON

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£8 adults, £5 over-60s, £2 under-18s



# FC UNITED OF MANCHESTER

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SEASON 2012/13  
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