



## SCENE IN BERLIN

# Soccer fans of all stripes make themselves at home in Berlin

Germany has a rich soccer culture, but to experience it all you'd have to crisscross the entire country ... or would you? There's another way: Cruise Berlin's streets, following the cheers and the scent of beer.



At roughly 50 square meters (540 square feet), and with a capacity of around eighty people, the Niedersachsen Stadion, or Lower Saxony Stadium, may be the smallest arena in the world. But when Hanover 96 are playing, the "stadium" - actually a clubhouse in the Neukölln district of Berlin - sure gets loud.

"We tried for years to find a bar that would show our team's matches, but we kept getting kicked out," said club president Tobias Quednau. "So we just decided to organize ourselves and rent a space where we could get together and root for our guys like we would back home."

Just to be clear: The Lower Saxony Stadium is not a bar, but a clubhouse. It's only open when Hanover 96 are in action. Patrons join a registered association and take turns manning the beer taps, sweeping up the joint and maintaining a modicum, but only a modicum, of order.

After years of mediocrity, the 96ers are in the midst of their best season ever, and even as outsider it was difficult not to get swept up in the euphoria this past weekend, as the eternal underdogs moved up to third in the table with a win over Mainz.

The crowd is overwhelmingly male and ranges in age from 20-to 60-somethings. One of the few women in the association, Andrea, has the unenviable task of tending bar while everyone else is going bonkers.

"It's not as if I don't like living in Berlin," she says. "But coming here gives me a bit of home-away-from-home feeling."

As a locale run by fans, for fans, the Lower Saxony Stadium is probably unique. But the 96ers are by no means the only ones who have imported their hometown football culture to the German capital.

### **Dortmund punks and Bayern metalheads**

**There are scores of football clubs in Germany with traditions going back over a century - the 96 in Hanover's name, for instance, refers to 1896, the year of the team's founding. And clubs' histories, their record of success or lack thereof, have shaped the individual ways in which their fans behave.**

**In the age of globalization, football remains a social pocket of emphatic regionalism. So it's not surprising perhaps that football enthusiasts in Germany often look for an oasis if they move to Berlin.**

**What usually happens is that a group of fans will simply commandeer an existing bar. The owner, grateful for a guaranteed supply of thirsty patrons, is usually more than happy to accommodate requests for asylum.**

**Thus it is that in the middle of the yuppified Prenzlauer Berg district, fans of second-division Fortuna Düsseldorf convene at a tapas restaurant called Alois S. (The establishment is also home to Werder Bremen supporters.)**

**The bars often end up taking on something of the character of the fans. If you visit Schmitz in the district of Mitte when there's a Schalke match on, you'll get a pretty good aural and olfactory sense of the sweaty, song-happy charm of the terraces in Gelsenkirchen.**



A bit of homespun Hanover culture in the midst of Berlin

**But strange constellations emerge as well. The Milchbar in Kreuzberg mixes manic enthusiasm for Borussia Dortmund with 1980s West Berlin punk trappings.**

**Meanwhile, fans of well-heeled Bayern Munich meet up in the Bretterbude - its name means 'shack' or 'dive' - in Friedrichshain, otherwise a den of self-proclaimed heavy-metal iniquity.**

**Welcome guests**



The Niedersachsen Stadium is standing-room only this season

**After the Mainz match, the delirious Hanover supporters sing a couple of club songs and pound a few last bottles of "Harry" - their nickname for Herrenhausen beer. The suds come from a Hanover brewery, and club members take turns driving the 286 kilometers (177 miles) back to their town of origin, to pick it up by the crateload.**

**For legal reasons, Lower Saxony Stadium is officially only open to members. But temporary memberships are available for a fiver, with a "Harry" thrown in to cushion the blow of what amounts to a cover charge.**

**Organizers are proud that Hanover natives have been known to make the trip to Berlin to watch matches with them. And lo and behold, on this afternoon, one of the young men at the bar is indeed a Hanover resident.**

**"The atmosphere is really great here," says Aaron. "I was visiting my girlfriend, and I figured there was no way I could find a place to match the match in its entirety. But thanks to Google, I'm here. There's no way you could find a place like this, for supporters of another city's club, in Hanover."**

**And that raises a question. Would any of the devotees of the Lower Saxony Stadium ever consider watching Hertha Berlin, the capital's biggest club, currently down in division two?**

**Only if they get promoted, comes the unisono answer. And only if they're playing Hanover 96.**

**Author: Jefferson Chase**

**Editor: Jennifer Abramsohn**

---

**LAST WEEK'S COLUMN**

---

**In Berlin, you might meet a prostitute with a PhD**

When Berlin's mayor described the city as "poor but sexy," he certainly wasn't talking about the women standing on Oranienburger Street. Still, prostitution in Berlin is as colorful as the metropolis itself. (08.04.2011)

---

**WWW LINKS**

---

Missed a 'Scene in Berlin'? Read past editions here.

---

---

**Date** 15.04.2011

---

**Related Subjects** [Bundesliga](#), [Europa League \(UEFA Europa League\)](#), [Bundesliga Latest](#), [Berlin](#), [Fortuna Düsseldorf](#)

---

**Keywords** [berlin](#), [football](#), [soccer](#), [bundesliga](#), [fans](#), [bars](#), [watch](#), [match](#)

---

**Print** [Print this page](#)

---

**Permalink** <https://p.dw.com/p/10rpz>

---