



# You'll Never

Mainz, 1973.

A group of bored, left-wing *Gutenberg-Gymnasium* (Gutenberg Grammar School) students are dreaming of a different world. A better one. They're reading Theodor W. Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, and Jean-Paul Sartre. Chairman Mao's *Little Red Book* and Karl Marx's *Das Kapital*. They're listening to Bob Dylan, Jimi Hendrix, and The Rolling Stones. Cream and The Doors. They're drinking *Apfelschnaps* and Persico. Lambrusco by the two-litre bottle. They're idolising Franz Beckenbauer, Paul Breitner, and Gerd Müller. Jürgen Grabowski and Bernd Hölzenbein.

Helmut Schön's West Germany had just been crowned *Europameister* (European champions) in Brussels and would soon become *Weltmeister* (world champions) in Munich. Inspired by their heroes and united in their love of the sheer joy of playing football, they decided to form their own hobby club and began to kick a ball around in the shadows of the ZDF television studios on a field in Lerchenberg. When interest grew a few months later, they moved to an actual football field next to the *Lerchenberger Grundschule* (Lerchenberg Primary School) and, while abilities may have varied, the shared goal didn't. Just enjoy yourself.

As part of the generation of '68, the club wanted a name that countered petit bourgeois values and reflected its international outlook. After one-too-many beers in the *Brauhaus zur Sonne* (where a pint only cost 50 *Pfennige* at the time), four options were put forward: Barfuß Bethlehem (Barefoot Bethlehem), Schildkröte Damaskus (Tortoise Damascus), Yeti Kathmandu, and Ente Bagdad (Duck Baghdad). Ente Bagdad it was. Unanimously. The Iraqi capital was synonymous with the *One Thousand and One Nights* Middle Eastern fairy tales, which best described the way they played and what they wanted their club to be. And, as for ducks? Well, they always keep their heads above water.

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# Waddle Alone



2010 - Rubber Duck with Respekt! sign

With a raft of ducks at their disposal and a suitably-global name, all that was left to do was to find a first opponent. Werner Pilsner, one of the original four members of the club, put forth the ingenious suggestion of playing their first friendly *in* Baghdad, and wrote to the DFB to ask for the contact details of its Iraqi counterpart to try and make the arrangements. There was only one small snag: he'd forgotten to enclose a stamped return envelope. They're still awaiting the reply to this day. The honour, instead, was bestowed upon local Mainz-based team, FC Vincenz.

Minds open, long hair flowing, yellow ducks ironed on to the front of their pristine white shirts, and their names on the back, FC Ente Bagdad waddled out onto the chewed-up field by the Vincenz Hospital to make their bow. Although they were able to put the ball past the Vincenz goal (or, more accurately, climbing frame posts), their opponents returned the

favour five times. Lovesick, Ente goalkeeper Milo '*die Krake*' (Milo 'the octopus') was hamstrung by only really having one arm at his disposal; the other was otherwise engaged with the sorrow-drowning hip flask next to his goal. That, at least, was in safe hands.

*Kein Problem.* The same is true now as it was then: the most important thing to Ente Bagdad is not winning but having fun and enjoying the game of football together. For almost five decades now, the club has been united by a common passion for football and the shared conviction that 'humanistic values and tolerance form the basis for peaceful and respectful coexistence'. Origin, culture, skin colour, age, religion, sexual orientation, and gender identity do not play a role for them. The only '-isms' that they believe in are feminism, humanism, and pacifism.

Ente Bagdad is a hobby club that cares just as much about social commitment as it does football. Under

the umbrella of SV Vitesse Mayence, they train every Saturday at the *Enten-Arena* (Ducks Arena) in Bretzenheim, compete exclusively in friendlies (generally across the Rhine-Main area), and, as of 2016, boast their own *A-Jugend* (youth) team. Though it was not their initial intention, commitment to social causes has become just as – if not more – important than the football. Both on and off the pitch, they've helped, and welcomed, people from Africa, Asia, Europe, and South America. Even North Frisia, they joke. 'You'll never waddle alone' is their motto. Doing so is strictly *verboten*.

They're outward-looking and open to the world. As well as playing at home, they use their international contacts and, increasingly, *Mundpropaganda* (word of mouth) to organise regular '*Kulturkick*' trips across Germany and beyond – exchanging rubber ducks, not pennants. In the last decade-and-a-half, they became the first German club to play in Syria in 2005, played against the German Embassy in Rome's Olympic Park in 2006, celebrated 50 years of *Freundschaft* (friendship) between Burgundy and Rhineland-Palatinate in Dijon in 2012, played against a team of Tibetan expatriates in Switzerland in 2013, and earned their 'greatest victory' in Bolivia in 2016 at 3,600 metres true altitude. And that's without even mentioning trips to Austria, Belgium, England, Morocco, Poland, and Strasbourg. For 2022, a '*Kulturkick*' trip to Rwanda is in its planning stages.

As their name implies, these '*Kulturkick*' trips are about more than just football. They're an opportunity to listen, to see, and to learn. To facilitate cultural exchange and international understanding. Few were more special than the club's DFL Cultural Foundation-supported trip to Israel in 2019. As well as matches against Maccabi Haifa (who even fielded a member of Israel's 1970 World Cup squad) and Kibbutz Ma'abarot selections, the club laid a wreath at the Yad Vashem Holocaust Centre in Jerusalem, were given a tour of Kibbutz Ma'abarot by Theresienstadt survivor Zvi Cohen, and ceremoniously handed over

a page from the Gutenberg Bible in Haifa.

At home, Ente Bagdad are staunch supporters of the *!Nie Wieder* (!Never Again) Holocaust memorial campaign and active participants in the annual Mainzer Erinnerungswochen (Mainz Remembrance Weeks). Together with Mainz 05, the Mainz Fan Project, Mainz Supporters, and QueerNet-RLP, the club commemorate the victims of the Holocaust and keep their memories alive by organising events such as exhibitions, film screenings, panel discussions, and stadium action on the *Erinnerungstag im Deutschen Fußball* (Remembrance Day in German Football). Zvi Cohen visited Mainz earlier in 2019, and in 2020 they hosted a tournament with Makkabi Deutschland, a Sinti and Roma team, two rainbow teams, and the Mainz 05 Ultras.

Every day, the club lives by their commitment to the maxim '*Gemeinsam für Erinnerung und Vielfalt*' ('Together for Memory and Diversity'). In April 2018, they made their strongest statement yet in a friendly against the Mainz 05 Ultras at the Enten-Arena. With anti-Semitism beginning to rear its ugly head again in Germany and a man wearing a kippah having been attacked in Berlin's Prenzlauer Berg district a week earlier, players of both teams walked out wearing them as a show of solidarity, many of whom even had Muslim origins. 'Anti-Semitic attacks', founding member Ronald Uhlich reaffirmed, 'are attacks on each and every one of us.'

Since early 2014, and long since before Angela Merkel addressed the migrant crisis in August 2015 by proclaiming '*Wir schaffen das!*' ('We'll make it!'), Ente Bagdad has also been committed towards helping refugees living in Mainz. When they looked around and saw that so many had lost everything but their lives, they asked themselves what they could do to help. Help welcome, help support. After approaching refugee organisations, the club took on the sponsorships of Afghan, Egyptian, and Syrian refugees living in the town's *Zwerchallee* refugee home

– registering them as club members, supplying them with kits and boots, and driving them to-and-from training in Bretzenheim. Giving them something to cling on to.

In summer 2015, together with Mainz 05 and the Juvente Mainz Foundation, Ente Bagdad formed Germany's pilot *Willkommen im Fußball* (Welcome to Football) alliance. In collaboration with the German Children and Youth Foundation, the program facilitates smoother integration and social coexistence for young refugees through football. As well as allowing displaced youths to make friends and have fun, the self-proclaimed *Enten-Taskforce* (Ducks Task Force) have also helped in every other conceivable capacity: arranging legal and medical appointments, city tours, excursions, German language courses, and homeland-themed welcome parties. They even help with finding apartments, tuition, and planning for a brighter future. What they give materially, they get back in *joie de vivre*.

Over the last half decade, Ente Bagdad has helped more than 150 refugees (both adults and children) gain a foothold in German society and begin to rebuild their lives. Although it hasn't all been smooth sailing and psychological scars often take the longest to heal, thanks to the 'duck family' people have been able to settle in, to integrate, and to begin to live their lives. To make genuine connections on a human level and real friendships, often with those from different countries. They are studying, training, and working. They have apartments, prospects, and futures. Where there was once nothing, there is now something. Where there was once despair, there is now hope.

Although the last thing they're in it for is the recognition, Ente Bagdad boast the most noble trophy cabinet in German football. The club were awarded the Rhineland-Palatinate European Special Prize at the State Chancellery in Mainz for over three decades of integration in May 2006, the *Querpass* magazine *Respekt!* award for commitment to integration from all

continents in November 2010, and the Mainz Sports Initiative Prize for exemplary commitment to refugee work in December 2017. They're also in possession of two DFB Integration Prizes (2015 and 2018), as well as numerous Mainz Sports Stars awards (2017, 2018, 2019, and 2020).

The club's biggest honour, though, came in 2019 when it was awarded the Julius Hirsch Prize in Frankfurt-am-Main on the eve of Germany's European Championships qualifier against Northern Ireland. Since 2005, the DFB have presented the award in memory of the former German-Jewish Karlsruher, Fürth, and national team player who was deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1943. It honours associations, institutions, and individuals who campaign for democracy and human dignity, as well as against anti-Semitism, racism, and all forms of discrimination. For Ente Bagdad, it represented national recognition for its indefatigable tirade against



2019 - Peter Krawietz, Klopp and Campino with duck's scarf

forgetting the past. It's difficult to conceive of a worthier winner.

That night, punk rock band *Die Toten Hosen* (The Dead Trousers) were also being recognised with the Julius Hirsch Prize of Honour for creative commitment against all anti-Semitism, discrimination, and xenophobia. Knowing that the band's frontman, Campino, was a close friend and Liverpool supporter, the Ente delegation gave him one of their famous 'you'll never waddle alone' scarves and asked him if he would present it to Jürgen Klopp. Within days, a photograph had made its way back to Mainz of Campino, 'Kloppo', and his assistant and 'eye' Peter Krawietz holding it aloft. What better endorsement than one from one (or, two) of Mainz's favourite sons?

As an independently-financed club so active in the community, Ente Bagdad were hit harder than many over the last year. More than just friendlies and *Kulturkick*' trips to Lüneburg and Munich being cancelled, the pandemic has meant that young refugees under their wing have been denied their foremost avenue to integration. Undeterred, the club have remained steadfast in their commitments, continuing to do whatever they can off the field. They even found a window to hold a Rettbergsaue beach party and a means of virtually holding the annual *Enten essen Enten*' ('Ducks Eating Ducks') night. Thankfully, the *Goldene Ente* (Golden Duck) restaurant has adapted, too.

A global pandemic was never really going to stand in their way, though. Last Christmas Eve, the club received an urgent appeal for help with the desperate situation in the Bolivian capital, La Paz – home of ducks Carlos and Victor, and destination of their furthest trip yet. With clinics overwhelmed and intensive care beds sparse, their niece and her husband had set up a small practice in their parents' house to help the most vulnerable, working evenings there after their own hospital shifts. In under two weeks (and in the context of a lockdown), Ente

Bagdad raised €3,400 to go towards life-saving equipment there. Their humanity knows no bounds.

Although 2021 has remained anything but for almost everyone, bar the football, it's been business as usual so far for Ente Bagdad. At the start of the year, the club took part in a virtual incarnation of the annual *Mainzer Erinnerungswochen* programme. In February, as part of the *Fußball für Vielfalt* (Football for Diversity) initiative, the club signed the Berlin Declaration: 'Together against homophobia. For diversity, respect and acceptance in sport.' And, in March, the club was awarded the 2021 Karl Delorme Prize, named after one of the city's foremost Social Democratic Party politicians (whose son also played for the club), for outstanding social commitment.

The club may not have played a match this year yet, but everybody affiliated with it remains committed to its same founding principles of tolerance and respect. Origin, culture, skin colour, age, religion, sexual orientation, and gender identity do not play a role at FC Ente Bagdad. They didn't in 1973, and they don't now. Nobody, under any circumstances, waddles alone.

Waddle on.

**With sincere thanks to Stefan Schirmer. FC Ente Bagdad are online at [www.ente-bagdad.de](http://www.ente-bagdad.de).**

