

By Nasry Essmat

Egyptian-German Dialogue Prior to World Cup 2006 "Football ... The Language of the World"

IN AN ENDEAVOUR TO STRENGTHEN CULTURAL RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES UNDER THE MOTTO "FOOTBALL ... THE LANGUAGE OF THE WORLD", GERMAN ORGANIZATIONS IN EGYPT ARE OFFERING A WIDE RANGE OF ACTIVITIES TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE POPULARITY OF FOOTBALL AND WORLD CUP 2006 HOSTED BY GERMANY.



German coach Tina Theune-Meyer

One of these activities is featured in the successful visit of the German coach Tina Theune-Meyer, winner of the World's Cup for Women in 2003 along with Germany's team. The invitation was offered by The German Cultural Centre "The Goethe Institute".

Theune-Meyer is considered the most successful soccer coach in Germany after winning Europe's Championship three times and the Olympic Committee's Medal for 2004. Theune-Meyer, accompanied by TSV Ludwigsburg Club, which holds the second level in Baden Württemberg State tournament, will be playing several matches with Egyptian teams.

Cairo and Alexandria have been venues for matches during April between TSV Ludwigsburg and teams from both cities. Theune-Meyer led a training session with the German team along with the National Egyptian Women Players.

During her visit, Theune-Meyer met Egyptian players and coaches to update them on training programmes and to organise conversations between German and Egyptian women football players. Egyptian players will return this visit in July 2006 through the UNESCO Youth Gathering.

Theune-Meyer's visit, as well as the women's football matches, are part of a 2006 multi-activity football program organized by The Goethe Institute in Cairo and Alexandria under the motto "Football ... The language of the World".

Johannes Ebert, Manager of The Goethe Institute in Cairo and Regional Responsible of Goethe Institutes in the Middle East, says: "Some people may wonder why a cultural centre gets preoccupied with a sport like football. In fact, it is not just a game; it's a social phenomenon which enjoys a special position in Egyptian and German societies."

Ebert was present with Theune-Meyer and Breta Fagner – delegate from the German Embassy, in the ceremonies to draw out the teams for the First Arab Championship for Women's Football. The Championship was concluded last month in Alexandria with the participation of national teams from Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Syria, Palestine, Lebanon and Algeria.

Ebert adds: "Women enjoy a special rank in Egypt and Germany. Therefore, it is natural to care about women football matches."

Unlike the big popularity of "Men's" football in Egypt and the Middle East, "Women's" football suffer from indifference, insufficient funding and is always met with sarcasm from traditional fans.

Breta Fagner sees a resemblance between the problems women's football face in Egypt and what German women had to face when they started playing football for the first time.

Fagner says: "Men used to mock us in Germany, but we retained ▶

respect after winning the World Cup and the election of Birgit Prinz as the best female soccer player in the world."

Fagner believes that the development of women's football in Egypt had taken great leaps. She dreamt with her colleague Sahar El Hawary, responsible for Women's Football in The Egyptian Football Union, to host a German team to play in Egypt. The dream came right by hosting TSV Ludwigsburg team, an event that contributed in pushing forward Egyptian women's football to march into international championships. These steps are featured in a program called "Women in the Football Playground" and is realised by the sponsors of the event like Daimler-Chrysler, Bavaria Egypt and Orascom.

The delegate from the German Embassy thinks that holding the first Arab Championship in Egypt uncovers Egypt's interest in women's football and sees it as a successful tool for communicating with Egyptian youth.

The GAT asked Theune-Meyer whether it is possible for women's football to win a share of the huge funding allocated by the government and the private sector to men's football. She explained that Egypt is a big country which loves football just as Germany does where women's football has now been recognised.

Theune-Meyer says: "Women's football is as economic as men's. Winning championships and TV broadcasting have motivated sponsors to offer financial support which aided us in forming teams for the ages of 15, 17 and 19 years old.

The German coach goes on to say: "We have several teams for popular clubs. There is also a special sponsor, Catia Company for sweets, intended for the German national women's team. Some players have also obtained sponsorship contracts to support and utilize their good image in commercials and advertisement.

Fagner also adds: "We hope to resume talks over football because it leads to a better understanding compared to traditional seminars."

Fagner's words were realised through holding football matches between German employees working in Egyptian companies and some Germans who reside in Egypt on one side versus Egyptian University teams. The latest match was between a team formed by the German Embassy in Cairo versus a team from Suez Canal University. Some German delegates carried on towards Almenia Governorate in South of



Egypt and Alexandria in the north on the same mission.

Moreover, since 25 January, a mobile exhibition called "Football ... Language of the World" has been travelling around in Cairo, Alexandria, Assuit, Almenia and Mansoura. The exhibition comprises drawings of the World Cup 2006 and photographs belonging to Magnum Agency for Photography.

A caravan "Deutsch Mobile" or "Move with the Germans" has been touring from 27 February to 25 March. The bus visited governorates from Aswan to the Delta. It stopped at 30 schools and universities offering short courses in German football terminology, shooting tips, games, in addition to cultural competitions which aim to spread the German culture.

The Goethe Institute and the German Embassy will be broadcasting the World Cup matches live next June and July. In addition, documentary and drama films – including the German Film "Miracle of Bern" – will be shown. The film shows how the Germans succeeded within a short period to win the 1954 World Cup held in Switzerland even though they had gone through a devastating war a few years earlier. ▲

2006 FIFA World Cup Germany ... Tourism at its Best

The World Cup is considered the top tourism event of the year. Every single tourism firm around Germany made a themed offer to satisfy the needs of Soccer oriented tourists. Germany planned and is promoting all aspects of German culture and local beauty spots.

In spite of the fact that all the action is taking place in 12 major cities, many of the 32 World Cup teams are being accommodated in different towns around Germany. This has attracted a great number of fans to stay as close as they can to their beloved soccer squads. The arrangements made for the World Cup started as early as 2000 when the European host was announced. Preparation covered every acre of the country, according to Martina Binthack of the German National Tourist Board (GNTB).

The GNTB, one of the biggest sponsors of tourism in Germany, is expecting more than five million additional night bookings – equivalent to a 1.7% increase in 2006. Figures are taking into account the number of fans tickets. Almost all German cities and towns will be showing the World Cup matches on giant screens giving the fans the opportunity of a stadium-like atmosphere even if they cannot attend games.

