

Prohibition: a frequent obstacle in the development of women's soccer

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Introduction

Women's soccer has evolved dramatically over the past years regarding frequency, intensity and competitiveness of matches [1]. Nevertheless before achieving its current status, highlighted by the extremely positive sporting [2] and economic [3] results of the FIFA Women's World Cup Germany 2011, the now celebrated sport was very close to extinction. The prohibition of the practice of soccer by female players marked the history of this sport in several countries, such as England and France [4]. The aim of the present study is to carry out a comparative analysis of this murky period in the history of women's soccer in Brazil and Germany.

Methods

A literature review, especially focused on historical content, was conducted based on specific references from both countries.

Results

A chronological summary of the comparative analysis is shown in table 1. Soccer was introduced in Brazil as a sport for men in the late nineteenth century, when it was already practiced by female players in Europe. However, the first women's match in the country took place as early as 1921 [5]. The apparent rapid insertion of women into Brazilian soccer was curbed by a prohibition law in 1941, a reflection of an extremely patriarchal society. The act was not repealed until 1979, paving the way for the expansion of the sport in the 80's after 38 years of unofficial practice [6].

In Germany the first female team was established in 1907 with the formation of FC Fortuna 02 Leipzig [7]. But this team did not last long, so it was not until 1921 that the first match between women's squads (Dresdenia SV x Radebeuler BC 07) was held in Dresden [8]. During the Weimar Republic women also played soccer at German Universities until the Nazis came to power [9]. Throughout the *Gleichschaltung* - forcible-coordination - in the National Socialist period, sports associations, including the German Football Association (DFB), were subordinate to the National Socialist League for Physical Education (NSRL) [10]. As a consequence, since 1936 the fledgling women's soccer had been refused, seen as a not recommended practice, in what is called a *resolute ban*. A second ban (1955-1970) was applied only to the Federal Republic (West Germany) and to its clubs. In East Germany women had been free to play soccer since 1960 as a so-called *Freizeit- und Erholungssport* [11], given that women's soccer was considered just a recreational sport, without high-level competitive ambitions [4].

In both countries medical and biological concepts were widely used as arguments against the practice of soccer by women, what was often widespread publicly [12,13]. The main worry was a possible damage of the female reproductive functions, because of their natural fragility, which was not suitable for the demands of the sport. For these reasons alternative procedures had been posteriorly applied, such as two halves of 35 minutes in Brazil [14] as well as 30 and then 40 minutes, in Germany [4].

Table 1. Chronological comparison of the development of women's soccer in Brazil and Germany.

Historical facts	Brazil	Germany
First female match	1921	1921
Beginning of the prohibition	1941	1955*
End of the prohibition	1979	1970*
Duration of the prohibition (years)	38	15
First official national team	1991	1982 / 1990**
Uninterrupted national competition since	2007	1990

*Imposed by the German Football Association in West Germany. **National Team of the GDR.

Currently the German and Brazilian women's soccer are listed among the best in the world, playing main roles in major international tournaments (Table 2), however the difference of the evolution of its competitive practice between the European and South American continents is striking (Table 3).

Table 2. International successes of Brazilian and German women's soccer.

International presence	Brazil	Germany
World Cup appearances	6	6
World Cup best results	Runners-up (2007) Third place (1999)	Winner (2003, 2007) Runners-up (1995)
Olympic appearances	5	4
Olympic best results	Silver medal (2004/2008)	Bronze medal (2000/2004/2008)
Continental Titles	5 (in 6 editions)	7 (in 10 editions)
Continental Titles (Clubs)	3 (in 3 editions)	6 (in 10 editions)
Best world player	5 (Marta)	3 (Birgit Prinz)

Table 3. Beginning of women's soccer competitions in Europe and in South America.

Beginning of continental competitions	Brazil	Germany
For national teams	South American Championship	European Championship
A national team	1991	1984
U20 national team	2004	1998
U17 national team	2008	2008
For clubs	Women's Libertadores Cup	Women's Champions League
	2009	2001

In effect since 1956 a national team had already been played friendly matches for West Germany against other national squads, although not officially [13]. In contrast, it was only in 1988 that the first unofficial Brazilian team was reported, represented by the club Radar [6]. German women's soccer could also take advantage of an uninterrupted National League - *Women's Bundesliga* - since 1990, while the Brazilian female players, after several failed attempts, could finally begin playing in the Brazil Cup from 2007, which still needs to be improved regarding structure and competitiveness [15].

Conclusion

Despite official bans, soccer continued to be practiced by women in both countries. Visible progress actually began after legitimation by national associations and the need to participate in the newly released international competitions. The success of the national teams in major international tournaments decisively influenced the establishment of national leagues in each country. Currently Brazil and Germany belong to the world elite of women's soccer, playing each other in the final match of the World Cup 2007 and occupying the fourth and second position in the World Ranking, respectively. After nearly a century, investments are still required to develop women's soccer as a whole, as well as for the particular needs of each country.

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