



ST. BAULI
DEATHPRESSO

...SCHLAFEN KANNST,
WENN DU TOT BIST.

The not-so-badlands

Words and photos by **Jeff Kavanagh**

An hour before kick-off, the old punk is the only one noticeably hammered. Sporting a lank, orange Mohawk and ripped up jeans, he lurches towards the bottle of schnapps. "Prost", he laughs, toasting his small group of companions. All around them, people are dressed in hoodies and caps emblazoned with skulls and crossbones and despite the ageing anarchist's intoxication, there's no suggestion of trouble on this mild, late August evening in Hamburg.

The only rumblings of discontent emanating from the *St. Pauli* fans outside the modern, glass front of the Millerntor's South Stand, sipping beers or queuing at the "Vincent Vegan" food truck, concerns the poor run of form earlier in the year that cost them promotion to the Bundesliga; it carried into the first two games of the season and which they worry might continue at home against *SV Sandhausen*, a small club from a town near Heidelberg.

Despite a disappointing start to the new campaign – a draw with *Ingolstadt* and a loss to *Aalen* - it's not a bad time to be a *St. Pauli* supporter. The club's finances are enjoying a sustained period of stability, work is about to start on the fourth and final stage of the modernisation of the *Millerntor* - the building of the new North Stand - and perhaps most importantly their team would soon host *Dortmund* in the German Cup in October.

Most fans are keenly aware it wasn't far back in *St. Pauli's* 104-year

history that the club, nicknamed the *Freibeuter der Liga* – the Buccaneers of the League- almost sank beneath the waves. Having yo-yoed between the first and second divisions of German football for years, mismanagement on and off the field eventually caught up with them and they finished bottom of the Bundesliga in the 2001-2002 season, plunging another division the next. In deep financial strife, the club almost lost their license to play professional football.

Fortunately, theatre impresario and sometimes drag queen **Corny Littmann** came sailing to the club's rescue. An unorthodox choice for a football chairman, he was an astute one as well, says **Sven Brux**, a *St. Pauli* fan since the mid-80s and head of security and organisation at the club. "He's not only a theatre man, but also a businessman and he had a great network that lead to the start of the building of the new football ground."

A legion of loyal supporters also helped. Situated in *St Pauli*, a quarter of Hamburg most famous for its sprawling red-light district, the club was lucky to see a few thousand fans through its turnstiles in the early 80s. It was round this time, however, that some of the punks, artists and students attracted to the harbour-side neighbourhood's cheap rents started showing up at games, bringing booze, pot and Jolly Roger flags with them. The *Millerntor* soon gained a cult reputation beyond somewhere to watch football, and became a place where proudly anti-racist, anti-

sexist and anti-homophobic left-wing fans came to party. By the end of the 80s, the 20,000 capacity ground was regularly selling out.

Just over a decade later, supporters continued to turn out en-masse despite four consecutive years trapped in the third division. Littmann wasn't slow to recognise the club's appeal, both in Germany and abroad, and fundraising projects such as the "Retter" (Saviour) t-shirt campaign, which sold 140,000 t-shirts in its first six weeks in 2003, were initiated.

By the time the theatre man stepped down as chairman in 2010 (he remains in management at the club), the club boasted over 11 million fans worldwide and generated 6.6 million euros a year in merchandising revenue. The *Millerntor* also had been redeveloped to include business seats.

Inevitably, some supporters are unhappy with the direction the ship has been steered in the last decade. "There are people who have changed from *St. Pauli* to [smaller local clubs] *Altona 93* and *USC Paloma* because of our club becoming more commercialised," says **Dirk Albrecht**. Not that it's a new phenomenon, says the 47-year-old sales manager and a *St. Pauli* regular for the past 25 years, explaining the same thing happened at the end of the 80s.

Albrecht, however, was initially sceptical of the club's redevelopment plans, but "not because the club won't be the same afterwards." It

was rather that plans for a new stadium had been repeatedly mooted over the last 20 years, yet little had eventuated due to financial restraints. "Even when they started the construction work (on the new South Stand, which was completed in 2008), the main opinion was that they will never finish it because of going bankrupt."

Nick Davidson, author of *Pirates, Punks & Politics*, a book about the club and how he became a regular visitor to the *Millerntor* from his home in the Midlands in England, admits he also opposed modernisation. Having fallen in love with the stadium "due to its old-school, down-at-heel charm" after attending a match in 2007, he feared redevelopment "would rip the heart

out of the ground." For the most part, he says, that hasn't happened. "Yes, there is a stand with two decks of executive boxes, but there is also an incredible 10,000 capacity terrace on the rebuilt Gegengerade (the stand opposite the main stand). If anything, the noise and atmosphere is vastly improved."

Jennifer Dreyer, a 43-year-old teacher and season ticket holder for almost a decade, isn't so sure. "There's more space now so there's no need to stand shoulder to shoulder, which also means there's less of a chance to share a hand-rolled whatever with strangers. Beer is more expensive and sausages are no longer grilled over an open fire. It's all become commercialised and less intimate."

Unsurprisingly, the development of the club has drawn parallels with the gentrification of its surrounds. The *St. Pauli* district remains home to a rich collection of dive bars, music venues, strip joints and brothels, but property developers and an influx of young professionals with deep pockets have forced out its long term residents, many of them musicians, punks and squatters who helped imbue the neighbourhood with its flavour. Predictably, fashionable eateries, design hotels and state of the art office blocks have sprung up among the area's less salubrious establishments.

So, in the same way that it has become fashionable to have a flat or go for cocktails in *St. Pauli*, has the club also become a trendy place to watch football?



Sven Brux bristles a little at the question. "Football grounds are always a mirror of surrounding society. In the 80s there were a lot of rough harbour workers in the ground. But the harbour industry has changed, so the jobs have changed. This has nothing to do with a trendy thing going to FC St. Pauli, it's just normal that society has changed."

Sven Langner, a social worker with the Fanladen, a long-running, independent St. Pauli fan organisation, reckons that the club has become fashionable, and the expansion of the Millerntor's capacity to 30,000 has also seen the rise in the number of "football consumers" at the ground. "They wear the clothes with the 'Jolly Roger', and like the whole style of St. Pauli," the 37-year-old says. "But when

the match is over they are mostly in the pubs or at home."

What is important, says Langner, who started coming to St. Pauli matches when he was 13, is that the "active supporters scene", a core of about 2,000 fans, most of whom are club members, retain a strong influence in the club's politics. "I think the club understands that all it is today came from the fan scenes in the 80s. Is the club gentrified? A little bit, but the influence of the fans is still ok."

This influence is very much evident in the commercial considerations of the club, says Brux. "It is forbidden for the club to sell the name of the stadium, which costs us something around 1.5 million euros per season. It's also forbidden to have this half-

time pitch entertainment presented by sponsors. The fans said we don't want this commercial shit."

In 2011, supporters famously also agitated against *Susi's Show Bar*, a local strip club that had installed a dance pole in its corporate box, deeming the whole enterprise sexist and forcing the club to cancel its contract with the strip joint.

Outside the stadium, the district has much the same feel as it did when he first started coming to games, says **Nick Davidson**. "There are still FC St. Pauli and Refugees Welcome flags hanging from balconies. Residents and fans still come together to fight gentrification and they also still unite over issues such as the 8,000 people who attended a march supporting



the Lampedusa Refugees last Autumn."

As for fair weather fans attracted by the club's image, they have always existed, reckons Dirk Albrecht. *"Usually this happens when the team is promoted to the first division."* They stop coming if the team starts playing poorly, he says, but given that the team spends most of its time in the *Second Bundesliga*, there's little risk of the majority fans turning up for little other reason than it's trendy to support *St. Pauli*.

Talking to committed fans of the club, the general consensus is that this is where most of them want to be: safely in the second division of German football, but with the occasional foray into the top tier. *"Yeah, sure,"* says Brux when asked if the club's ambition is to play in

the Bundesliga. *"The ambition must be to play the most successful football possible with our financial possibilities."* He points out recently signed Croatian player **Ante Budimir** cost 900,000 euros and is their second most expensive player ever. *"That shows you in which level we play."*

The club appointed **Oke Göttlich**, a 38-year-old music industry entrepreneur who sold *St. Pauli* fanzines as a teenager, as its new chairman. For Brux, the appointment of someone fundamental in shaping the values of the club in the 80s to its top job is the final step in a 25-year process that began with the establishment of the Fanladen fan project in 1989.

Göttlich is also the type of businessperson that the board wants at the club's helm for the next ten

years and beyond, he says. *"We must have visions about which role we have to play in professional football in Germany when there are things like the influence of big companies. This guy with his company (finetunes GmbH, a successful independent music distribution firm) has shown us in the last years that it can be successful to think about alternative ways to play this big game."*

In the meantime, there's still a match to be played against Sandhausen. Disappointingly, it's a dull affair with few chances. Three minutes into stoppage time, with the game 1-1 and rain tumbling from the sky, *St. Pauli* snatch a goal and the stadium erupts. At least a third of the main stand and many of its executive seats are long empty, but the still packed standing areas of the *South Stand* and *Gegengerade*, as well as the old *Nordkurve*, heave with happy fans.



