



THE BIG POND

A US-GERMAN LISTENING SERIES

American Sports in Germany

by Susanne Grüter

[Crying female voice, exultation, English speaker: "The Bonn Capitals win their first Championship in the 29 years history of the Club"....]

Female speaker: Team and fans are in an exceptional state and the sold out stadium with its more than 2 000 spectators is on fire. For the first time, the Bonn capitals won the German Championship in October 2018.

Martina Weller: Baseball in Bonn increased tremendously and so many more people are coming to visit our games. That is just fabulous. We love it.

Male speaker: Said Martina Weller who is selling the green and yellow jerseys for the Capitals. This many fans watch only during the play-offs, but the club enjoys an increasing number of regulars during the season, too.

Original voice Voxpops male: It is fantastic, I never thought that might be possible to have this around the corner and we go out, have one hundred meters to the stadium and that is the reason we are here every weekend, and for kids it is excellent.

Original voice Voxpops male 2: You can come here with all family and there is also place for chatting, having some burgers, meeting friends or other people and there is interesting sports, a little bit like chess on the long.

Original voice Voxpops male: I still do not know much about the game itself, but the atmosphere is great. Everything is peaceful, no aggressive yelling and there is music, too, I think, it is great.

Female speaker: The baseball park, which is located in a wide park area, close to one of the largest rivers in Europe, the Rhine, is also very popular. The Bonn Stadium is considered one of the most beautiful in Germany and is the base of the German Baseball Association.

[Stadium announcer (in German): "Please, get up from your seats for the German anthem", music sound]

Male speaker: On the four baseball diamonds, the "shamrock", the approximately 250 members of the club train in eleven teams. At the furthest point, one has to hit the ball further than 125 yards to score a homerun.

[Stadium noises]

Female speaker: The Bonn Capitals are one of the top clubs in Germany since they were founded – partly kick-started by Americans. After the second World War, the Allies were stationed here, when Bonn was still the German capital. There was an American settlement where later members of the American Embassy lived. The Caps took over the ball park from them. Franz-Werner Krausgrill founded the association back then.

Franz-Werner Krausgrill: People from the embassy came, because they did not have a men's league. So they saw us playing – how bad – we do not want to talk about – they joined us, and it was like a mixed thing. They supported us, they gave us equipment, because there were no stores where you could buy a catcher equipment or special hats, things like that. You had to import them from the United States.

Male speaker: Krausgrill and his teammates had just registered "Capitals" as trademark name when the Wall came down in 1989 and everyone knew that Berlin would become the capital again in the future. The club kept the name anyway, though the Government and German Parliament moved to Berlin in 1999. Nowadays, some of the former parliamentary buildings house various UN organizations. So, the city of Bonn with a population of only 330.000 inhabitants has a cosmopolitan flair – also a reason why baseball attracts many spectators here.

[Music in the Bonn stadium]

Gerry Frapier: My name is Gerry Frapier. I am from New Haven, so it is just a short train ride from New York and I live in Cologne and I like Baseball. It is cool to see the game, you know, played in Europe. As a kid, I could go to Shea Stadium all the time, and there is nothing better than going to see the Mets, but now that I live here, it is my little piece of home.

Cornelia Schmitz-Stercken: There was a hit, and a point for home, and now we are leading by four to two.

[Exultation in the stadium]

Female speaker: Cornelia Schmitz-Stercken is the wife of the club's president and takes care of the fans on the sidelines with drinks and cake. At important games her nerves flutter.

Male speaker: To support the players even better, Sabine Walter founded the first fan club of Bonn Capitals a few months ago – "BC Unity." As much as she is a fan of the boys, she knows they would have a tough time in the US.

Sabine Walter: We have just a little number of players who got the chance to play in the United States. We have one player, playing for the Minnesota Twins, Max Kepler. He is, I think, one of the best players we have ever seen in Germany, and of course, the players

here in the German Bundesliga (German National League) are far away from what he is playing, but I think Americans would be surprised because of the atmosphere in the stadiums.

[Stadium noises]

Female speaker: Udo Schmitz, president of the Bonn Capitals for ten years, shares this view. Both his sons play in the front. The German baseball players are getting better, but the tradition is simply lacking.

Udo Schmitz *[in German]:* This is certainly not comparable to what you see in the stadiums of the Major League, where 40, 50, 60 or more thousands of spectators come to see the games. But by German standards, you will not find anything better than this here. So, in terms of the density of mood and excitement, this is the absolute pinnacle of the season in baseball Germany.

[Sirens blaring, music in the Bonn Stadium]

Male speaker: The German Baseball Association includes about 22 500 members – the Cheerleading Association Germany about 17 500. In comparison, the German Football Association has over seven million members. So, the sporting priorities of the Germans are clearly distributed.

[Female coaches counting in English: “1, 3, 5, 7”, giving commands and orders, clapping]

Female speaker: Located about 40 kilometers north of Bonn is – also along the Rhine – the city of Leverkusen with a population of around 170 000 inhabitants and a center of the German chemical industry. The Bayer Group supports a Bundesliga football club and a major athletics club, but not the cheerleaders, although the Leverkusen team is the most successful in Germany.

[Battle cry: “Wildcats – let’s go – we are wildcats”]

Male speaker: The Wildcats are financed by the contributions of more than 350 members. Fees for performances help to cover travel expenses and entry fees. Cheerleading is soon to become an Olympic sport and the club hopes to finally find sponsors. In Germany, cheerleaders also struggle with their image. Coach Svenja Kollek gets to the heart of it.

Svenja Kollek: You have this cliché and you think about pompoms, you think about girls with tiny skirts and big boobs and a lot of makeup, but that is not the Cheerleading Sport.

Janina Hashani *[in German]:* You have to spend a lot of time, which scares off many.

Annika Lischy *[in German]:* We have three training sessions per week, and most of the time we go for a fourth time to develop individually, especially when championships draw closer.

[Stadium noises]

Female speaker: Annika Lischy and Janina Hashani, 16 and 17 years old, are not only preparing for their own performance, they are also taking care of the younger cheerleaders. Janina is a

trainer. 30-year-old Rene Jablonski is also coaching. Everyone in the club are volunteers, which shows high commitment, but which also brings satisfaction.

Rene Jablonski *[in German]*: If somehow guardians or parents come to you with tears in their eyes and say: "My God, Rene, that was so cool what you guys did there", that is a feeling that cannot be easily described. And that is why it will be quite tough for me, personally, to quit in a year or two.

[Cheerleaders stamping on the floor and working out, female coach (in German): "Celine, stoop down, more, move!"]

Svenja Kollek: You need to have so much confidence in your whole group. If you come down with your head from a height like two or three meters or standing on a pyramid and fall down and no one catches you - yes - you can die. When you quit, then it is because you are going away because of your job or your body hurts too much or you got pregnant or something like this, but never because cheerleading is too dangerous or it makes no fun.

[Female coaches (in German): "You have a break for drinking and then we have happy hour"]

Male speaker: Fun with endurance training? The so-called happy hour is intense. Coach Svenja Kollek demands full commitment. However, the most important aspect, according to deputy club chairman Sandra Hawlik, is idealism and discipline.

Sandra Hawlik *[in German]*: It is really a tough sport, and we also expect a lot from the kids and the parents. So, even attending children's birthday parties is no reason for us to miss in training. This is a very clear statement, so the only valid reasons they may be missing training are compulsory school events and, let us say, weddings, baptisms, etc. But otherwise, this is an absolute no go. It is a team sport, if one is absent, then the whole team cannot practice.

[Stadium noises]

Female speaker: A highlight for many Wildcats was to experience cheerleading live in the States.

Janina Hashani *[in German]*: We were together at the World Championships in America, yeah, that was really cool in Disneyland.

Annika Lischy *[in German]*: It is a completely different feeling, because they train on quite a different level.

Rene Jablonski *[in German]*: Of course, one has to admit that their choreography are definitely dope, because they can all do the double twist, and in our team you have maybe only two people who can do double twists.

Janina Hashani *[in German]*: Then you see all of the American teams. That gives you another boost as you want to shine as brightly as the others.

[Stadium noises]

Female speaker: However, in 2017, the team from Leverkusen in turn impressed their American role models at the Summit Championships. Svenja Kollek explains:

Svenja Kollek: Really big gyms and the owners and some parents they came to us and asked: “You are from Germany? We have never seen a team like you before from Germany”, and we were so proud. I think, last year we did a great job in the USA and now they know us.

[Female coach giving commands for exercises and endurance training, team chanting]

Male speaker: The Wildcats get their technique, choreography and pyramid sequences regularly improved by American coaches. In addition, they put great importance in fostering young talents. That makes them so successful. The same applies to the Bonn Capitals.

[Sound of vuvuzela horns, drums, and percussion, exultation in the stadium. Stadium announcer (in German): “And now it has happened, third out, the Bonn Capitals win 4:2.”]

Male speaker: Many players who joined the Bundesliga team in recent years are home-grown players. Sports Director Florian Nehring explains.

Florian Nehring: First of all, you have to have good players and then develop them to good coaches, because every former or every experienced player, they have a coaching role in our youth program and then you develop the young players and then it is kind of easy.

Male speaker: However, in German baseball, even Bundesliga and national players have to resign themselves to being amateurs.

[Hip-Hop music sound]

Max Schmitz: My name is Max Schmitz, I am 26 years old and I am a pitcher for the Bonn Capitals. I am not earning anything with baseball but you do get reimbursed for national team trips, you do not have to pay for those and luckily via the German Sports Aid Foundation you get a little bit of extra money. I study and my parents are helping me out financially.

Male speaker: The Bonn Capitals have an annual budget of about 250 thousand Euros. That means that sports director Florian Nehring quickly feels the limits.

Florian Nehring: With that budget, you can maybe pay a quarter of a baseball player over in the States.

Female speaker: The Caps cannot attract Americans to Germany with lucrative players’ wages. For some, however, the University of Bonn and international companies in the city are an incentive.

[Stadium announcer (in German): “Yes, let us start like this. Our guy, Eric Brenk!”]

Eric Brenk: My name is Eric Brenk, I am 26 years old and play shortstop with the Bonn Capitals. I was born in the US and raised in the US. My mom’s family is German, and I

have been living here for four years, playing baseball and studying and after study working. It is pretty fun and we have a good team here, I enjoy it.

[Stadium noises]

Female speaker: The club benefits greatly from Eric Brenk. Another stroke of luck was playing coach Bradley Justin Roper-Hubbert – an institution in Bonn for seven years now. He has since returned to the States. As a farewell present his Capitals have given him the German championship title.

Bradley Justin Roper-Hubbert: I was born in Bermuda, raised in Atlanta, Georgia. A friend of mine hurt his elbow who was playing here immediately before the season and the club needed someone last minute and I sent an email to the club and they were in a rush so in two weeks I was over here. It is life, it just happens, crazy, yeah. Europe is the best decision that I made so far in my life.

[Battle cry: "Let's go – we are wildcats!"]

Male speaker: A regional cheerleading competition in Düsseldorf. The Wildcats launch their Tapsy Cats into the race. The little ones are between four and seven years old. Most of them appear in front of a jury for the first time. Club photographer Peter Wehner is completely blown away.

Peter Wehner *[in German]:* They were so cute when they were sitting on the bus, it looked as if the bus was still empty. You could not see them. If you look at these children, this ardent zeal is wonderful. Cheerleading is something where the children are in it with their heart and soul. These kids are not just cheerleaders here, they are cheerleaders throughout their lives. They practice their performance everywhere, in the schoolyard, downtown, department stores, where there is space.

[Adviser prepares kids for the competition, music sound, female coach (in German): "Do you understand me?" Kids: "Yeah!" Coach giving commands (in German): "Well done!" Audience clapping]

Female speaker: In the warm-up area, it is time to concentrate, listen to the coaches and bring the two-minute-thirty program through as synchronized as possible.

Peter Wehner *[in German]:* They appear to be calm, but sometimes they can be quite nervous and excited. One of the girls cried yesterday since she did not know if it hurts to apply nail polish.

[Stadium speaker announces: "Tapsy Cats!" Music sound, cheering and clapping]

Male speaker: Guided by their supervisors and coaches, the little ones make a successful appearance. Afterward, they leave the stage orderly and go to the locker room.

Marion Schmitz *[in German to her team]:* You gave your best and now the jury decides how good that was. And if you are not satisfied with that, who is to blame? The jury? Your coaches? You. We all together, we have to train more. OK? But as long as you have fun, you have done everything right.

Female speaker: Head coach Marion Schmitz has explained where to go, and now the Tapsies march in rows of two to the award ceremony back to the hall.

[Award ceremony, stadium speaker (in German): "To come in second with 8.04 points - ahead of the Wildcats - the Tapsy Cats!" Audience crying, clapping, chanting: "Wildcats!"]

Annika Lischy *[in German]*: The Tapsies finished second, quite surprisingly.

Alina Voß *[in German]*: We are very proud of the little ones. We did not expect such a good result, and that they would come second. That is all I can say.

Annika Lischy *[in German]*: That is all I can say.

Male speaker: So, the young start early into a career in cheerleading. Little Romy has enjoyed it.

Romy *[in German]*: It was great, when we were on stage. Great that everyone was all together.

Dennis *[in German]*: I liked the program the most. I just did not dare to do join, then my mom signed me up and then I had fun.

Male speaker: Dennis, the only boy in the Peewee team, thinks it is cool to lift the girls. During the debriefing, the kids' parents are already waiting in the lobby.

[Meeting after competition, coach (in German): "How do you feel?" Kids: "very good, yes!"]

Mother of a cheerleader *[in German]*: Very proud, I could not be any more proud than that. She sort of became involved without us pushing her to join.

Male speaker: A good start for the new season. The Leverkusen Wildcats want to continue where they have left off. Here, Sandra Hawlik, the deputy Club Chairperson explains:

Sandra Hawlik *[in German]*: Last year, we were the most successful club in all of Germany. We have brought home several German Championship titles and vice champion titles last year. Our youth group were European Champions in 2016 and 17, two years in a row - a first! That was really an amazing feat.

[Wildcats calling final ritual, siren blaring, and music sound]

Female speaker: After the win of the German Championships, the Bonn Capitals prepare for the next challenge. The Club will host the European Baseball Championships in 2019. So, the Ball Park will need to be prepared accordingly. Finally the long-awaited flood light system will be installed and financed by the city. The Caps want to give their best for the home crowd. Here the speaker Angela Beckmann:

[Music sound continues]

Angela Beckmann: The European Championships are normally won by the Netherlands, followed by Italy and Spain. But the German national team was fourth place last time and so the goal should be, I would say, okay, go one step further, so what about the third

place. As long as we are under the top five we can go to the Olympic qualifiers - and that is the goal.

[Male voice: "Go Caps, go!"]

The Big Pond - A U.S.-German Listening Series is brought to you by the Year of German American Friendship (Deutschlandjahr USA), a comprehensive collaborative initiative funded by the German Federal Office, implemented by the Goethe-Institut, with support from the Federation of German Industries (BDI).



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