

Das Wunder von Bern

(The Miracle of Bern)

Germany 2003. Director: Sönke Wortmann.
117 mins. German with English subtitles.



1. What is the film about?

Summer, 1954. The Soviet Union is sending its prisoners of war home. Among them is the father of a quiet, football-loving 11-year-old, Matthias, who lives with his mother, sister and brother in a West-German mining town. The return of the boy's father Richard casts a shadow over the once-happy family: broken by his years in captivity, Richard has trouble adapting to life in post-war Germany and alienates his family through his severity. Unlike his son, Richard is neither interested in football nor in the World Cup that's about to be held in Bern, Switzerland. Matthias, however, longs to be there with his friend and idol, Helmut Rahn, who's been chosen to play on the German team. Through his passion for the game and his fighting spirit, Matthias rekindles a love of life in his dad's heart. And so, as the final match of the World Cup begins, a little miracle of love and generosity leaps across borders to help another miracle occur - the victory of Helmut Rahn and the German team, the miracle of Bern.

2. Characters in the film

Matthias Lubanski	a 11-year-old boy who loves football
Richard Lubanski	Matthias father who tries to cope with his experience as prisoner of war in Russia and to adapt to a new life in post-war Germany
Christa Lubanski	Matthias mother who works hard to earn a living and keep the family together
Bruno and Ingrid	Matthias' brother and sister
Helmut Rahn ("Boss")	player of the National Football team of 1954 and father figure for Matthias
Paul und Annette Ackermann	a journalist and his wife whose honeymoon trip takes them to the Football World Cup in Switzerland
Sepp Herberger	legendary football coach of the national team in 1954

3. Background information

Nachkriegsdeutschland: This term describes the situation in Germany after 1945 ("post-war Germany"). Germany was gradually rebuilt after World War II, mainly by women, because many men had died during the war or were still imprisoned. Children growing up at that time were therefore also called the "generation without fathers". From the mid-50s onwards living standards improved quickly due to the economic boom, which is often referred to as *Wirtschaftswunder* ("economic miracle"). Parallely, the victory in the world cup in 1954 did a lot to improve the Germans' morale after the years of war, which is also reflected by a newspaper's headline after the final game: "Wir sind wieder wer!" ("We're somebody again").

Spätheimkehrer: After World War II ended in 1945, about 3 million German men were still kept as prisoners of war in the former Soviet Union. Many of them died due to the bad living conditions in the camps, but from 1946 on the prisoners were gradually released. The men to return to Germany only many years after the war were called *Spätheimkehrer* ("late homecomers"), the last to be released in 1955. Back home, they often had difficulties coping with their traumatizing experiences of imprisonment and integrating themselves in a new, post-war Germany.

Ruhrgebiet: The Ruhr Area is a densely populated area with coal mining and steel industry in North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany, consisting of a number of large formerly industrial cities such as Duisburg, Essen, Bochum and Dortmund. The area is famous for its distinguished working class culture, where local football, the breeding of carrier pigeons and the corner pub form essential parts of the social life.