

Germany's 'Melting Pot' World Cup Team

July 7, 2010

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With Germany set to play Spain in the semifinals Wednesday, Mary Louise Kelly speaks with German MP Ozcan Mutlu about the multinational makeup of the nation's soccer team. Mutlu, who is of Turkish origin, says he loves the integrated team and its German-Turk star.

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MARY LOUISE KELLY, host:

In Germany, World Cup fever continues. Millions of soccer fans will watch the much-anticipated semifinal match, today, between Germany and Spain. And here's something we were surprised to learn: The German team is one of the most ethnically diverse in the whole tournament.

To find out more, we called up German MP Ozcan Mutlu, who's a big soccer fan. We caught him at a café in Berlin.

Good morning.

Mr. OZCAN MUTLU (Member of Parliament, Germany): Good morning.

KELLY: Let me ask you about this. I'm told that about half of the German team have diverse backgrounds; that they were either born abroad or have dual citizenship; that a number of them could actually be playing in the World Cup for another country. Is that right?

Mr. MUTLU: Of course. Eleven of the 23 on the team are from non-German backgrounds, and for the very first time we have such a diverse team. And I'm very glad and happy about that because this reflects the multicultural reality of our country.

And late, but not too late, the German Football Federation realized that there are so many wonderful players with non-German background, and instead of giving them away for teams like Turkey or Spain, or whatever, they asked them to play for Germany - and this is very, very important signal.

KELLY: I understand one of the big stars of the team is player of Turkish origin, born in Germany but of Turkish origin. And he was the real star of the first round of the tournament. Tell us about him.

Mr. MUTLU: Mesut Ozil is just a genius. This guy is already a national hero, not only in Germany, also in Turkey. And many, many Turkish people who live in Berlin and in Germany for decades already, who never felt home, now starting to feel home. Because this guy is playing for Germany

and they do identify themselves with the German National Team, waving the German flag.

KELLY: And I understand you're of Turkish origin, as well. You must be feeling some national pride for two countries today.

Mr. MUTLU: Yeah, I do. But I'm mainly German. So therefore, my main focus is today, we have to win. And if Mesut, today, scores some goals it would be great, because we do need such very important symbolic signals to say, look, we are a very diverse country. We have a very diverse team and we all are together, and we can win together.

KELLY: Well, I was going to ask, has there been much criticism in Germany, people who feel that this team is made up of too many foreigners, as they would put it.

Mr. MUTLU: You will always have such idiots who are not willing to accept the reality, the diversity. But the majority in Germany is very happy about this great team and so I am. But there will be, always, a group, a small group, of right wing, or right extremist people - you never will get them. This will always be a problem in Germany.

KELLY: That's German MP Ozcan Mutlu who joined us from a cafe in Berlin, where he's gearing up for the big game today.

Mr. MUTLU: Thank you very much. And I will I have to admit that I'm very sorry that U.S. team didn't do so far. But I'm quite sure the U.S. team has future. These guys going to be a big surprise at the next tournament.

KELLY: Yeah, well we hope so. Thank you for the condolences.

Mr. MUTLU: You're welcome.

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I'm confused by this article - I was left with more questions than answers. What was the change in policy that happened late to allow this diversity? IS the German team mostly non-native born Germans -naturalized so they could play soccer.

It is interesting though because I did notice that the style of play of the field was much different than it had been -gone was the robotic efficiency of the German soccer of my childhood.

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Rebecca Hansbrough (spidergirl24) wrote:

When you look at the soccer teams, most of them have a person of color on them, either native born, naturalized or dual citizenship. One could see a native born person who is several generations removed from the family's origin would identify with their country of birth but maintain some emotional connect to their ethnic roots. Ruud Gullit, a former Dutch soccer star, considers himself native to core, is the son of Afro-Surinamese father. In South America, native identification is assumed as a matter of course.

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