

Blues World



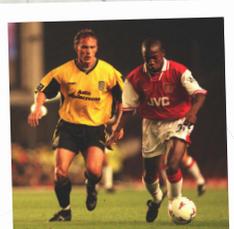
Toby pictured during his visit to Birmingham last season for the corresponding fixture against Fulham.

Germany



HEY, I SCORED AT HIGHBURY!

Tony Hey was the first German player to pull on the Blues shirt when he was signed by Trevor Francis in the summer of 1997 for £300,000 from Fortuna Cologne. Then aged 26, the midfielder was fulfilling his childhood ambition to play professional football in England. His St. Andrew's career began well enough, the team winning the first five games that he started, flying high in second place in the Division One (now Championship) table in mid-September. However, the side's good form didn't last – just one victory was recorded in the next 14 league outings. By the end of that miserable run, Blues had plummeted down the table and Hey had lost his place on the right side of midfield to new signing Jon McCarthy. He came off early in the second-half of a goalless draw with Oxford United in late October 1997 and that proved to be the last of his 10 appearances for the Club. Reoccurring calf and Achilles injuries led to him spending much of the next two years on the treatment table. Hey did at last have a goal to show for his efforts in royal blue, the Berlin-born battler firing Francis' charges ahead in a League Cup tie at Arsenal. In fact, he was the last Blues player to score a goal at Highbury. Sadly the Gunners fired back that night to win 4-1 after extra-time. Hey is now a UEFA Pro Licence coach – his most recent role coming with the Bahrain Football Association as their Technical Director.



TESCHE THE SECOND

It was nearly two decades before a fellow countryman followed in Hey's footsteps by joining Blues, current midfielder Robert Tesche becoming only the second German on the St. Andrew's books when he arrived on loan from Nottingham Forest in March 2015. The 29-year-old, who was born in the port city of Wismar in northern Germany, began his football education as a youth player at VfL Mennighüfen before joining the youth academy at German Second Division side Arminia Bielefeld. He progressed through the youth ranks to play First Team football for Bielefeld and went on to represent Hamburger SV and Fortuna Düsseldorf. Tesche moved to these shores to sign for Forest in August 2014 and made a total of 50 appearances during his two years at the City Ground, which included his first temporary spell at Blues. His goal against Rotherham United on Good Friday 2015 made him the first German to score in a league match for Blues. Since becoming a permanent Blue last summer, Tesche's career in the Second City has also been hampered somewhat by injury.



BIG DEFENDER HEADS HOME

In the summer of 2015, giant defender Emmanuel Mbende left German club Borussia Dortmund to try his luck in this country. The centre-half, who was born in Cameroon but moved to Germany at the age of 10, came through the Dortmund youth academy for seven years. He opted to come to these shores, feeling that the English game suited his attributes. He initially joined Blues on trial and impressed sufficiently in Under-21 fixtures to be offered a professional contract until the end of last season. He became a regular in Richard Beale's Development Squad and started more games (26) than any other player, notching two goals. He couldn't make the breakthrough into the First Team but showed enough raw potential to be offered fresh terms by the club last summer. However, he turned down the contract offer, preferring to return to Germany to study and play for Chemnitz FC. The Cameroon youth international signed a two-year contract with the German third tier club, which included a significant sell-on clause. Mbende has been an unused for the majority of Chemnitz games this season, chalking up just six appearances thus far.



GERMAN-BORN DUO BECOME BLUES STARS

Two more former Blues favourites came into this world on German soil, but neither would really describe it as their homeland. Popular striker Mikael Forssell was born in the northern German town of Steinfurt, due to his father working in that area. He subsequently moved to Finland at the age of one-and-a-half and went onto claim 87 caps for the country he grew up in. The flame-haired forward, who scored 37 goals in 118 games for Blues, has returned to Germany three times during his career, playing for Borussia Monchengladbach, Hannover 96 and VfL Bochum. Now 35, his career has gone full circle and he is turning out for his first professional club, HJK Helsinki. Goalkeeper Maik Taylor has far stronger roots, born in Hildesheim to a German mother and an English father, who was in the British army stationed in Lower Saxony. He spent most of his childhood in the country, playing in youth sides SV Fallingbostal and AC Nienburg before coming to England. He later followed in his dad's footsteps by joining the REME based at Arborfield in Berkshire, but was picked up by Barnet. And so began a football career that saw him play 242 games for Blues and 232 for today's visitors Fulham, as well as earning 88 international caps with Northern Ireland.



THROUGHOUT THIS SEASON WE'RE TURNING THE SPOTLIGHT ON BLUES FANS EXILED OVERSEAS. IN TODAY'S BLUES WORLD, PETER LEWIS TELLS THE STORY OF GERMANY-BASED BLUENOSE TOBY ZETTL...

There may be an intense rivalry between the countries at national level, but domestically there is a small group of Germans who are more than happy to throw their passionate support behind Blues.

Toby Zettl is a member of the Bluenoses in Germany (BiG) supporters club and avidly follows the fortunes of the St. Andrew's boys. Despite having never seen a Blues game in person or even set foot on these shores before last year, the 35-year-old from Moenchengladbach chose Birmingham City as 'his team', snubbing his local side Borussia in favour of the team England's second biggest city. There was just something about this club which reached inside his footballing soul. "It was more 'love at first sight' than a patriotic thing," says Toby. "As a teenager interested in traditional football at its best, it was obvious to have a closer look at England through the divisions. I find the English football much more interesting than the German and also the lower leagues are very exciting. I had a favourite in every English league at one point but I was drawn to BCFC – Birmingham City really got me. Though I hadn't been to Birmingham, or England before, I became an exiled Bluenose in 1999."

Toby's bond with the Club has been further strengthened by the development of the internet with match footage, news, views and interviews now accessible at the touch of a button. He continues: "I read lots of blog articles, forum posts and follow supporters' chats on social media. There are a couple of tremendous applications for smart phones which supply me with everything that's happening around St. Andrew's, with news coming directly from the Club or other local sources. I listen to the match commentaries online and celebrate wins in a digital way – 'Cheers' on Facebook and messages to other BiG members. But oh how I'd love to be in the City in these moments."

Toby picks out our first promotion to the Premier League in 2002 and the Carling Cup success as the highlights of his time supporting Blues. That 2011 Wembley win secured the Club's Europa League adventure and for Toby the chance to finally watch the team live, after he made the 340-mile round trip to Bruges. However, he wasn't able to celebrate quite the

way he would have liked after Chris Wood's late goal sealed a dramatic victory at the Jan Breydel Stadium. "I took a day off and went there alone by car, just to sit with the home supporters. I had to wait till I was in my car again to cheer for the brilliant result, but to be honest I had the best view of our supporters' stand and their flags. Now, six years later, I found out that many of our supporters club members went there alone as well, without knowing each other. There are not many Blues supporters in my region, so I am glad I found BiG to share my love for this special club."

It was the formation of the 'BiG' group ahead of the 2015/16 season that provided the motivation for Toby to finally make the pilgrimage to St. Andrew's. He joined some of his fellow members on a three-day trip to Birmingham in mid-March last year, taking in the home game against today's visitors Fulham, as well as watching Blues Ladies in action the following day. "We visited friends of our supporters club, made a sightseeing tour through the City and showed up at some recommended pubs. The highlight, of course, was the match against Fulham and the chance to support our BCFC Ladies in the Women's FA Cup against Arsenal. A nice trip with lots of fun, interesting people and tasty beer!"

He adds: "The match itself was OK, a 1-1 draw. The atmosphere inside the stadium was in need of improvement compared to other European football stadiums. The reason might be the missing standing area which would empower the supporters to cheer and sing way better. And promptly, one or two matches later, the Tilton Alliance was born and caused a sensation, or so I heard on my video stream!"

The Bluenoses in Germany, whose membership number more than 20 – the majority of whom are natives of their own country rather than being ex-pats – are planning future trips to the Second City. Toby is looking forward to tasting more "Yummy English breakfasts" and making another visit to his favourite Digbeth pub, the Spotted Dog. In the meantime, he makes sure all the locals in Moenchengladbach know exactly where his footballing allegiances lies. "I have a lot of beloved things of my club – scarfs, shirts, shorts, caps, flags, pin badges and stickers on my car showing that I'm proud to be a Bluenose," he says.