

Red Bull? Bull, certainly.

Some teams in the English football pyramid have engendered almost universal loathing and hatred: Man Utd, for obvious reasons; MK Dons for their gridiron-style franchise move; Fleetwood and currently Forest Green Rovers for the way in which they are buying their ascent from lower-non-league to Football League status.

Across the world there are further examples – Juventus for their cheating; Paris St Germain (PSG) and Monaco, especially the latter, for their purchased success yet no culture. In Germany, however, one team is standing out beyond anyone else.

Firstly, a little chronology: SV Austria Salzburg, a proud Austrian club founded in 1933, were bought by the drinks firm Red Bull in 2005 who promptly changed the team's name (to Red Bull Salzburg), kit (from violet to red/white) and history (declaring on the new club website, that "this is a new club with no history", before being told by the Austrian FA to rewrite the part that said the club was founded in 2005). Very MK Dons. Meanwhile, a la AFC Wimbledon, SV Austria Salzburg reformed but instead of playing in a 31,000 seater stadium (not surprisingly called the Red Bull Arena) they've had to relocate to a 1,600 ground. Starting in the seventh tier they have had four promotions since. But SV Austria Salzburg have now been darkly overshadowed by more than just the cuckoo Red Bull Salzburg (or FC Salzburg as they are called in European games, UEFA not allowing them to use their sponsor name).

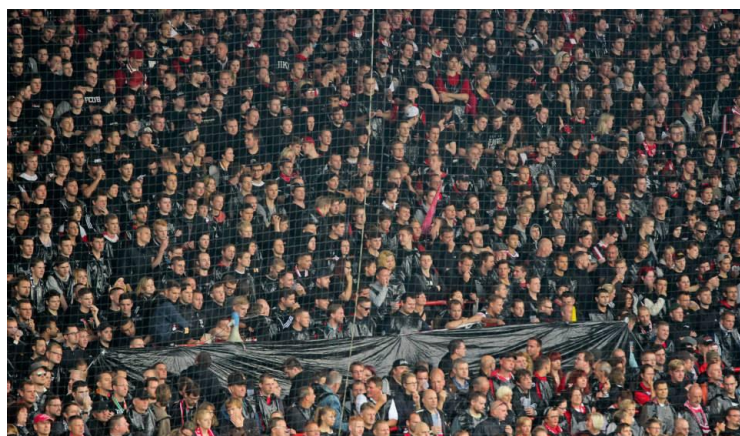


Ignoring Red Bull's purchase of the New York/New Jersey Metrostars in 2006, as US Soccer is incredibly naff, two years later the Austrian drinks firm, under the instruction of owner Dietrich Mateschitz, created Red Bull Paulista in São Paulo out of nothing, inserted them into the fourth division of the São Paulo championship from where they have bought their way up the ladder. Not satisfied with approaching global domination, Mateschitz then purchased the licence for the football arm of a sports club in the Leipzig area of Saxony, eastern Germany, rebranding it RB Leipzig and advanced the remodelled club – officially known as RasenBallSport Leipzig e.V. (Lawn Sports Club Leipzig) but the RB letters are better known as Red Bull – up the Oberliga and into the 2. Bundesliga for this season.



Two days after Germany had won the World Cup, RB Leipzig played PSG in a friendly. Big-time opponents? More like one of the few teams that would touch them with a barge-pole as possible adversaries shied away from playing them as a result of fan protest. Pre-season protests weren't the end of it, either: the team bus has been pelted, advertising hoardings destroyed and continuous chants from opposition fans revolve around, "You're killing our game", culminating in last Sunday's Union Berlin fans silently wearing black in the home end for the first 15 minutes before bursting out in colour and confetti and noise... and going on to win 2-1 despite being 2nd from bottom v RB Leipzig in 2nd place.

More than just noise and colour, though, the banners round the Stadion An der Alten Försterei told RB and Mateschitz exactly what they thought of them. (*Below: before and after the 15 minute mark*)



A Union Berlin blog (www.union-berlin.com/2014/09/21/mateschitz-marketing-menagerie/) describes a big black and white banner at the Waldseite end reading, “Football culture dies in Leipzig” and continuing at the Gegengerade with: “Football needs: participation – faithfulness – terracing – emotions – pro bono work – financial fair play – tradition – transparency – passion – stories – independence.” So basically everything the Red Bull marketing menagerie is considered not to be about.



The Union Berlin banners stretched around and around the ground...

And marketing/brainwashing/corporate money-making is what they *are* about: the RB Leipzig badge is a spitting image of the drink logo (even the ‘new’ one required as part of the deal with the German Football League [DFL] to obtain a licence for this season); RB’s club members – traditionally in Germany numbering their tens of thousands – reach only between 8 and 14 (no-one knows exactly) and are Austrian Red Bull executives (board member Ulrich Wolter said, “Clubs where ultras have gained influence are not in the best interests of the game”); Salzburg fans who protested against the path their club was taking were banned and the in-house media channel only churn out the party line.

You’d be right to expect that the DFL would have something to say about this naked takeover, what with their lauded 50+1 rule which precludes any one person or organisation having a controlling interest in a football club (essentially only being allowed to own max 50%). But, with Leverkusen, Wolfsburg and Hoffenheim seemingly allowed to bend these rules, what’s one more club? Karsten Blaas in *When Saturday Comes* describes this rule as a “paper tiger” as the myth of German fan-owned clubs appears to be just that, more of a myth than comprehensive fact.

Certainly Red Bull couldn’t give a flying fig for culture, tradition, fan-involvement, heritage, history... But should we be surprised or even that bothered? Is it way too late to be trying to protect our game, yes *our* game, from the money men? Didn’t the horse bolt out the stable many moons ago, around the time Sugar, Scholar, Dein, Edwards et al supped with the devil in 1992?

Forget your pathetic FC United “we’re not going to Old Trafford cos the prices went up a bit” b*ll*cks. This – Red Bull – is the devil incarnate that is going to deliver the final, lethal blow to our game as more and more clubs will become beholden to a fat-cat corporation molesting the footballing institution as a means to shift more units off the supermarket shelves.

Third-party ownership... £16,000 watches... Red Bull takeovers and ‘creations’ of ‘new’ clubs.

Dear oh dear.

Whatever next.



The image of a blue and white quartered, flattened, abandoned can of this abominable drink and its analogous link to the forthcoming death of football is purely coincidental and in no way related to Bristol Rovers. Natch.