

The 90 minutes when Yulia Tymoshenko was Ukraine's captain...

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Subhead: During the current UEFA European Football Championship, Germany's men on the microphone send the television nation into a rollercoaster. It's your vote: Who commentates best?

Body: Admittedly, that thing with the comparative record is confusing. Soccer fans kept asking the one question during the last match day of the group stage at the current UEFA European Football Championship: Who makes it to the next round? The rankings are a mystery even to professionals. When Spain scored the 1-0 against Croatia with only minutes to go, ZDF commentator-in-chief Béla Réthy announced: "Now Croatia has to score twice." One goal would have been sufficient – as was the case before Spain had scored. But who is supposed to understand all of that?

Gerd Gottlob was even worse off. The NDR chief sports commentator dubbed Yulia Tymoshenko Ukraine's replacement captain for the injured Andriy Shevchenko instead of Anatoliy Tymoshchuk during the team's bitter elimination from the tournament. It was that time again: A million frowns and sneers across the TV nation caused a formidable shitstorm on social networks such as Facebook or Twitter. You can always make things worse though, say, for example, if you repeat the very same mistake during the second half.

Soccer commentators are among the most disputatious subjects since the invention of live coverage. Admired by millions, hated by just as many. The men on the microphones (Sabine Toepperwien only commentates matches on the radio) have nothing to win, but everything to lose. Seldom that one of their conspecifics manages to excel out of the everyday gibberish with a set of particularly pointed perspectives. Most of the time though, it's the minor and major mistakes that make the faces of those millions of hobby coaches on the couches in the homes of the Federal Republic of Television Germany blush with anger.

Obviously, everyone knows better anyways. When ZDF UEFA European Football Championship newcomer Oliver Schmidt's voice was tensely paralyzed, viewers forgave him. His ZDF colleague Thomas Wark fared worse. He had told his dozing viewers in the midst of the incredibly boring crunch meeting between England and France about a scoreless first half. Doing so, he not only peculated Joleon Lescott's goal but also Samir Nasri's equalizer for France. It takes a lot of goodwill to blame that on a decline in concentration. The fact that all of a sudden, French keeper Hugo Lloris supposedly stood between the posts of the English goal underlined the ZDF misery.

Wark did however put himself forward for an interpreter job with his excellent pronunciation of Lloris' last name. Still, the Mainz-based TV station only sees the tail lights of its ARD colleagues in its reporting from this year's championship in Poland and the Ukraine.

Former RTL reporter and now ARD commentator Tom Bartels send his listeners into a true emotional rollercoaster when he talked about Spain routing the Irish team. As always, Bartels wasn't stingy with information. But he embezzled the accurate pronunciation of the Spanish players during his game preparation. It was a mere blemish that "Gerard Pique" was transformed into "Gerrard Pike", a mix of English midfielder and clumsy non-professional. But then again, Bartels scored when he fell silent during the final minutes of the game, just to let his audience enjoy the Irish supporters' goosebump-loaden chants instead. That way, he managed to transport one of the emotional highlights of this year's UEFA European Football Championship.

Despite the Irish elimination, there will hopefully be some more of these emotional climaxes before the final on July 1. That game will be broadcast on ZDF, according to contracts negotiated far in advance of the tournament. That's a matter for the boss, obviously. Who if not Béla Réthy could be sitting at the microphone that night? The ZDF old hand was mentioned online the most often so far. The Sueddeutsche Zeitung compared his talking style with "reading a package insert of headache pills" – in line with the motto: Strength lies in calmness. From year one, Réthy was the German antipole to his Southern European colleagues, whose voices often times tumble while tumbling.

Réthy can't be fooled. He didn't even lose his temper over the weather god. Instead, the rain battle between France and the Ukraine enhanced the tournament with another curiosity. Together with his longtime assistant, Réthy talked about the weather. Obviously. It rained. Like crazy. For a whole hour. The result for Réthy wasn't an award like the one Guenther Jauch and Marcel Reif got when they chatted during the legendary "Madrid goal crash". But the ZDF commentator-in-chief proved to be as commanding of the situation as possible and managed to keep viewers in front of their TV screens.

His very personal bonanza would probably be a German bid to the final. In their beer bliss, soccer fans would be way too nervous to listen carefully. And who knows? If Mario Gomez scores the decisive goal in minute 85, even Béla Réthy will probably fly off the handle. In that case, the commentator would finally be a winner too.