

**2003**

## **THE SOWER**

Art & sport, football & resistance... they have about just as much in common with each other as Gorcum soccer club Unitas and artist Jeanne van Heeswijk. It all depends on what you want to see.

The most renowned footballer, activist and art-lover is without a doubt Amsterdammer Nicolaas Steelink, a union activist and Multatuli expert who emigrated to the United States of America in 1914, becoming a pioneer figure in the American Soccer League. His membership of the anarchist-oriented union, the Industrial Workers of the World, was indeed rewarded with a long sentence in the notorious San Quentin prison, but this did not prevent him promoting politics, art and football until his death in 1989.

During the Great Depression and the Second World War, football did not immediately shine in resistance heroics, but the game did offer a cultural safety valve. While the February Strike of 1941 saw thousands of people rise up in protest in Amsterdam, just a few streets away there were greater numbers attending Ajax's championship game. After the German invasion of May 10, 1940, the competition was speedily resumed in Rotterdam as well. On June 16, Feijenoord once again waltzed to a 6-1 victory against the Spekholzerheide team from Zuid-Limburg. No fewer than 4,173,500 people visited a sports event in 1940, and three years later this number had almost doubled. The number of members in the Royal Netherlands Football Association (KNVB) increased from about 80,000 in 1940 to more than 125,000 in 1943. The number of Feijenoord members remained stable during the war, hovering between 650 and 750.

While the city was being reduced to rubble, the people's club of Feijenoord flourished. Social life was severely disrupted because of the curfew, air raids and pogroms. Happily, the stadium nicknamed *De Kuip* (The Tub), completed in 1937, offered some consolation. Here one could meet friends and acquaintances at least once a week in a relaxed atmosphere. Nonetheless, the club was not left unscathed in these difficult times. The club administrator, Phida Wolff, was deported to Amersfoort concentration camp, for example. And tragically the Rotterdam victims of the pogrom of November 1944 were rounded up in De Kuip. It is unknown how many Jewish Feijenoord supporters were deported. Some of the Feijenoord players who were deported to Germany were so attached to the game that they chose to play for a German club. In 1943, for example, the Feijenoord player Krijgsman even played for 'Geheim Oranje' – a national team composed of Dutchmen in German labour camps. After the liberation in 1945, Feijenoord expelled these 'half-traitors'.

Art also played a small but not insignificant role at Feijenoord after the war. A great many pennies and ha'pennies were collected to commemorate the supporters who were deported and murdered by the Nazis. The proceeds were used to commission a monumental artwork named *De Zaaier* (The Sower), which was placed next to De Kuip. Unfortunately the statue was destined to have but a short life. An over-zealous civil servant ascertained that no permission had even been requested for the

monument's placement, and had it removed. To this day, the whereabouts of 'The Sower' remain unknown.

Art & sport, odd bedfellows, but under Rotterdam's reigning City Executive we have the *Commissie Kunst & Sport* (Arts & Sports Committee). My message to them? 'Get serious about cultural policy, and how! Forget that ridiculous Pim Fortuyn monument and that 'Gay-Gnome', and give 'The Sower' back to Rotterdam and Feijenoord.'