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## In the End, They Opted for the Orange

Perhaps the stirrings in Ukraine—which tomorrow holds a presidential election to replace the voided result of 21 November—are best captured in the lines of **Andriy Bondar's** “[Roman Alphabet](#).”

one of my friends thinks  
that if we switch to the roman alphabet  
our people will steal less  
and immediately  
our messy byzantinisms  
our obnoxious sovietisms our endless ugro-finnisms  
(sorry ugrics, sorry finns)  
will disappear and something will snap in our heads  
—and “voila!” we are part of europe

One realizes that more is being contested in this election than a choice between two men. The issues involve orientation (East vs. West), language (Ukrainian vs. Russian) and other fundamental aspects of identity. Debate rages whether the name of the capital should be rendered in the Roman-style “Kiev” or the Ukrainian “Kyiv” or “Kyyiv.” Naturally, football has been part of the upheavals. **Shakhtar Donetsk** of eastern Ukraine, a top side that regularly appears in European competitions, earlier this month faced the quandary of whether their first-choice kit would send the wrong political message (**Dominic O'Reilly**, “[Orange Revolution Won't Distract Ukrainians from Their Goal](#),” *Scotland Sunday Herald*, 5 December). Orange, the Donetsk color, has been adopted by the so-called revolutionaries backing **Viktor Yushchenko**, while the industrial region encompassing Donetsk strongly supports the departing **Leonid Kuchma** and designated successor **Viktor Yanukovich**. Donetsk had played in white in an earlier Champions League fixture against AC Milan, but facing Barcelona on 7 December they selected orange, winning 2–0.

Complicating issues is that only a minority of players for Donetsk and for rivals **Dynamo Kiev** are Ukrainian (5 of 24 on **Donetsk**, and 12 of 25 for **Kiev**)—and most of these are not regulars. In fact, as **Franklin Foer** writes in his recent book, *How Soccer Explains the World: An Unlikely Theory of Globalization*, Ukraine has been especially adept at trolling the world market for footballers, showing fondness for Nigerians—with mixed results (see chap. 6, “How Soccer Explains the Black Carpathians,” 141–66). Foer profiles **Edward Anyamkyegh** of **Karpaty Lviv**; **Julius Aghahowa**, also from Nigeria, plays striker for Shakhtar. Neither seems at home. Says journalist **Oleg Racz** about Aghahowa:

[Donetsk] is not Kiev or Lviv, which are pretty cosmopolitan now, but a town with coal mine slag heaps and Soviet urban sprawl everywhere. When he first came he couldn't speak the language, couldn't settle. . . .

Both Shakhtar (**Hryhoriy Surkis**) and Kiev (**Rinat Akhmetov**) are owned by government backers and are part of the old way of doing business. **Simon Kuper**, who chronicles in *Football against the Enemy* (chap. 6, “Rulers of the Ukraine,” 52–65) the shady dealings at Dynamo, writes recently in a more optimistic vein that changes in the 26 December election could mean more transparency for Ukrainian sport (“[Establishment Club in Fear of Ukraine's Proesters](#),” *Financial Times*, 18 December). He notes that some Ukrainian athletes, particularly boxer **Vitali Klitschko**, have broken the linkage between sportsmen and

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sportswomen and the old Soviet apparatus (on Klitschko, see **Peter Wilson**, “*Boxers in the Orange Corner*,” *The Australian*, 24 December). European player of the year **Andriy Shevchenko** of AC Milan, it is true, had appeared on government channel 1+1 backing Yanukovich. But he was greeted at the San Siro in the Champions League match against Donetsk with signs reading, “Shevchenko, your political choice made your country cry.”

Propaganda and Soviet sport have long been partners. One of football's most notorious myths is that of the “Match of Death” in 1942 between German occupiers and Dynamo players. The latter, allegedly informed at the interval that they would be shot if victorious, nevertheless prevailed 5–3 and, according to the Soviet-era legend, were summarily executed. The facts, exposed over time by local historians and by novelist **Anatoli Kuznetsov** in the acclaimed *Babi Yar*, and published in definitive form in **Andy Dougan's** *Dynamo: Defending the Honour of Kiev* (Fourth Estate, 2001), told a different tale. Dynamo footballers played several matches as a team named “Start,” regularly beating opponents when not working at a Kiev bakery. In the so-called Death Match, they did beat a German side, but there were no reprisals. **James Riordan** (“The Match of Death: Kiev, 9 August 1942,” *Soccer & Society* [spring 2003]: 87–93) writes: “[A]mid the carnage and dreadful inhumanity of war, bitter foes played football. They played fairly and with respect for each other. They shook hands and then went off to resume the war” (90).

Tragically, the Dynamo players who did survive the war were treated as pariahs for having played against and allegedly cooperated with the German occupiers. Some, however—certainly the Jewish goalkeeper, **Abram Gorinstein**—were killed at Babi Yar, among some 45,000 murdered at the ravine outside Kiev. And Ukrainians as a whole bore the brunt of losses in the European conflict, suffering between 12 million and 15 million fatalities. As historian **Vladimir Mayevsky** remarks in the DVD collection *History of Soccer: The Beautiful Game*, “People died, and let the land be soft for them.”

**Other sources:** For regular updates on the Ukrainian elections, see the English-language *Kyiv Post* (<http://www.kyivpost.com>). Links to Web logs about Ukraine are available at *The Guardian* website ([http://blogs.guardian.co.uk/news/archives/world\\_news/2004/11/watch\\_the\\_world\\_watching\\_ukraine.html](http://blogs.guardian.co.uk/news/archives/world_news/2004/11/watch_the_world_watching_ukraine.html)). For more on the mighty Dynamo Kiev, see the feature at the *Football Culture* website ([http://www.footballculture.net/teams/ground\\_kiev.html](http://www.footballculture.net/teams/ground_kiev.html)).