BETWEEN MYTH AND REALITY: A DEMAND FOR A DOCUMENTED SPORTS HISTORY SHOWN BY THE EXAMPLE OF THE 1936 OLYMPIC GAMES

BY
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Introduction

"The German handling of the entire fair staggered and, at the same time, captivated the imagination. Money meant nothing. Adolf Hitler merely ordered that everything be gotten ready and everything was gotten ready. That more than 100,000,000 Marks (about $ 40,000,000) were spent in so doing was quite incidental and unimportant."¹

Thus wrote in retrospective Arthur J. Daley in his article entitled: "Summer Olympics, Greatest Athletic Show in History", published the New York Times in December 1936. His allegation: Hitler managed everything from behind the scenes disposing over an unlimited money supply. This perception of the Olympic Games of 1936 has not changed much to this day, especially not in most monographs. You can see this clearly in the wording of some book titles, e.g.: "Hitler's Games",² "Hitlers Spiele",³ "Hitler's Olympics"⁴ or even: "Berlin Games: How Hitler stole the Olympic dream".⁵ This phenomenon is even more noticeable in popular magazines or TV documentaries. Even the International Olympic Committee (IOC) itself follows this pattern when it states on its homepage, in a characterisation of the Olympic Games in total: "The 1936 Olympic Games put paid to Adolf Hitler's attempt to prove his theories on the superiority of the Aryan race." There are but two further facts connected with the Olympic Games of 1936 the IOC finds worth mentioning: These Games were the first with an Olympic torch relay and to be broadcasted on TV.⁶ The IOC has nothing more to say about the Games of 1936. Everything seems to be researched and well-proven.

This attitude of the IOC towards the Games of 1936 is irritating, for in the 1930s the IOC members still voiced a thoroughly positive impression of the Berlin Games. During a press conference on 12th August 1936 in Berlin the President of the IOC said:

"Coubertin's supreme aim was that the masses of a nation organising the Games should be truly inspired by the Olympic idea. This dream was so immensely fulfilled in Germany that we are filled with a deep happiness. […] In Berlin we have
now achieved the highest possible level for the Olympic Games. [...] It was the ab-
olute maximum of what the Olympic Games can give to us."

And Lord Aberdare, a British member of the IOC and a member of the Ex-
cutive Committee said, when asked about his impressions of Germany during
a press conference on 15th August:

"On meeting Adolf Hitler I sensed the presence of a great man. Most important, my
conversations there have fully convinced me that Germany is sincerely aspiring to
secure world peace in alliance with England. [...] It is an undisputed achievement of
the National Socialist government to have faced the destructive effects of Commu-
nism and to have abolished it in Germany. This also is of great importance for the
pan-European aspect."

Hard to believe, but this positive impression voiced by the members of the
IOC even influenced the 1966 vote for Munich as Olympic City of 1972.

There is an immense output of books and articles about the Olympic Games
of 1936. Unfortunately, these unique Games have been strongly neglected as an
object for serious scientific research. In consequence, sports-historical research –
as far as this topic is concerned – still adheres to a position that historians
judge as hopelessly antiquated since the 1960s: A strong fixation on Hitler,
who is said to have been involved in everything. Thus, very complex problems
are simplified to an extreme form of personalisation. Sports-historical publica-
tions still often want to awake the impression that the Third Reich was a "totali-
tarian monolith" and that the National Socialist (NS) regime acted in one block.
However, even general works on German history are lacking a critical analysis
of structures when they come to speak of the Olympics of 1936, usually just in
a side remark. One tends to ignore the fact that the complexity of the then
existing social reality and the related processes – such as have been illustrated
by studies of social history – most certainly must have influenced the many
years of preparation and the actual staging of the huge Olympic event of 1936.
It is a certain fact that the Olympic Games 1936 were utilised by the NS regime
to improve its international prestige. However, Helmut Schelsky pointed out in
1973 that this was the general practice of all governments without any offense
being taken. Still, the Games of 1936 were possibly unique in so far, as the
self-image propagated by the government and its true intentions extremely
dverged from another.

These processes are not without relevance for our modern age. It is an inter-
esting phenomenon that in our time a general tendency exists to mingle sports
and politics. This trend can be observed in the protests against Qatar because of
the situation of the workers at the building sites for the 2022 FIFA World Cup,
the criticism with the humanitarian situation in China previous to and accom-
panying the 2008 Olympics in Peking, the scruples about Russia during the
2014 Winter Games in Sotchi, and, most immediately, the general criticism of
the social and political situation in Brazil illustrated in many reports on TV,
prior to the imminent FIFA World Cup 2014. Berlin 1936 may well be the first
instance of such a hard-to-digest mixture concocted of brotherhood in sports on
one side and political discrepancies on the other. Logically, it would make sense to inspect the historical coverage of the Berlin Games to try to discover what was new and different in these Games. But to do this, one must take care to aim at an extremely objective evaluation of the Games. This demands a scrupulous division between truth and legend, for innumerable legends and myths arose around the Games of 1936 more than with any other Games before and afterwards. If one gains insight into how these legends originated and what the system behind this phenomenon is, one ideally grows sensitive, if similar legend or myths are constructed around modern towns and countries hosting sports events.

Thus this thesis would like to dismantle some myths and legends built around the Berlin Games of 1936. By no way should this study lead to trivialise the Third Reich and its regime. The main aim is to show how a certain political situation can lead to an unreflected and unscientific portrayal in historical literature. The strong personalisation of Hitler – at least in the Anglo-American literature –, the picture of the regime as a static block, and a sweeping accusation of misuse leads to elemental problems when one attempts to understand the influencing processes of the time in question. Negation of the complexity of historical reality has extensive consequences and finally results in an unnecessary construction of myths, hindering a clear assessment of bygone events. These myths serve to darken these events rather than to help in understanding them. True rejection can only be the result of true understanding. Elucidation can only result from explanation. This statement was made by Martin Broszat as early as in the 1960s. If sport-historical literature aspires to being a serious and equitable historical field of study, it must take care to remove myths that have sprung up and must be on its guard if new myths arise. Otherwise one cannot demand an end to myths in any other realm of science.

**History of Research**

A short summary of research history can aid in understanding why extensive myths especially arose around the topic of the Olympic Games of 1936. A critical survey of the Games of 1936 began in the early 1960s when a group of important responsible Olympic organisers like Carl Diem (General Secretary of the Organising Committee for the Berlin Games) and Karl Ritter von Halt (President of the Organising Committee for the Winter Olympics 1936) were greatly aged but still alive. The critical opinions were expressed in historical circles as well as in areas of the general public, for example in educational broadcasts. Criticism flourished in the middle of the 1960s, when Munich applied for the Games of 1972 and its bid was accepted in 1966. It was generated mainly from beyond the Iron Curtain, in the *German Democratic Republic* (GDR), where one aimed to denounce and discredit the West German sports
system, its functionaries and the preparations for the Games of 1972. This happened in accordance with the *Communist International (Comintern)* of 1935: capitalism = imperialism = fascism.\(^{17}\) The authors of the 1960s and early 1970s concentrated on such materials that agreed with their ideology and furthered their aim.\(^{18}\) Some even tried to convincingly show that the contemporary situation in the Federal Republic of Germany was even worse than in the Third Reich.\(^{19}\) Not only the sweeping statement about the “misused Games” originates from them, but also the first forms of negative myths (see chapter 3.2). They were not interested in working *sine ira et studio*. Conspiracy theories circling around the games of 1936 even arose in the GDR. One of these postulated that Werner Klingeberg, a member of the Berlin Organising Committee, had developed coup plans against the IOC in the 1930s as a co-worker in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.\(^{20}\) In actual fact, this cannot be true, because Klingeberg’s personal file clearly shows that he did not work for the Ministry until the year of 1952. The evidence can be found in the part calculating his pension claims based on the years of his service.\(^{21}\)

The GDR’s working on the topic of the Olympic Games of 1936 benefited from the fact that the documents pertaining to the Winter and Summer Games were archived in Potsdam, making them inaccessible for western researchers. True enough, western researchers were likewise not free of ideology in their reassessment of the Games of 1936.\(^{22}\) But their main handicap was the inaccessibility of the relevant sources.\(^{23}\)

Even today, there exists a noticeable interest in the Olympic Games of 1936 in the USA. One can only speculate about the reasons. Probably this is owing to a general fascination with everything to do with the Third Reich. Another aspect could be the international participation in the so-called *Nazi Olympics*, for it furthered an automatic development of different myths in different participating countries. The US athlete Jesse Owens is an impressive example of how such myths can develop around a person. Even after his death in 1980 he was gradually made to a sports idol. In 2012 he was even featured on the cover of the “Routledge Companion to Sports History” with a photo made in Berlin in 1936.\(^{24}\)

In spite of the enormous interest in the Olympic Games of 1936 one can observe a remarkable phenomenon too often: There is hardly, if any, serious study of sources. This pattern was initiated with the first monograph on the Olympics 1936 in 1971, Richard Mandell’s "Nazi Olympics".\(^{25}\) Written in plain language, it offers simple answers to complex questions. However, Mandell often makes use of newspapers alone and includes absolutely no archive documents. Bibliographical references are spare and scarce and often enough faulty. Just like in the 1960s publications of the GDR, you still find the same deficiencies in contemporary literature in general: Source studies are replaced by moral condemnations and a collection of anecdotes. Thus the British historian Richard J. Evans presumably was inspired by the script of the American science fiction
film Contact when he wrote about the Olympic Games of 1936 in his many-volumed opus "The Third Reich" (2005): "It has even been claimed that the first television broadcast strong enough to reach out beyond the planet Earth was of a speech by Hitler, delivered at the opening of the 1936 Olympic Games." On one hand, Hitler, as the patron of these Olympic Games did not hold a speech but in keeping with the IOC protocol merely spoke the official opening words. On the other hand, the range of television waves was still far too restricted in the year of 1936, as was proven by tests made in the summer of 1936 in Taunus, a German low mountain range. The general disregard of available sources is deplorable considering the original archived NS material from the GDR has been accessible for almost 25 years now. And this does not include the considerable mass of further archived material that is perfectly well accessible in Germany and other western nations.

At this point, we will deal with some of the myths concerning the Olympics of 1936. Their dismantling aims to enable a more differentiated view of the Games of 1936 and its events.

Some of the most popular myths need not be discussed here at length, one of them being the allegation that the architect Albert Speer was responsible for saving the Berlin Games by taking charge of the construction plans for the Olympic Stadium developed by Werner March. Just one look into the minutes of the board of construction convinces us that this is a false claim.

The second of these myths concerns the allegation that Hitler refused to shake Owens' hand. It is easily refuted by the fact that Hitler had definitely stopped congratulating athletes in public the day before Owens' first Olympic victory in the 100 meters run.

The third popular myth maintains that Rudolf Ismayr committed an immense faux pas when he grasped the swastika flag while swearing the Olympic oath. The Olympic regalement explicitly calls for the speaker to hold the national flag of the hosting country during this ceremony.

The fourth myth pertains to the assertion that the French team was supposed to have raised their arms in the German NS salute to greet the Führer when marching into the Berlin stadium. In actual fact, this was the so-called Olympic salute that was merely misunderstood, because it was not familiar to the public. Interestingly, the same French action had also led to confusion at the opening ceremony of the Winter Olympics in Germany in February at the same year. Here, the Reich Minister for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda was forced to announce that it had indeed been a demonstration of the official Olympic salute.

Although these myths and anecdotes have long been disproved, they have a habit of surfacing in literature again and again. The following text will deal with myths about the preparation and execution of the Olympic Games that have not been discovered till today. Their dismantling aims to illustrate the importance of meticulous source work on one hand, and, on the other hand,
demonstrate how these myths arose and what probable motives led to their preservation and tradition.

Myths pertaining to the term of preparation for the Olympic Games

Unlimited financial resources for the Games

Frequently, you find a misestimation of the actual extent of the NS central government in literature, for instance, when the important question of the financing of the Olympic Games is concerned. Some today's authors want to simplify this question, by maintaining that an unlimited fund of money was placed at the organisers' disposal and the NS regime paid for absolutely everything that was demanded. It is exactly this impression that Daley imparts in the above mentioned article in a 1936 December issue of the New York Times. Another claim that stubbornly exists in historical literature is that the realisation of the Olympic Games in Berlin cost 100 million Reichsmark, and that in 1933 the sum of money provided by the German state for the execution of the Games was increased from 4 or 5 million to a "spectacular" sum of 100 million Reichsmark!

Closer scrutiny shows that not one author takes pains to supply evidence for this allegation. Normally one author just copies this "information" from another. This pattern ultimately culminates in the statement by Daley in the above mentioned article. One can assume with much certainty that Daley did not have any real insight into the actual financial situation of the German state. His method was to add up the estimated costs of single items. Remarkably, contemporaries using this method arrived at different sums. However, neither Daley nor anybody else takes pains of explicitly stating which single items these were supposed to have been. In reality, an official list of the actual costs was neither ever published, nor even recorded. On may rightfully assume that this would have been a thing of sheer impossibility, for there were far too many institutions and state organisations involved in the actual preparations of the Games. A fixed Olympic budget never existed.

We are only aware of few documented expenses: The Reich Ministry of the Interior was mainly responsible for the Olympic preparations. Its budget encompassed a mere 9 million Reichsmark in 1936. The extension of the German Sports Forum to the Reichssportfeld including the Olympic Stadium cost 50 million Reichsmark. This money was given by the Reich Ministry of the Interior, the city of Berlin, the German Reichsbahn, the Reichsrundfunkgesellschaft (German broadcasting company) and the German Reich Post.

Furthermore the city of Berlin spent for example 11,000 Reichsmark for special road signs necessary for the Games. The Reich War Ministry had to pay 2 million Reichsmark for the construction of the Olympic Village.
Moreover, the historical literature does not explain why the alleged budget increase of 100 million Reichsmark – if it had existed – deserves to be judged as "spectacular", considering the size of the actual event. In actual fact, the question of how the Olympic Games were financed is far more complicated and confusing, as was not untypical of Third Reich dealings in general. In October 1933 Hitler demanded to expand the existing Deutsches Stadion in the west of Berlin on a grand scale, (which turned out to be a complete new construction). Up to that point, the Organising Committee followed the official state instructions that stipulated the event should be self-liquidating: 7.5 million Reichsmark for the whole preparation would then be covered by 7.64 million Reichsmark ticket money. The National Socialists were then in power for 8 months.

However, there was by no means an unlimited money supply: State Secretary Hans Pfundtner, who was responsible for the preparations, stated in an internal conference in the Reich Ministry of the Interior held in October 1933, referring to the sports sites which the Ministry was expected to finance: One would be prepared to follow Hitler's demands with pleasure but also was forced to account for the general German financial situation. Everything should be constructed worthily and at the same time economically. Thus a large sports park was installed – the Reichssportfeld. However, some important parts were sacrificed for economical reasons, for example the originally planned cycling stadium. Instead, a temporary building made of wood was constructed. Until spring 1936 the question was still unsolved. Two originally chosen sites were rejected because of the expensive digging that would have been necessary. In a different case, neighborhood protest led to a dismissal of the project. Finally the cycling stadium was erected on the sports field of the Berliner Sport-Club.

If one attempts to figure out the total cost of the Olympic Games it is also necessary to take into consideration the funds supplied by different cities throughout Germany, not only the funds of the Reich Ministries. These funds have been completely ignored by contemporary researchers – and probably also by the estimators of those days. They will be discussed later, because they not only were relevant for the financing of the Olympic Games of 1936 but also serve to challenge the myth of the perfect organisation.

_The IOC has ignored the racial discrimination in National Socialist Germany._
_The workers' sport was the true but impeded preserver of the Olympic Idea_

You can frequently read that the IOC was idle and neglected to withdraw the Olympic Games from NS Germany. The communists and working-class athletes would have been the true preservers of the Olympic Idea. In actual fact, the President of the IOC, the Belgian Count de Baillet-Latour was fully aware of the racial discrimination in Germany. On 3rd May 1933 he addressed the three German members of the IOC in a letter, demanding them to provide a
written guaranty of the German Reich Government that the Olympic Rules would be respected. As is popularly known, this declaration was delivered at the IOC session in Vienna in June 1933, stating that Jews were not generally excluded from the membership in the German Olympic team.

However one might rightfully ask why the IOC did not withdraw the Games from Germany in spite of a continuing discrimination of the Jews in Germany. One of the reasons was the strict separation between sports and politics propagated by the IOC. This was a basic principle of the IOC. Moreover, the President of the IOC was surely aware of the fact that the German organisers of the Games hardly had any possibility to influence the Reich Government. Baillet-Latour probably knew that Sports on the whole did not have much scope for influencing important political situations. In October 1935 he wrote a letter to the three US members of the IOC – William M. Garland, Charles H. Sherrill and Ernest L. Jahncke – in which he explained his convictions on this point. Mainly in the USA, a movement to boycott the Games in Germany had been formed. Although this letter has been freely accessible in the Bundesarchiv (German Federal Archives) for many decades, the important passages in it have been simply ignored by historians. The President of the IOC wrote:

"Everybody can feel free to withhold his sympathy from the NS regime. However, it would mean a needless exaggeration to take any drastic steps. For is there a single nation that has refused to compete with a German team on German ground? Is there any nation that has severed its political relationship with Germany because of the Jewish question? And on the whole, the Games, even if they are staged in Germany, are not German games, but the Games of the International Olympic Committee. The athletes are not even guests of Germany but rather guests of the IOC!"

Considering the athletic relationships, Baillet-Latour was right. Up to the start of World War II the number of international sports meetings involving German athletes even doubled to that of Weimar Republic. All major international federations of that day like to stress a strict separation between the world of politics and sports.

In his letter, Baillet-Latour did not merely point out the inability of sports to influence politics through any pressure. Presumably as a reaction to the call of one American IOC member to boycott the Games in Germany (Jahncke), Baillet-Latour chose to remind his addressees of the situation that existed only a few years before in the USA at the 1932 Olympic Games:

"It is nonsense to demand a withdrawal of the Games from Germany, because Jews are refused a membership in sports clubs. Does not the same thing apply to the Negroes in the US clubs? In other nations but the USA black people are treated equal to white people. The IOC had but one path to take for the Olympic Games of 1936 – the same that was taken when rumors arose that Negroes were blocked from the US Olympic teams, namely to ensure that they were not explicitly excluded from the membership."

IOC member Garland's immediate reply to Baillet-Latour's letter was: "I agree with you absolutely in all you have said." Only shortly afterwards Garland mentioned to Baillet-Latour that it was incomprehensible for him how the
people calling for a boycott could actually be of the opinion "Hitler should be taught a lesson in German politics through the medium of amateur athletic sport, which is not interested in the politics of any nation." 58

Incidentally, Baillet-Latour was backed in his position not to withdraw the Games from Germany by some Jews. In a resolution made at the Congress of the Maccabi World Union of Jewish Sports in the end of September 1935 there was an appeal not to withdraw the Games or boycott the Games in general, but rather it stated that: "In view of the Jewish situation in Germany the Maccabi World Congress requests all Olympic Committees and all other athletic governing bodies to allow Jewish athletes to abstain from participation in the Olympiad in Germany in 1936." 59 The large Christian US-organisation YMCA propagated the participation in the Berlin Games in October 1935. 60

When discussing the "Boycott of the 1936 Olympic Games" and the preservation of the Olympic Idea one must deal with a further aspect that was especially subject to myth-building in the GDR. For the sports-historical literature of the GDR not only propagated the accusation that the Olympic Games of 1936 were misused. In addition, it likes to portray the Communists as the impeded preservers of the Olympic Idea. 61

Surely the Communists and the workers' sport would not have been able to realise this aim. Rather, their sudden interest for the Olympic Games appeared to be insincere and strongly politically motivated. When the IOC in 1931 voted for the 1936 Olympic Games to be staged in Berlin, this was not celebrated particularly by those. The German Communists attempted to prevent this by all means. Even in January 1933 – two days before Hitler's appointment as Reich Chancellor – they applied to the Reichstag, the German Parliament, to prohibit the financing of the Olympic Games by public means. 62 The Soviet Union in those days fundamentally rejected the Olympic Games as being imperialistic and bourgeois. 63 The workers' sports clubs opted for staging their own Workers' Olympics in Barcelona in the summer of 1936, at which thousands of working-class athletes were expected to participate. These games were canceled because of the outbreak of the Civil War in Spain. Strange enough, the Communist International was aiming to reject these Workers' Olympics – if they had indeed taken place – as being too much nationally influenced and thus not communist enough (This incidentally concerned also the Amsterdam Art Exhibit "De olympiade onder dictatuur" in the Summer 1936). 64 The political members of the extreme Right thought differently. In the Election of the Reichstag of July 1932 Hitler's Party, the NSDAP advanced to the strongest fraction in the Reichstag with a vote of over 37 %. A government participation in the foreseeable future seemed to be very likely. In September 1932 Hitler informed the IOC on its inquiry that: The NSDAP would not create any hindrance towards hosting the Olympic Games in Germany. Of course also non-white people were allowed to participate. 65
Obviously Hitler had realised the potential of the Olympic Games at an early stage.

Actually, the black athletes were involved in the failure of the US attempts to boycott the Games. Not a single athlete in question opted for a boycott in a poll conducted by the American Olympic Committee (AOC) in 1935. Even Ben Johnson, a black track and field athlete at the Columbia University verbally attacked the president of the Amateur Athletic Union of the USA (AAU) Jeremiah T. Mahoney in 1934, saying:

"I think Judge Mahoney should clean up the South [of the USA], where Negroes are barred from membership in the A.A.U. […] Judge Mahoney also should investigate the discrimination practiced against Japanese and Chinese athletes on the West Coast. I question the advisability of giving our support to the boycott [against Olympic Games in Germany] until these things are done."

Likewise, IOC member Sherrill wants to know from Mahoney (in an article in the New York Times in October 1935):

"Why doesn’t Jerry see to it that Jews are admitted as members of the New York Athletic Club, of which he is a member? […] And why doesn’t he make it a point to mention the fact that Negros are not permitted to participate in sports in the South?"

Mahoney could only reply: "I am a very inactive member, and have nothing to do with the rules or regulations. General Sherrill is also a member there."

Racial discrimination in the USA – not only against black athletes – was indeed one of the biggest problems of the US boycott movement. This problem, however, is hardly mentioned in any works about the Olympic Games, even though it is of vital importance if one tries to understand the dilemma of the American boycott movement. Only because of this situation the press officer of the Reichssportführer (Reich Sport Leader), Guido von Mengden could announce unabashedly in the German Press of August 1935 that the Germans were indeed very conscious of the discrepancy between the German racial laws and the Olympic Games, but that other countries tolerated racial inequality as well. All the same, there must be some sort of island, where all could meet peacefully. Should only one country boycott the Olympic Games because of political reasons, this would mean the end of the Olympic Games.

The harshness of the 1935 German racial laws – and especially their consequences – should by no means be underestimated or ignored. However, it is an acknowledged fact that Jesse Owens, who won four Gold Medals in Berlin, highlighted the absurdity of not only the German, but also the American forms of racism.

A Torch Relay Poster makes trouble

Historical literature likes to postulate, either directly or indirectly, that the Olympic Games of 1936 were part of a (well-nigh demoniacal) overall plan of the Nazis. An incident shortly before the beginning of the Berlin Olympics thus
also developed to a myth. This has to do with the (pictographic) occupation of a section of Czechoslovakia for the German Reich.

The German Organising Committee had suggested that a relay should be run from the antique site of Olympia to the contemporary site of the modern Games, a suggestion that was approved by the IOC. The couriers were to carry the flame over a distance of 3,075 kilometres through seven countries. The entire publicity for the Olympic Games was under the supervision of the Propaganda-Ausschuß (Publicity Commission) appointed by the Reich Ministry for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda. The Publicity Commission carried on its foreign campaign through the international organisation of the Reichsbahnzentrale für den deutschen Reiseverkehr (RDV) (German Railway Publicity Bureau). The RDV had arranged for the design of a poster showing a rough map with the route the relay would take. The separate nations through which the relay run would lead were recognisable by different colours. This poster was printed in an edition of over 30,000 copies and distributed in all five continents; over 1,000 of them were sent to Czechoslovakia. (Figure 1)

This poster was displayed uncriticised for many weeks in Czechoslovakia until the leftist Czechoslovakian press claimed in early July 1936 that borders in the poster were purposely made to look like the Sudetenland belonged to the German Reich. (At this time the northern, northwestern and southwestern border areas in Czechoslovakia with a majority of inhabitants who felt they belonged to Germany were so-called Sudetenland or Sudetengebiet. (Figure 3)) In consequence the Prague Public Attorney (on instructions from the Czechoslovakian Ministry of the Interior) ordered the confiscation of the posters. This incident was published in diverse national and international (workers') newspapers and grew notorious as early as 1936.

Since then the reported allegation has been frequently referred to in scientific literature, the Public Attorneys' action being a sure proof for its truth. Nobody saw a reason to question this. Until this point, nobody wondered about the fact that the Czechoslovakian foreign minister Edvard Beneš – who became president of state in December 1935 – had signed a friendship contract with the Soviet Union in May 1935 and was following a neoslavistic course. However, is the allegation about the willfully drawn borders truly justified?

One of the original posters is archived in the Deutsches Historisches Museum (Berlin). It incidentally also was published in contemporary German magazines. The first thing you notice is that the indicated borders are strongly generalised and in no way accurate. A scrutiny of those areas belonging to the Sudetenland shows that these regions are not clearly included within the German borders. Those newspapers that aimed at utilising the incident for an attack against NS Germany by reproducing the poster in question drew a dotted line into the poster several tens of kilometres north of the printed border. (Figure 2) In consequence this led to the impression that the Sudetenland now was expanded all the way to Dresden, the capital of Saxony, a part of the Ger-
man Reich. Furthermore, the editors forgot to note that the Sudetenland did not only exist in this border country of Czechoslovakia but also in the border regions of Austria, near the south boundary to Czechoslovakia (Figure 3).

This incident did not lead to an international crisis. As early as 9th July the German press reported that Czechoslovakia had signaled that the relay run could pass through this country as planned. On the following day, 10th July, the Czechoslovakian ambassador in Berlin, Vojtěch Mastný, was on a visit to the undersecretary Ernst Woermann in the Foreign Office in Berlin. The confiscated poster was only marginally mentioned. The ambassador communicated that he had personally convinced himself that the poster was innocent of any political aims. However, the confiscation could hardly be changed now. Yet there would not arise any problems for the relay run. Shortly afterwards, Mastný informed the Foreign Office that the Czechoslovakian government would keep to the confiscation to avoid further excitement in his country. All the same, it would publish a statement that the poster definitely was not connected with any form of political claim from the German side, but that it was merely an output of artistic license. There are no records whether this statement actually was published or not. The further almost 6,000 posters which thereafter advertised the Olympic Games in Berlin and for the Olympic yachting events at Kiel in Czechoslovakia were not subjected to criticism. In fact, state president Beneš even welcomed the torch at his summer residence near Tabor, and the president of the Czechoslovakian sports union insisted on personally carrying the torch to the German-Czechoslovakian border as the final Czechoslovakian runner.

Myths from the period of the actual Olympic Games event

Old memories can lead to fantastic stories

Sports history frequently is forced to rely on the oral reports of time witnesses. Just as with written documents, these too must be critically questioned as to their sources, their exact dating and their possible intentions. As a matter of course, memories freshly recorded after an event can be expected to be more truthful than those recorded many decades later. Yet it is difficult to say where to draw the border. However, credibility can be given Robert Atlasz’ recording of a time witness report resulting from an inspection tour by Avery Brundage 25 years before – in the summer of 1934 – and its fundamental outcome. Brundage was commissioned by the AOC in Berlin to inspect whether Jews were being hindered at practicing sports in Germany. On his inquiry whether Jews were permitted to join in Sports Clubs in Germany, the functionaries of the Jewish sports organisations – among them Atlasz – had replied: "Yes, but only in Jewish ones." Atlasz recalls that Brundage merely commented this circumstance with the words: "My club in Chicago doesn't permit any Jews
either! 87 This meeting must have been a significant experience for the Jewish sports functionaries, for now they were certain that they could not expect any support from Brundage, the President of the AOC and the AAU.

However, great precaution should be taken when the reports are recorded from memory many decades after the actual event, for even memories are subject to change and influence. Thus Guy Walters, in his book "Berlin Games: How Hitler Stole the Olympic Dream" first published in 2006 relies on 23 (!) interviews he held with time witnesses in 2005 – almost 70 (!) years after the actual Olympic events. Long by now, oral-history research has proved that the actual truth and value of such interviews is very limited. Memory is not a static thing that can be called upon at any time without any alterations. 88

If one ignores this fact and simply accepts such memories uncritically, the output can easily be a book filled with a lot of fantasies, like that of Laura Hillenbrand, who repeatedly interviewed the US track and field athlete Louis Zamperini (1917–2014) as late as at the Millennium and then wrote his biography. Obviously, the writer did not check Zamperini's allegations for their verity. For example, he claims that the US team traveled from the harbor of Hamburg to Berlin (250 kilometres southeast of Hamburg) via a stop in Frankfurt/Main, 89 which is in actual fact over 400 kilometres southwest of Berlin. In Berlin, Zamperini claims to have snatched and pocketed a swastika flag from the Reich Chancellery by jumping to grab it. However, historical photos demonstrate that Zamperini would have had to jump an impossible height to achieve this feat. Furthermore the flags were so enormous that one could hardly have hidden unremarkable them in one's coat. (Figure 4)

Zamperini even reports that at this incident the foolish guards at the Reich Chancellery had made use of their guns. 90 However, during the Olympic Games the Reich Chancellery was continuously beleaguered by spectators who wanted to see Hitler. 91 To see him was an absolute must, not only for the cheering German spectators, but even more so for the foreign tourists. About the Canadian athlete Hilda Cameron even was reported to have called: "Adolphe come out!" 92 It is totally out of the question that weapons were used in such a situation in order to warn someone off. The NS regime was careful to avoid anything that could excite international disapproval. 93 Still, swastika flags were indeed torn down during the Olympic Games in Berlin. Those reports of the German secret police that are still available today show this. For example, the daily report of 9th August 1936 records: "At different locations in the city usually smaller swastika flags that were hung at an accessible height were destroyed by removal or burning." 94 However this occurred only at private dwellings, sometimes even through SA-men who were under the influence of alcohol. 95 The removal and destruction of a flag from the Reich Chancellery has never been recorded and obviously never occurred.

Zamperini's narration culminates in the claim that he had not only spoken with the Reich Minister for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda, Joseph
Goebbels, in person but also had shook Hitler's hand. This – like the flag incident – is an event that could never have actually taken place, in this particular case because of the building arrangements of the stadium.96

The original recordings made during or shortly after the Olympic Games are far less spectacular than Zamperini's memories. Most important: They were made prior to any knowledge about what occurred after 1936 – the disastrous events of World War II and the Holocaust – and hence are unbiased. Rather, they clearly reflect the ambivalent attitude of contemporaries towards the Olympic Games of 1936. The remarks by the British athlete and gold and silver medal winner in athletics, Arthur G. K. Brown, show the controversial reactions in a country with a free press like Britain. After the Games, Brown criticised them in an article in a Cambridge university newspaper:

"The extraordinary thing that though the officials had so much time to do everything there was to do, they never did anything so elementary as fill in the starting holes; and though they had eight days in which to run off the four rounds of the 400 metres, they chose to squeeze them into two days, a circumstance particularly galling to the writer. [...] All this could have been over-looked had it not been for one thing, which ought to be said without reserve; that the Berlin crowd was probably the most unpleasant crowd before which athletes have had the misfortune to compete."

In addition, the cost sharing of 6 Reichsmark per day was criticised as being too expensive.97 However, only a few days later, two other participants in the Berlin Games, the British athlete Frederick R. Webster (pole vault) and the Czechoslovakian athlete Josef Klein (decathlon), wrote a letter to another newspaper in Cambridge and vehemently contradicted Brown and his criticism. They wanted to straighten out his "mis-statements". About the audience, they wrote: Brown's statement

"is certainly untrue and hypocritical. [...] Mr. Brown has a right to consider himself an authority on athletics and maybe even politics, but it seems a little presum[ptuous] and not in the best of taste for him, in his position, to criticise a nation, of whom, in spite of his six marks a day, he was a guest."98

It is to be assumed that most members were quite happy in Berlin, just like Webster and Klein. Countless photographs made in the Olympic Village illustrate this. (Figure 5) Jesse Owens recorded his impressions of his first day in the Olympic Village in his diary on 25th July:

"The first day in the Village was very interesting. Met many people from strange lands & most of them could speak some English. [...] The village is a most beautiful place. Nice grass, building[s], a beautiful artificial lake, the night[s] are cool and good sleeping."99

Many myths arose particularly about Jesse Owens. The most impressive one: His asserted friendship with the German long jumper Luz Long. After the war, Owens used to claim till his death in 1980 that he was a very good friend of Long from the time they first met in Berlin and that their friendship lasted – by letters – far into World War II.100 Long was killed in 1943 at an age of 30 years.101 Yet in Long's inheritance, which has been preserved including all cer-
tificates and athletic awards, there is not a single hint that there was any contact to Owens beside the meeting during the Olympic competition in the Berlin Olympic Stadium. Owens’ allegation that he had met with Long every evening in the Olympic Village cannot be true, because Long did not live in the Village continuously during the Games. Sometimes he slept at home in Leipzig, 150 kilometres distant from Berlin, at other times he boarded privately outside of Berlin.

In his autobiographies Owen published passages from the letters exchanged with Long. However, he never could produce a single original letter. Owens writes that he had received a letter from Long from North Africa. However, Long was never stationed in Africa. In connection with this myth of a great friendship, one must mention that Owens opened a PR-agency and was nominated "Ambassador of Sport" by US President Eisenhower in the 1950s, in which function he traveled all over the world. After 1936, Owens systematically contributed to his own legend till his death. This is probably the reason why one of his Olympic gold medals from Berlin was auctioned off at a price of 1,5 million dollars in December 2013, the highest sum ever paid for a sports trophy.

The Olympic Games 1936 as a huge media event, in which a strict censorship for photographers was implemented

Literature likes to claim that the Olympic Games in Berlin were a huge media event. In addition to the usual censorship laid upon the German press since 1933, it is common opinion that a strict censorship of footage was laid upon the foreign press. As a matter of routine, one then mentions that the Olympic Games 1936 were the first Olympic event ever to be radio broadcast live into all five continents and that – for the first time ever – television covered the events. In contrast, only 125 German (press) photographs were permitted to take pictures. Till this day, nobody has ever critically questioned these allegations. First, as the radio coverage is concerned: Yes, the Games were indeed broadcasted by radio stations and, yes, TV was also present. TV, however, was still in an experimental phase and played a very minor role. Radio broadcasting, too, was still in its early development, and such an ambitious project as worldwide broadcasting was a totally new challenge and in consequence was often faulty. Even the transmission to Germany's next-door neighbor Austria was fraught with problems. The faulty transmission of the Berlin opening ceremony caused a great deal of anger there.

In 1996 Teichler spoke of a “total radio broadcast” of the Berlin Games. And indeed, 3,000 programmes were produced by 41 broadcasting stations from all over the world during the Games. This does sound like a substantial number. But these are only 4.5 radio programmes per day and broadcasting stations on average. Since the German broadcasts had the largest share, even
decreasing the average daily total. Furthermore there were only 7.4 million registered radio users in Germany in summer of 1936\textsuperscript{113}, whereas the total population count was 66 million\textsuperscript{114}. In the middle of the 1930s there were about a dozen broadcasting stations in Germany. During 20th July to 20th August 1936 their number was reduced to two: the *Deutschlandsender* (called during this time: *Olympia-Weltsender*), normally responsible for the programmes of the otherwise independent German broadcasting stations and now mainly responsible for the coverage of Olympia, and the *Reichssender Berlin*.

However, a look into the contemporary radio programme magazines proves that – in comparison to what is usual nowadays – the Olympic Games were covered to a very modest degree. On the day of the opening festivities, 1st August, the length of broadcast including the introductions was 2 ¾ hours.\textsuperscript{115} In the USA the radio stations merely broadcast the last half hour of the opening ceremony; only WABC broadcast for a whole hour.\textsuperscript{116}

However, on a regular day of competition, the Olympic programme in the German radio was rather meager and was by far surpassed by musical broadcasts.\textsuperscript{117} In both German radio stations, the programme was initiated every morning at 6 o'clock with the Olympic fanfare. In the mornings, the afternoons, and evenings the *Deutschlandsender* broadcast music programmes with classical or modern music that were only interrupted by occasional live reports from the events or by a short mention of new competition results. There were plenty of programmes that had nothing to do with Olympia. In the evenings, a so-called *Olympia Echo* reported on the events of the day.\textsuperscript{118} A complete broadcast of one event was not possible, as there simply was not enough room for this.

The *Reichssender Berlin* mainly broadcast a programme of light entertainment that was interrupted to inform about Olympic results and reported on the most important results once every hour. At noontime it broadcast information on the past events for 45 minutes. In the evening it broadcast the 20-minutes-long *Olympia Echo* of the *Deutschlandsender*.

We now come to the question of the visual recordings of the Games. Unquestionably, the NS regime aimed at creating a good image of itself with the help of the Olympic Games. But did this actually involve a strict picture censorship, like Arnd Krüger wrote in 2003? 

"Only German photographers were permitted inside the stadium."\textsuperscript{119} Was the coverage in the stadium indeed only restricted to German photographs? If yes, what was the reason?

At the 1906 Olympic Games in Athens – today often called "Intermediate Games" – the picture coverage was subject to regimentation probably for the first time in the history of the Olympic Games. The IOC had sold the film rights for the main site of these Games, the Panathenaic Stadium, to a French production company, which sent one cameraman to Athens. Another cameraman from a different French production company was forbidden to film in the stadium. He was only allowed to film outside of it.\textsuperscript{120} Since the Olympic Games 1912 in Stockholm the trend arose for the Organising Committee in question to
give preference to domestic media representatives where the picture coverage was concerned.\textsuperscript{121} For example, the Dutch Organising Committee wanted to sell the picture rights for the Olympic Games 1928 to only three Netherlands agencies to ensure that the athletes were not hampered in their competitions by too many cameramen.\textsuperscript{122} Furthermore there existed a strong regimentation in Los Angeles 1932 and a favoritism towards US reporters. The organisation for the press and picture coverage in the Berlin Olympic Games explicitly relied on the experiences of the previous Games.\textsuperscript{123} Thus the restriction of only native picture reporters to the closed sites of the events was enforced.\textsuperscript{124} Previous to these Games the Berlin Organising Committee distributed prints informing members of the press, athletes, referees and guests of the Berlin regulation. One bulletin states: "It is permitted to take pictures at all competition sites, however photographing in the interior space of the stadium centre is only permitted to a group of official reporters with special armbands."\textsuperscript{125} These restrictions only concerned the interior space of the stadium. However, everyone – including all representatives of the press – was free to take pictures from the spectator seats. (Figure 6) Thus the Organising Committee published "Rules for the coverage by press, picture and radio at the Olympic Games of 1936" stated as follows: "Spectators may take their cameras to the events and take pictures from their seats as long as they do not disturb the surroundings, especially other spectators."\textsuperscript{126}

The complete press picture output of the over 125 official picture reporters in Berlin totaled to a number of almost 16,000 pictures, as far as they were registered. This is a number five times higher than only four years ago in Los Angeles.\textsuperscript{127} These pictures also were relayed to the press and public with considerably more speed. Nobody knows how many amateur photographers were present in Berlin. The German Agfa company claimed in an advertisement after the Games that one out of four guests came with a camera.\textsuperscript{128} The fact that the historical literature of today mainly relies on press photos has to do with a source problem. The photos of the amateurs were never centrally collected. They were not submitted to a censorship. Curiously, photographing in Berlin was liberalised to a greater extent than at any Olympic Games of the previous decades.

However, the rules for visual records led to a great deal of irritation from the Reich Ministry for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda: When Hitler was personally present at the competitions in the swimming stadium on 15th August, a Dutch female guest dashed towards him to greet him. After the Games, this incident led to a change of correspondence between the Reich Ministry and the Organising Committee. The Reichsministerium informed the Organising Committee that it had confiscated all (press) pictures made by the press photographers. The Reich Ministry had abstained from involving the amateur photographers, yet if any pictures of the incident should be published in international papers, the Organising Committee would have to face the consequences.\textsuperscript{129} The
General Secretary of the Organising Committee, Carl Diem, acknowledged the letter and replied, (enclosing a copy for Hitler's Chancellery): "We believe that the spontaneous welcome by our foreign guests does not implement any disadvantage for the Führer and his work in the foreign press."130

The Reich Ministry's excitement remains a mystery, especially since German newspapers reported of the incident complete with a large photo.131

The Olympic Games of 1936 were perfectly organised

Historical literature likes to claim that the Berlin Games were a perfectly organised event. This opinion was regularly voiced – not surprisingly – in the German press in 1936, but also in foreign monographs about this event.132

However, things did by no means run smoothly. Not even mentioning the quarrels between Lewald (President of the Organising Committee for the Berlin Games) and Diem of the Organising Committee on one side and the state institutions and Reich Ministries on the other side, it is interesting to focus on what went on outside the capital of Berlin. In how far were the German municipalities involved in the Olympic project and how eagerly did they contribute to it?

The above mentioned Propaganda-Ausschuß installed the so-called Olympia-Zug as a medium for national advertising. It comprised a group of trucks with a mobile exhibition with 560 square metres. 1935/1936 this "train" traveled through Germany and displayed an exhibition about the Olympic Games of the antique ages, the modern age, and the Olympic preparations for 1936 at about 100 different locations.133 The cities in which the "train" stayed were ordered to supply free boarding for the truck drivers, honorary cashiers, as well as free electricity and water. This procedure more or less worked. But there were also voices of protest. The mayor of Leipzig, Carl Friedrich Goerdeler, complained to the Deutscher Gemeindetag, umbrella organisation of German municipalities, that the advertising for the Olympic Games should not be financed from communal budgets. This should be a matter of the Reich.134

The Deutscher Gemeindetag sympathised with this complaint and stand up for the municipalities. In early 1936, it wrote to the Reich Ministry of the Interior, stating that: In view of the strained financial situation of the German municipalities, the financing of the Olympic advertisement by means of their budgets is unacceptable, especially taking in account that beside Berlin only very few other cities would profit from the Olympic Games in any way. If the Olympic Games were considered to be a national concern, then the advertising must be financed by the State budget!135

However, the Olympia-Zug was not the only item the municipalities were supposed to pay for. A multitude of cities from all over the country were to be involved – also financially – in the installment of the Berlin flag decorations, as the Berlin means were too restricted for this.136 Furthermore, several cities were ordered to finance training-groups.137 However, a poll made by the Deutscher
Gemeindetag in the region of Baden in February 1935 clearly demonstrated that at least the cities of this area that had been asked for support by the Reichsbund für Leibesübungen (Reich Association for Physical Training) had then already declined their help or postponed it. Only one single city had contributed a meager sum of 30 Reichsmark for a training-group. Obviously, municipalities and private persons alike had by now been asked for financial contributions so frequently that they only were prepared to help when there was no alternative.

In addition, the Organising Committee directly approached 150 German municipalities in April 1935 asking for help in decorating the Olympic Village. The Organising Committee wrote that the Olympic Village would be a center of experience for the active members. 26 athletes would live in each of the stone houses. The houses would not simply be numerated. Each house would bear the name of a German town. Furthermore it should be equipped with pictures and decorations of this special town. The Organising Committee would like to ask, which municipality would like a house to bear its name. In turn, the municipalities would be asked to pay an artist for murals, the lending costs for 3 x 26 sets of linen with the town's arms and the costs for about 25 large scale photos of town views. The addressed municipalities now added up the costs, each for themselves, and arrived at totally different sums ranging from 2,000 to 6,500 Reichsmark for the fulfillment of all the Organising Committee's wishes. The municipalities reaction to the Organising Committee's letter was very reticent. Very few municipalities (circa 20) were actually willing to contribute in a larger scale and supply the artist for Berlin. The Organising Committee gave up on the question of linen. Finally the Organising Committee reduced its demands to the photos with the town views, cutting the actual sum each municipality had to pay to a mere 100 Reichsmark. Some municipalities did not react until shortly before the Olympic Games after frequent reminders. The Organising Committee in all events was not quite sincere towards the municipalities. What they did not say: The expensive photos were intended to be gifts as souvenirs for the foreign guests.

**Conclusion**

In addition to the decades old myths and legends mentioned in this essay, new myths and legends are continuously arising even nowadays. For example: Alexander Priebe speculated in 2008 that basketball was only admitted into the Berlin programme by the Organising Committee early in 1935 to counteract the boycott movement in the USA. However, Hans-Dieter Krebs shortly afterwards remarks that Priebe does not produce any documentary evidence for his allegation and furthermore completely ignores the fact that the acceptance of a discipline into the Olympic programme never ever was decided by the Germans.
Priebe also forgets to explain why someone would seriously abstain from boycotting the Games just because of an inclusion of basketball. Perhaps this is the place to remark that Polo was also (newly) incorporated into the Olympic programme for Berlin on short notice. Another myth, originated by Frank Becker in 2009, states that the Olympic sites in Berlin were purposely concentrated in one area – meaning the Reichssportfeld – to enable a quick reaction in case of politically motivated disturbances or demonstrations. In actual fact, the IOC explicitly postulated that the Olympic sites be concentrated in one area since the 1920s. Already the Games of 1924, 1928 and 1932 were staged in huge sports parks that especially constructed for these Games.

In 2010 Schiller and Young commented on the topic of how history deals with the Olympic Games of 1936 that even the IOC "reduce[s] a complex bundle of influences and perspectives to a moral shorthand." The NS regime was a objectionable dictatorship. However, it is not suited for myth-building. On the contrary, the myths and legends constructed around the Olympic Games of 1936 want to depict the NS functionaries and their mechanisms of ruling as having been rather simple and naïve, which they definitely were not. True, the Olympic Games seemed to be perfectly organised in the eyes of many contemporary witnesses. This more or less was true of the sports-technical preparations – the work of the Organising Committee. However, all further activities not seldom suffered from a fight over competencies, which was not unusual and rather typical for the Third Reich. The two leading heads of the Organising Committee, the non-party members Lewald and Diem, were often confronted with problems when trying to realise their visions. True, a large sum of public fund was supplied on many levels to realise the Olympic Games. However, the budget was not unlimited and was not spent without deliberation. Outside Berlin, the enthusiasm for the financial support of the Olympic Games was rather meager. True, the Olympic Games were an event of great interest for the media. However, in comparison to the role that (TV-)media play in Germany today, the actual participation of radio stations and their broadcasts in the summer of 1936 were modest. Undoubtedly the reports in the radio broadcasts, newsreels and in the press served to generate a euphoric atmosphere in Germany and increased the NS regime's prestige at least in Germany. However, not few people remained skeptical or disinterested towards the huge event in Berlin, and this not only abroad, but also at home. Besides, the regime had no motivation to quasi incorporate the Sudetenland ahead of time in 1936, a thing that occurred anyway in 1938.

A major topic previous to the Olympic Games of 1936 was the discrimination of Jewish citizens in Germany. They led to a boycott movement especially in the USA, yet the actual discrimination practiced in USA at this time made this argument highly invalid, as not only the Belgian IOC President saw it to point out. As was mentioned above, accompanied by a reference to Ian Kershaw, developments in historical sciences can only be achieved if one is free
from exaggerated emotionality or embittered polemics. The research into different incidents turning around the Olympic Games of 1936 lead to a further point of insight: A lack of source work has frequently led to a rich development of myths and legends constructed around the Olympic Games of 1936. These myths are basically the outcome of a simplification of processes that arises when one either willfully ignores the accessible sources or just deigns source work as negligible. Working with available sources does definitely not support a belittlement of the harm done by the NS regime. On the contrary, only solid source work can help to illustrate the mechanisms of these regime. And furthermore: Only serious study of sources can ensure a respect of sports historical literature as a serious branch of science, on the condition that the scientist meticulously proves his thesis with the help of as many sources as possible.

Figures

Figure 1: Detail of the original poster of the German Railway Publicity Bureau. (Postcard, transported on 16th August 1936. Author's collection)

Figure 2: Map in a Norwegian workers' newspaper, August 1936. The alleged expansion of the so-called Sudetenland is shown in dashed lines. (Anonymus, "En provokatorisk tysk olympiaplakat")
Figure 3: Distribution of population by ethnic assignment after World War I. In the northern, western and south-western border areas of Czechoslovakia dominated by a German population (so-called Sudetenland). Striped = Area of Czech population.

(Stier / Kirsten / Wühr / Quirin / Trillmich / Czybulka / Pinnow / Ebeling, Großer Atlas zur Weltgeschichte, p. 151. © Westermann, Bildungshaus Schulbuchverlage, Brunswick)

Figure 4: Amateur photo showing the Reich Chancellery in Berlin during the Olympics 1936. (Author's Collection)