

Oregon Sports Hall Of Fame Museum Explores Controversial 1936 Olympics In Nazi Germany

The Nazi Olympics Berlin 1936

Focus - Hitler's Use and Abuse of Sports

Organized by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, D.C. and hosted by the Oregon Sports Hall of Fame Museum, Portland, The Nazi Olympics: Berlin 1936 explores what happens when race, politics and sports collide, specifically, at the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin. The 6,000 square foot exhibition premiers Monday, January 25, 1999, and runs through Saturday, May 15, 1999. The Nazi Olympics Berlin 1936

The Nazi Olympics Berlin 1936 premiered July 19, 1996, at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, D.C., and was on display through July 1997. The opening coincided with the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta, and commemorated both the 60th anniversary of the Berlin Games and the centennial of the modern Olympics. The exhibition now travels to cities around the United States.

In view of its mission to broaden public understanding of Holocaust history, the Museum has developed an exhibition that examines the Berlin Games in the context of mounting repression in Nazi Germany. The Olympics were awarded to the German Weimar democracy in 1931. But within two years, Adolf Hitler became Chancellor of Germany and began transforming the nation into a one-party dictatorship and police state.

With the Nazi rise to power, the Berlin Olympics became a focus of controversy. Many observers in the United States and other Western nations questioned whether participation in the 1936 Games would represent an endorsement of Hitler's regime. Others argued that sports should remain separate from politics. Although the internationalist spirit of the Olympics was contrary to the extreme nationalism espoused by the Nazis, the Games afforded an irresistible opportunity: to exhibit, on a world stage, a revitalized Germany whose athletes exemplified Nazi racial theories of Aryan superiority. In the end, 1936 became the year of "Hitler's Games." This exhibition examines the tensions that characterized the "Nazi Olympics" -- Games which, intentionally or not, afforded temporary international legitimacy to their host's fascist regime.

The Exhibition

The exhibition opens by bringing visitors into the setting of the 1936 Games. Introductory panels illustrate

the components of the Nazi police state during 1933-36 (the "Führer," Nazi Party rallies, repression of dissent, concentration camps) and document a culture of state-sponsored racism and virulent antisemitism.

The exhibition then addresses how the Nazi takeover of all aspects of German life even extended to athletes and sporting organizations, excluding all but those who "fit" the Nazi racial ideology.

Nazi ideology viewed sports as essential to the strength and purity of the German "Aryan" race; it was used as a means of indoctrinating youth and preparing a generation for war. A Reich Sports Office was formed to coordinate all sports groups, including the planning for the 1936 Olympic Games. The exhibition documents how, in violation of the Olympic spirit espousing the separation of sports and politics and the doctrine of "fair play," Reich Sports Minister Hans von Tschammer und Osten was personally involved in selecting athletes for the German team.

The Nazification of German sports included efforts to exclude Jews and other "non-Aryans" from German sports and recreational facilities. The exhibition documents how Nazi officials expelled top-ranked Jewish and Roma and Sinti athletes from clubs and competition, and how this trend forced Jewish athletes to continue their training in separate Jewish sports associations.

Growing international criticism of Germany's repressive measures, and increasing awareness of the exclusion of Jews from Olympic training facilities, fueled concern over the prospect of holding the 1936 Games in Berlin. Despite Nazi efforts to deflect international criticism by promising equal treatment for Jewish athletes, many American newspapers and anti-Nazi groups, including the Amateur Athletic Union, urged a boycott of the Games.

In examining the boycott controversy, the exhibition covers issues such as American Olympic Committee President Avery Brundage's German sympathies and commitment to the Berlin Games; boycott rallies and efforts to convene alternative Olympics; Jewish American responses to the boycott in light of American antisemitism; worldwide protests, and the eventual close decision in favor of American participation. The African American community's reactions to the boycott effort, including editorials charging hypocrisy in view of American discrimination against Black athletes and arguments that

Black athletic victories would undermine Nazi racism are highlighted.

The Olympics themselves are poised between propaganda imagery and the reality of a dictatorship rearing for war. Nazi deception was key: antisemitic signs were temporarily moved from public view during the Winter 1936 Games held in Garmisch-Partenkirchen. By the Summer Games in Berlin, the propaganda machine was in full force. Despite Germany's re-occupation of the Rhineland only a few months earlier -- an act of aggression violating two major peace treaties -- posters, magazines and exhibits promoting the Summer Games celebrated a national commitment to peace.

Athletes and spectators alike were swept up in the festive, dramatic ceremonies, opened by Hitler himself, at the XI Olympiad. Joseph Goebbels' Propaganda Ministry exercised stringent control over the press coverage of the Games, even as a new major concentration camp was under construction just outside Berlin in Sachsenhausen. In poster art, Germany was presented as the modern heir to the Greece of classical antiquity, the Aryan ideal. The 1936 Olympics are often best remembered as the Games of Jesse Owens and other African American athletes. The exhibition chronicles the success of 18 African American athletes, condescendingly referred to in one Nazi newspaper as America's "auxiliaries." But their success at the Games, while perceived as destroying the Nazi myth of "Aryan superiority," should be seen as a marginal victory, since the segregation codes of "Jim Crow" continued for decades after the 1936 Games.

The participation of Jewish athletes also is examined: the pressures to boycott the Games; the incentives to participate; the tragedy and frustration of record-holders removed from competition; even the decision to allow a woman with partial Jewish heritage to compete as a fencer on behalf of Germany.

In sum, the exhibition presents the 1936 Games as they were experienced and as a first class diversion. The progression of events leading to World War II and the Holocaust -- the reoccupation of the Rhineland; the German-Italian Axis pact; Nazi military support of the fascist regime in the Spanish Civil War; the German-Japanese alliance, and the continuing persecution of non-Aryans -- was absolutely unaffected by the glimpse of Germany afforded the world community during the 1936 Games.



(Above) Gretel Bergmann (foreground, in black tanktop) poses with her Jewish sports club. Members had used their shovels to transform farm land into a sports field.

(Left) In August 1936, Adolf Hitler's Nazi dictatorship scored a huge propaganda success as host of the Summer Olympics. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) had awarded Berlin the Games in 1931.

Free Glaucoma Screenings

For more information, contact:
Steve Fletcher, Director of
Community Relations (503) 359-2144
FOREST GROVE — The national Eye Institute, in coordination with the American Academies of Optometry and Ophthalmology, has proclaimed January as Glaucoma Awareness Month. In celebration of this proclamation, the Pacific University College of Optometry Vision centers are providing a program of free glaucoma screenings for adults of

all ages during the months of January and February.

According to eye doctors, glaucoma is one of the leading causes of blindness and vision loss. In many cases, the effects of glaucoma can be controlled if the disease is identified and treated in its early stages. Glaucoma screening are essential in detecting the presence of this disease before serious and permanent vision occurs. Free glaucoma screenings are

provided by Pacific University's Vision Centers during January and February via appointment. Pacific's vision centers offer weekday, evening and weekend hours, with locations throughout the greater Portland including Downtown, Southeast and Northeast Portland; and in Forest Grove and Cornelius. For more information and to schedule a screening at the Pacific Vision Center near you, please call 357-5800.

Kids Get To Cruise The Willamette

Three hundred at-risk or low-income children and youth are cruising the Willamette River on Sunday, Jan. 24, compliments of the Sternwheeler Columbia Gorge. Young people who participate in White Shield, Greenhouse, Moore Street Corps Community Center and additional Salvation Army Programs will view the city from a new perspective.

"The kids are going to love

being out on the water," says Lt. Doug Riley, commanding officer at Moore Street. "This is an opportunity many of them would otherwise never receive. Most have never enjoyed being on a boat, or seen their hometown from the river."

The two-hour tour is made possible by the Sternwheeler, a grant from the J. Frank Schmidt Family Foundation and Raz Transportation.

The Salvation Army serves

more than 1,000 people a day in the Portland-metro area. Youth programs range from an alternative school, homeless youth services, sports leagues, daycare, a residential treatment program for teenage mothers, to back-to-school and Christmas distribution of clothing, coats, toys and school supplies.

For more information on The Army's youth services, call 503.234.0825.

Tips for a Safe Year

1. Enroll all members of your household in an American Red Cross safety class. Courses are available for ages eight to adult.
2. Assemble a disaster supplies kit. Start with a flashlight, radio, batteries and non-perishable food.
3. Store a three-day supply of water for cooking drinking and hygiene —that's one gallon per person per day.
4. Keep an American Red Cross first aid kit easily accessible and well stocked.
5. Discuss with your family where you would meet if you were separated during a disaster and identify an out-of-state emergency contact.
6. Hold regular fire drills and practice your household's fire escape plan.
7. Post local emergency numbers—doctor, police, hospital, fire, veterinarian and pharmacy—near each telephone.

Attention: Retired Associates of Portland State University

The Retired Associates of Portland State University is pleased to announce its February schedule. On Thursday, February 4, former ballet dancer Nancy Killough will take us on an inter-

esting and informative backstage tour inside the Oregon Ballet Theatre and share some of her on-stage experiences.

We are pleased to have Phil Keisling, the Oregon Secretary of

State speak on the topic, "The Radical Middle in Oregon Politics: Perils and Prospects", on Feb. 11. Both programs are scheduled for the Nordic Room in Smith Hall at P.S.U. at 12:30 p.m.

1999



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