

Brundage, Jews and the Nazi Olympics

In 1931, the President of the International Olympic Committee, Henri de Baillet-Latour announced that the 1936 Olympics would be held in Berlin. By 1933 the Nazis had already planned to turn the Games into a propaganda tool for the superiority of the Aryan race. That year Jews had been barred from civil service in Germany, and Jewish athletes were excluded from sports clubs. In 1935 Ernest L. Jahncke, the American member of the International Olympic Committee wrote a letter to Baillet-Latour urging the IOC to cancel the Berlin Olympics because of “the contempt of the Nazis for fair play and their sordid exploitation of the Games.” The response from the IOC? Jahncke was the only person ever to be expelled from the International Olympic Committee.

Jahncke was replaced on the International Olympic Committee by an American with fewer qualms about anti-Semitism: Avery Brundage. Baillet-Latour wrote Brundage that he shouldn't be bothered by the call for a boycott because “Jews usually start screaming before they have a serious reason to do so.” Brundage responded that he opposed the boycott in any event because it was really a Jewish-Communist conspiracy to keep the United States out of the 1936 Olympics.

Brundage was born in Detroit. His parents were British, his father a building contractor. They moved to Chicago shortly after Avery was born, and his father promptly abandoned his family. At the University of Illinois, Avery joined the Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity, later becoming president of the Chicago alumni chapter. The fraternity's National Laws stated that eligibility was restricted to “any male member of the Aryan race”, and specifically excluded any person with a parent who was “a full-blooded Jew”. He became president of the AAU (Amateur Athletic Union) in 1928 and president of the American Olympic Association in 1929.

The 1936 Games were organized by German sports entrepreneur Carl Diem, who would later claim that he had successfully shielded the event from the influence of the Nazi regime. In reality the Berlin Games were manipulated and promoted by the National Socialist Party as important Nazi propaganda. (For example-- I highly recommend the 1936 film *Olympia* by Leni Riefenstahl, as well as her other well-known propaganda film *Triumph of the Will*, both of which are available in their entirety on YouTube. And along the same lines I recommend the biography *Leni* by Steven Bach.) But back to Berlin.

The rules and bylaws of the International Olympic Committee prohibited discrimination on the basis of religion, race, sex, ethnicity, and nationality. Nevertheless the Nazi organizers of the games announced that Jews would not be allowed to participate. In response to the calls for a boycott, primarily from the Americans, the Nazi organizers then said that Jewish athletes *would be* officially allowed on the German team.

Leading the American boycott protest was Judge Jeremiah Mahoney, president of the Amateur Athletic Union. Mahoney was one of a number of Catholic leaders supporting a boycott, including New York mayor Fiorello La Guardia, New York governor Al Smith, and Massachusetts governor James Curley. The Catholic journal *The Commonweal* (November 8, 1935) urged boycotting the Berlin Olympics that would “set the seal of approval on radically anti-Christian Nazi doctrines.” Though FDR was not involved in the boycott effort, US ambassador to Germany, William E. Dodd, and George Messersmith, head of the US embassy in Vienna, supported the boycott. Individual Jewish athletes from a number of countries chose not to participate in Berlin, and here, many Jewish athletes and Jewish organizations like the American Jewish Congress and the Jewish Labor Committee urged a boycott.

On the other side, pro-German Brig. Gen. Charles E. Sherrill told the New York Times, “We should not interfere with German policies” and later added that “there never was a prominent Jewish athlete in history.” Frederick Rubien, secretary of the U.S. Olympic Committee, added “the Germans are not discriminating against Jews. The Jews were eliminated because they are not good enough athletes.”

With growing protest here, the US Olympic Committee dispatched Avery Brundage in 1934 to inspect the situation first-hand. In the presence of Nazi officials, Brundage spoke to Jewish citizens in Berlin affirming that his Chicago sports club also did not allow Jewish members. The Nazis assured Brundage that 23 Jewish athletes would be invited to their Olympic training center, though in truth not a single German Jew was invited

to train for the Games. Brundage returned to America proclaiming that he was not able to detect discrimination against Jewish athletes in Germany, and in 1935 declared that the United States would participate in the Olympic Games, adding that American athletes should not become involved in “the present Jew-Nazi altercation.”

Brundage was however fore-warned about what was happening in Germany. From the University of Illinois’ Brundage Files is a letter in English from the “Volksfront Deutschlands” (German Popular Front) that he received at his hotel in Berlin. The document described the upcoming Games as a monstrous political deception: “everything is political propaganda, chiefly meant to impress the foreign visitor who upon his return will advertise nothing but a Germany of wealth, order, security, hospitality and perfect organization. . . The real sense of the Olympic Games will be invisible to the average visitor; the monstrous terror forbids the Germans to open their mouths and the enormous burden pressing on the German folk will be further borne in silence. An army of brave men whose ideal it was to fight for a peaceful competition and understanding with the other nations is being kept in prisons and concentration camps - a countless number - and it will be impossible for the foreigner coming from a country of democratic liberty to imagine the sufferings and tortures they have had to endure . . . Under the enormous Nazi terror our work is difficult and we therefore beg you to help us in our task to prevent Hitler and his [accomplices] to get ready for another war. You are not included in the terror and can use your liberty to see the prisons and concentration camps . . . Tell your countrymen what you see there.”

It’s hard to imagine that Brundage and other visitors did not know what was happening. Julius Streicher editor of the weekly tabloid *Der Sturmer* boldly wrote: “We waste no words here. . . Jews are Jews. And there is no place for them in German sports. . . Germany is the Fatherland of Germans, not Jews.” [*The Nazi Olympics*, by Richard Mandell]. Nevertheless, the message Brundage carried back to the United States was the one the Nazis had intended.

In his personal correspondence with other sport officials Brundage wrote “the Jews have been clever enough to realize the publicity value of sport.” Responding to Brundage the president of the International Amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF), wrote “the main reason [for] the Arian movement in Germany was that the Jews have taken a too prominent position in certain branches of life and have - as the Jews very often do when they get in the majority - misused their positions.”

Brundage agreed, writing: “Not only did Jews exalt their own political interests above the independence of amateur sport; not only did they fail to appreciate the contribution to the Olympic movement of [the] restraint Hitler had exercised; but also Jewish protest would be counter-productive in the long run. An Olympic boycott on account of the Jews would excite dangerous, possibly uncontrollable anti-Semitic sympathies in America.”

In fact, Brundage saw financial benefit in the Jewish boycott effort. In a fund-raising strategy letter to his American Olympic Committee colleagues he wrote “the fact that the Jews are against us will arouse interest among thousands of people who have never subscribed before, if they are properly approached.” And Brundage played the other side as well seeking to convince affluent Jews that only their generous economic support could avert the looming anti-Semitic storm. In an appeal for funds from the Jewish advertising giant Albert Lasker he wrote “A large number of misguided Jews still persist in attempting to hamper the activities of the American Olympic Committee. The result, of course, is increased support from the one hundred and twenty million non-Jews in the United States, for this is a patriotic enterprise. I regret to see this animosity built up in the colleges and other educational institutions and in the athletic clubs and organizations of this country. It will not be eradicated for a generation if then. . . My suggestion now is that in an endeavor to offset the growing indignation and resentment to which I have referred, that some Jewish group or committee assist the American Olympic Committee in its campaign to finance the American team. If the records showed contributions of \$50,000 to \$75,000 from Jewish sources, it might be useful in the future.” Albert Lasker replied “As an American I resent your letter and your subtle intimations of reprisals against Jews. You gratuitously insult not only Jews but the millions of patriotic Christians in America, for whom you venture to speak without warrant, and whom you so tragically misrepresent in your letter.”

By late 1935, Brundage had publicly blamed Jews for the boycott campaign, along with “the well-disciplined forces of approximately twenty million Catholics” adding “since American media [is] largely

controlled by Jewish owners, advertisers and reporters, nothing in the newspapers about the German situation could be credited.”

Brundage may have been additionally motivated to oppose the boycott: Brundage would have personally profited from the Berlin Olympics. Brundage’s papers at the University of Illinois include a 1938 letter from the president of the German Olympic Committee assuring him that his Chicago construction company’s bid to build the German Embassy in Washington had been accepted. That would have happened were it not for WWII.

Following the Berlin Olympics Brundage continued to be internationally prominent, but only to serve his own interests. Take for example the story of Anne-Marie Bohm. She had personally helped Brundage with his correspondence at his Berlin hotel, and she later sought from him an affidavit to sponsor the emigration of her brother, employed at a private German banking house, “he has no chance for the future and it is the same thing for him in other German business-houses for certain reasons.” When Brundage refused to help, Anne-Marie, tried again, “It would be very good of you to reconsider whether you could see your way to help my brother. . . I am afraid there is hardly any other alternative for a satisfactory solution of this all-important matter.” But Brundage responded that he could not “assert under oath that I will guarantee that your brother will not become a burden to the American authorities.... Accidents are always likely to happen.”

And there’s the story of Edgar Fried who had organized the successful torch relay for the 1936 Games and served on the Austrian Amateur Athletic Federation for twenty-five years, for a time as vice-president. He was equally desperate: “By the new German laws I am considered a non-aryan and further have not any more chance to gain my life in Germany, so I have to leave this country. Having no relations or friends abroad, I try to come away by help of those gentlemen which I know from the time when I have been an Austrian sport-leader. ... I had the honor to make your acquaintance at the Olympic Games of Amsterdam and met you again in Berlin 1936, but I guess you saw so many people at those occasions, that you will not be able to remember me any more.... You cannot imagine how awful and bad my situation is at present.” A personal appeal on Fried’s behalf came also from the president of the Austrian AAU, who wrote: “Would it not be possible for one or two members of the Olympic Committee to procure [an affidavit]? I assure you sincerely Mr. Fried has rendered so very much for the development of the Olympic idea and for the cordial relations of American and European sportsmen that we have to support him with all powers in the present times.” Brundage’s secretary responded with the standard answer that responsibility for supporting individuals wanting to enter the United States was too great for one person to assume. Fried died in a German concentration camp.

Berthold Leo Warner, seeking affidavits for himself, his wife and mother, recalled meeting Brundage at the Olympic Congress of Berlin in 1930. He wrote Brundage that he “had a good immigration quota number but no relation or friend in the United States. I do not venture to ask you personally for your help, but perhaps you know some people, who might be able to grant myself the benefit of an affidavit. All my life I have worked and striven with my brains and my hands and I express the hope that my knowledge will enable me to do so even in future.” Brundage replied that he couldn’t help.

After receiving so many requests for help, Brundage began using an ethical rationale for refusing assistance. In the case of one Theodor Schmitt, who also needed an affidavit, Brundage’s attorney wrote “It would appear to us ... that Dr. Schmitt was attempting to use your connection with the American Olympic Committee for his personal advantage. If such is the case, it appears to me that you would be going counter to the stand that you have always taken . . . you have never used [your connections] for any purpose of [giving] personal advantage and have scrupulously avoided the appearance of so doing; therefore it seems to us that the execution of this affidavit or any other affidavits for the same purpose would be going counter to everything which you have done in the past.”

Avery Brundage would later become the 5th President of the International Olympic Committee, serving from 1952 to 1972, and the only American to attain that position. His was a tarnished leadership:

- In the late 50’s the IOC, under the direction of Brundage, refused to take action against South Africa for its apartheid policies. He ignored international calls for South Africa to be banned from the 1960 Olympics. They were banned from the 1964 Games over Brundage’s objections.

- After not participating in 1964, South Africa was again invited by Brundage to participate in the 1968 Olympics until he was forced to rescind the invitation under increasing threats of a boycott and clear evidence of racial discrimination.
- Brundage was again overruled by the IOC in his invitation to white-minority ruled Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) to participate in the 1968 games.
- He was again overruled by the IOC prior to the 1972 games after African nations threatened to boycott unless Rhodesian athletes were excluded.
- And finally, Avery Brundage was in his last year as President of the IOC when during the 1972 Munich Games “Black September” murdered 11 Israeli athletes. Many called for the games to be stopped, or at least suspended for one day in honor of the murdered Israelis. In a public address Brundage refused to allow a one day suspension, and never even mentioned the murdered Israelis.

His wife of nearly half a century, Elizabeth, to whom he had not been faithful, died in 1971. I mention that because Brundage had once said that his ambition was to wed a German princess. In June 1973, he got his wish when he married Princess Mariann Charlotte Katharina Stefanie von Reuss who had worked as an interpreter during the 1972 Munich Games. She stated that she had first met Brundage in 1955, when she was 19. When Brundage was asked by reporters about the 48-year difference in their ages, Brundage responded that that he was young for his age and she mature for hers, and instead of 85 years to 37, it should be thought of as more like 55 to 46. Brundage died three years later in 1975 of heart failure, his fortune gone with the couple’s free spending.

As most of us remember the 1936 Berlin Olympics we particularly recall the exploits of America’s black athletes, particularly Jesse Owens. But we had Jewish athletes there as well.

By 1933 Hitler had already determined to use the Berlin Games to demonstrate of the superiority of his “pure Aryans” over the Jews, blacks and similar “mongrel” races of other nations. Remember, by 1935, German Jews were banned from participation in state sponsored sports, making them ineligible for the Olympics, and the American Jewish Congress and the Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League, called for America to boycott the Berlin Games, of that they be relocated to another country. The American Jewish Congress took its case to the American Olympic Committee, hoping to persuade the committee to boycott the Games if Germany remained the host. But their plea was ignored by the President of American Olympic committee Avery Brundage. He “had assurances” from Berlin that no Jewish athlete would be barred from the German team, and that no Jewish athlete from any other nation would be barred from the Games.

Many Jewish organizations urged Jewish athletes not to go, to boycott the games in support of German Jews. Among our Olympic hopefuls was Syd Koff born Sybil Tabachnikoff in 1912 on the Lower East Side of New York. In 1930, she joined the Millrose Athletic Club, whose membership included Jesse Owens, and in 1932, she represented America at the first Maccabean Games in Tel Aviv, Palestine. Once there, Syd Koff competed against the world’s best Jewish athletes and led the American team to the overall championship. She won gold medals in 4 events: the 50 and 100 meter dashes, the high jump, and the broad jump, and she finished fifth in two other field events. When she competed in her second Maccabean Games in 1935, Koff again, brought home the gold.

Syd Koff qualified for the 1936 Olympics in the broad jump and high jump. The world knew that German Jews were being openly attacked, that Jewish businesses were boycotted and synagogues had been destroyed. The world was well aware of the persecution of Jews in Germany, and where it would end. Syd and other American Jewish athletes who qualified for the 1936 Olympics had to make a choice. She chose to boycott.

We know now that Avery Brundage had instructed his US Olympic coaching staff to keep Jewish athletes from winning medals, and they may very well have found some excuse in Berlin to keep her from competing. In choosing to boycott, Syd Koff hoped that four years later she would compete in the 1940 Helsinki Olympics. But just weeks before those Games, the Soviet Union invaded Finland and the 1940 Olympics were

canceled. She never got her chance to win a medal. Syd Koff married, had children, retired from competitive track and field and died in New York City in 1999.

13 Jews won medals in the Nazi Olympics, including six Hungarians, and one American Samuel Balter winning gold in basketball. Jewish athletes from Canada, Belgium, Austria and Germany also won medals. The only German athlete of Jewish parentage was Helene Mayer who won silver in fencing. Hers is a story all by itself.



[Helene Mayer on right]



[Marty Glickman and Sam Stoller]

We remember the Olympic victories of Jesse Owens, and other “non-Aryan” athletes, but less known is the saga of two American Jewish sprinters, Marty Glickman and Sam Stoller. The 18-year-old Glickman starred in track and football at Syracuse University, while Stoller ran track for the University of Michigan. They both made the U. S. Olympic squad, but were only allowed on the 4x100 meter relay team. According to Marty Glickman, the effort to remove him from competition began at the American Olympic trials in New York. In those sprint finals he was told he placed fifth of the seven runners. But films of the race show that Glickman actually finished third behind Jesse Owens and Ralph Metcalfe, but there was no official photo of the finish. The judges, apparently under pressure from track coach Dean Cromwell and Avery Brundage, placed Glickman fifth behind Foy Draper and Frank Wyckoff. As a result, Glickman was not entered in the 100-meter dash, a premiere Olympic event. Instead, he traveled to Berlin as part of the 4x100 meter relay team. 18 years old, Glickman was grateful even to be going to the Olympics, though he felt that he’d been robbed of his chance at a medal in the 100-meter dash.

Once in Germany, Glickman, Stoller, Draper and Wyckoff spent two weeks practicing as members of the relay team, and were confident of victory. Then, on the day of the qualifying trials, head track coach Lawson Robertson told Glickman and Stoller that Jesse Owens and Ralph Metcalfe would replace them. Jesse

Owens protested to Robertson that Glickman and Stoller deserved to run. Robertson told him to do what he was told. Glickman pointed out to Robertson that any combination of the seven teammates could win the race by 15 yards. Robertson replied that he suspected the Germans were hiding their best sprinters to upset the American team, and needed to enter his four best athletes in the relay. Glickman turned to assistant coach Dean Cromwell and said, "Coach, you know that Sam and I are the only two Jews on the track team. If we don't run there's bound to be a lot of criticism back home." Cromwell retorted, "We'll take our chances." The American team won in record time as Glickman and Stoller, devastated, watched from the stands. Never allowed to participate in the Games.

Sam Stoller returned directly to Michigan for the 1937 season and won the Big Ten 100-yard dash, and later that year won an NCAA sprint championship. He died in Florida in 1985.

Glickman and the 1936 U.S. Olympic track team left Berlin for a track meet in Hamburg where Glickman ran in a 100-meter race against the German Eric Borchmeyer, who had placed fifth in the Olympics in that event. "I beat him by a yard," Glickman said. After that, he ran in a Great Britain-USA dual track meet in London. There, Glickman, Jesse Owens, Frank Wyckoff and Ralph Metcalfe set a world's record for the (4 x 100) relay. And, finally, they stopped in Paris, for a US, Japan and France triangular meet, where Glickman won the 100 meter dash, beating Frank Wyckoff, who ran anchor at the Berlin Olympics.

Glickman returned to college and became a football All-American. After briefly playing professional football and basketball, he had a distinguished career as a sportscaster for the New York Knicks, Rangers and football Giants and Jets. Glickman never got over the disappointment and disillusionment of the 1936 Olympics.

He returned to Olympic Stadium in Berlin twice—first in 1985 as part of a tribute to Jesse Owens, with whom he maintained a close friendship. He told historian Peter Levine:

As I walked into the stadium, I began to get so angry. I began to get so mad. It shocked the hell out of me that this thing of forty-nine years ago could still evoke this anger... I was cussing...I was really amazed at myself, at this feeling of anger. Not about the German Nazis ...that was a given. But anger at Avery Brundage and Dean Cromwell for not allowing an eighteen-year-old kid to compete in the Olympic Games just because he was Jewish.

Glickman returned once more to that stadium in 1987, this time with the New York Giants who were playing a pre-season exhibition football game there. He said: "So I went into the stadium. I had all kinds of feelings about that because I actually was placed in the best seat in the house-- Adolf Hitler's old box... I didn't watch too much of the game. I was thinking about those days in 1936." Marty Glickman died in 2001 at 83.

And as a footnote to this story, I found the following at a web-site describing Jesse Owens 1936 Olympic victories: "Owens' fourth Gold came in the 400-relay, an event for which he wasn't even entered until the last moment. *For reasons unknown*, the two American Jews on the United States team were dropped with Owens and [Metcalfe] taking their place. This new U.S. team won the gold easily."

And so it goes...

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