

## ***HITLER'S VIOLATION OF THE OLYMPIC RULES IN 1936***

*by Karl Lennartz*

The competitions of the 1936 Olympic Games in the Olympic Stadium began with track & field athletics on 2 August 1936. As on many of the days, Adolf Hitler, President and Chancellor of the Third Reich, was present and sat in his box of honor, surrounded by other honorary guests, most of whom were diplomats, ministers, and high-ranking members of the National Socialist Party (Nazi Party). In the afternoon, three finals (all men) were decided, with the results as follows:

### **Shot Put**

1.	Hans Woellke	GER	16.20
2.	Sulo Bärlund	FIN	16.12
3.	Gerhard Stöck	GER	15.66

### **10,000 metres**

1.	Ilmari Salminen	FIN	30: 15.4
2.	Arvo Askola	FIN	30: 15.6
3.	Volmari Iso-Hollo	FIN	30:20.2

### **High Jump**

1.	Cornelius Johnson	USA	2.03
2.	David Albritton	USA	2.00
3.	Delos Thurber	USA	2.00

After the victory ceremonies in the shot put and the 10,000 metres, which took place shortly after their respective finals, Hitler invited each of the three medal winners (Woellke, Bärlund, Stöck, Salminen, Askola, and Iso-Hollo) to his box and congratulated them. There are photographs and films of this. It was visible in the whole stadium and the spectators applauded.

The high jump took somewhat longer, and it became dark. Before the results were decided, Hitler left the stadium. This can be interpreted in two ways, the second of which seems more probable.

1. It was too late for Hitler and he had to leave because he had other plans.
2. It was expected that both Johnson and Albritton would be medal winners, and Hitler wished to avoid shaking the hands of black men and being photographed whilst doing so.

The same evening or the next morning, IOC president Count Henri de Baillet-Latour informed Hitler via the German IOC member Karl Ritter von Halt (member of the National Socialist Party, high-ranking SA member, and head of the German Athletics Organization), that a special distinction between the medal winners by the head of state violated the regulations of the IOC. We will never discover whether or not the friction of the second hypothesis described above prompted this meeting (of which both Hitler and von Halt must have been aware), i.e., the question of honoring or not honoring blacks (such as Johnson, Albritton, and Jesse Owens) and/or Jews (such as Ibolya Csák of Hungary).

On 4 August 1936 the presidential chancellor issued the following explanation:

Präsidentialkanzlei

Berlin, den 4. August 1936

Da der Führer und Reichskanzler nicht regelmäßig den Entscheidungswettkämpfer beiwehnen und daher nicht sämtliche Sieger der verschiedenen Nationen empfangen konnte, finden - um eine Revorzugung einzelner Sieger und damit einzelner Nationen zu vermeiden - künftig Empfänge der Sieger nach den einzelnen Entscheidungskämpfen in der Führerlege nicht mehr statt; lediglich deutsche Sieger werden dem Führer vorgestellt, falls er bei einem Siege Deutscher im Entscheidungswettkampf anwesend ist. Der Führer und Reichskanzler behält sich aber ver, sämtliche Sieger nach der Schlußfeier am 16. August gemeinsam in der Ehrenhalle am Glockenturm vor seiner Abfahrt vom Reichssportfeld persönlich zu begrüßen und zu beglückwünschen; eine Einzelverstellung kann hierbei wegen der großen Anzahl der Sieger nicht erfolgen.

[“Presidential chancery

Berlin, 4 August 1936

As the Führer and Chancellor of the Reich could not be present at all of the final competitions and were therefore unable to receive the winners of different nations, receptions of the winners after the individual finals in the Führer’s box will no longer take place; only German winners will be introduced to the Führer in the case of his being present at the victory of a German in a final. The Führer and Chancellor of the Reich reserves the right to personally greet and congratulate all the winners after the Closing Ceremony of 16th August in the hall of honor at the bell tower before his departure from the Reich’s sports ground; a personal introduction will not be possible on this occasion due to the large number of winners.”]

The impression that Germany and Finland had been given preference arose abroad and the American press reacted accordingly, interpreting the event and fabricating tales which nevertheless contained some truths. In both 1928 and 1932 the National Socialist Party (Nazi Party) had called for the exclusion of black athletes at the Olympic Games. After the success of blacks at Berlin in 1936, the minister for propaganda, Joseph Goebbels, writes in his diary on 5 August 1936, "White humanity should be ashamed of itself."<sup>1</sup>

When present, Hitler continued to receive winners in a back room of his box, out of public view. As for the rest, the German organizers added to the victory ceremony in a different way in agreement with the IOC: an oak wreath placed on the head and each winner was also given a potted plant containing a small oak tree. Somewhat later, Theodor Lewald (IOC member and President of the Organizing Committee) presented each champion with a book of pictures, "Olympia," by Walter Hege and Gerhardt Rodenwaldt.

When the Spaniard Fermin Cache Ruiz won the 1,500 metre race after a tactically masterful performance at the 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona, the Spanish King Carlos received him in his box to congratulate him. This could be seen by all spectators larger than life on the screen. The whole stadium, which contained more foreigners than Spaniards, applauded. There is, of course, a difference if a fascist dictator or a king of a democratic state violates the Olympic Charter. It would never have occurred to Juan Antonio Samaranch, who stood beside King Carlos, to forbid it.

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<sup>1</sup>After HJ Teichler, "The omitted handshake of 1936," in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 24 Sep 1993, p. 40.

<sup>2</sup>See "The 1936 Olympic Oaks: Where Are They Now?" by JR Constant, *Citius, Altius, Fortius*, Vol. 2(2), Summer 1993, p. 44.