

# Carl Diem and the Denazification of German Sport

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For sixteen days in August 1936, the city of Berlin played host to the XIth Summer Olympic Games. These games afforded the Nazi regime an opportunity to impress the international community with the new Germany's organizational ability, its peaceful intentions, and its prosperity. As Secretary of the German Organizing Committee for the 1936 Games, Dr. Carl Diem was the German official primarily responsible for making the Berlin Olympics possible and successful.

Carl Diem's historical legacy remains clouded in controversy. To his advantage, Diem could claim that he was never a member of the Nazi Party. Also, unlike his colleague Theodor Lewald, President of the German Organizing Committee, Diem was opposed to the Nazification of German sport. Diem held staunchly to the position that sport, and specifically the Olympic ideal, should be separate from the realm of politics.

Yet despite Diem's ideological position, the 1936 Games evidenced an unprecedented fusion of sports and politics. Diem's enormous organizational talent and scholarly knowledge of the Olympic movement was co-opted by the Nazi propaganda machine, which took full credit for the success of the 1936 Games. Moreover, Diem's denial of Nazi intentions in 1936 is contrasted by his later role in defending one of the final bastions of Nazi resistance against the Soviet conquest of Berlin. In early 1945, as Hitler Youth prepared for the armed defence of the Olympic Stadium and the Reich sportfeld, Diem delivered a passionate speech to these young men in order to lift their morale for the final cataclysmic battle.

Shortly after 1945, Diem was quickly rehabilitated in the world of German and international sports. He helped found and became rector of the German Institute for Sport in Cologne in 1947. He was also invited as an honored guest of the International Olympic Committee at the 1948 Games in London, although no German team was invited to compete.

This paper examines how Diem navigated between different eras in German history (Weimar Democracy, Nazism, and the Federal Republic) all the time holding firmly to the principle of the autonomous status of German sport. Because Diem's career as an administrator and scholar in the German sports movement started well before the Nazi rise to power, and lasted well beyond the collapse of Nazism to the early 1960s, he is an ideal figure to examine both the "Nazification" as well as the "Denazification" of German sport. It argues that Carl Diem, while neither a Nazi Party

member nor a war criminal as defined in the Nuremberg Trials, contributed his personal talent to the success of the 1936 Nazi Olympics, one of the propaganda triumphs in the early years of Nazi rule. Further, denazification proceedings in post World-War II Germany became bogged down in definitions of German guilt which focused heavily on membership in the Nazi Party and its organs, often ignoring the culpability of non-party members who collaborated with the regime.

This paper uses the diaries of Carl Diem and his wife Liselott from the period 1945 to 1947, as well as other documents and correspondence from the Carl Diem Archive in Cologne, Germany. It also uses records from the National Archives concerning denazification proceedings in the American and British sectors of occupied Germany in order to assess Diem's defence of his contributions to Nazi Germany.