

Gretel Bergmann

born 1914



The Film

Berlin 36
(2009, Kaspar Heidelbach)



Germany 1936.

Berlin is hosting the Olympic Games.
Hitler wants his athletes to demonstrate to
the world the superiority of the Aryan race.

There's just one problem.

Gretel Bergmann is one of his
best gold medal contenders...

...and she's Jewish.

A KASPAR HEIDELBACH FILM

BERLIN 36

BASED ON A TRUE STORY

CORINTH FILMS AND BETA CINEMA PRESENTS A GEMINI FILM EYEWORKS PRODUCTION IN CO-PRODUCTION WITH NDR DEGETO FILM AND BETA FILM
SUPPORTED BY NORDMEDIA FONDS FILMSTIFTUNG NRW FILMFÖRDERUNG HAMBURG SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN DFF MEDIA
KAROLINE HERFURTH SEBASTIAN URZENDOWSKY AXEL PRAHL ROBERT GALLINOWSKI THOMAS THIEME JOHANN VON BULOW AUGUST ZIRNER
CASTING ANJA DIHRBERG LINE PRODUCER KLAUS RETTIG SOUND SILVAIN REMY COSTUME DESIGN LUCIA FAUST MAKE UP DELIA MUNDELEIN HORST ALLERT
MUSIC COMPOSED BY ARNO STEFFEN EDITING HEDY ALTSCHILLER PRODUCTION DESIGN GÖTZ WEIDNER DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY ACHIM POULHEIM
BASED ON THE IDEA OF ERIC FRIEDLER SCREENPLAY LOTHAR KURZAWA CO-PRODUCERS DORIS J. HEINZE JORN KLAMROTH
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER TIM ROSTOCK PRODUCED BY GERHARD SCHMIDT DIRECTED BY KASPAR HEIDELBACH

CORINTH FILMS NORDMEDIA FILMSTIFTUNG NRW FILMFÖRDERUNG HAMBURG SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN DFF MEDIA NDR ARD Degeto BETA SCARLETT CORINTH FILMS

The Questions

Berlin 36 raises the questions:

- How good was Gretel Bergmann?
- How did Germany really treat her?
- Did America threaten boycott if she was excluded?
- Did the Germans know Dora Ratjen was really a man? Did anyone suspect?
- Did Gretel and Dora become friends?



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Early Years

- Bergmann was born in Laupheim, South Germany in 1914
- In 1931, she set German high jump record of 1.51 at the South German Championships
- Once Nazis took power in 1933 she was expelled from her club for being Jewish
- That April, her parents sent her to the UK
- She won the British high jump Championship with 1.55.



America intervenes

- By 1934, America was threatening an Olympic boycott if Jews excluded from German team
- Germany forced Bergmann to return to Germany by threatening family members
- She returned and was allowed to prepare for the 1936 Olympic Games.
- On 30 June 1936, one month before the Olympics, she tied the German record, at 1.60m
- Two weeks before the opening of the Olympics, once the Americans were on ship bound for the Games, Bergmann's record was struck from the book and she was removed from the national team for "under-performance"
- She was replaced by Dora Ratjen.



Gretel Bergmann interview



▲ In 1937 Gretel Bergmann won the American championship in the high jump and shot-put. She retired from competition after she again won the U.S. women's high jump championship in 1938. Ulm, Germany, ca. 1933. —USHMM #21713/Courtesy of Margaret (Gretel Bergman) Lambert

Did the Germans know Ratjen was male?

- No – this was only noticed by a train guard in 1938, shortly after Ratjen had won the European Championships with a world record 1.67
- Ratjen had been declared a boy at birth by the midwife, but 5 minutes later she said “No, she’s a girl”
- Christened Dora, raised as a girl, realised at 11 or 12 he was a boy
- None of her team-mates suspected – just thought it strange that she was too shy to shower in company



After 1936

- When told she couldn't compete in the 1936 Olympics:
- "I had so much fury. I went home and planned to come to the United States" (interviewed, 2009)
- In 1937 Bergmann emigrated to USA and lived in New York City
- In 1938 married Bruno Lambert, a doctor. As at 2009, he was 99, and they had been married 71 years
- In 1937, she won the US women's high jump and shotput championships
- In 1938 she again won the high jump
- Ended sports career at outbreak of World War II.
- In 1942, she received United States citizenship.

Epilogue

- In 1995 a Berlin stadium was named the Gretel Bergmann Sports Arena. Bergmann did not attend the ceremony
- The stadium in her birth place, Laupheim, from which she had been barred in the 1930s, was named after her in 1999. Bergmann attended the dedication.
 - She said: "I was not going to participate, but when I was told that they were naming the facilities for me so that when young people ask, 'Who was Gretel Bergmann?' they will be told my story, and the story of those times. I felt it was important to remember, and so I agreed to return to the place I swore I'd never go again."
- In 2009, the German track and field association restored her German record into the record books and also requested that she be inducted into the Germany Sport Hall of Fame.

