



That Dark Day In Munich

And the fight to keep alive a flame for humanity

By Dina Diamond

The Olympic Games is depicted as representing all that is good in the world. That no matter who you are, where you were born, what religion you practice, what race or ethnic group you belong to or identify with, everyone comes together in hope, camaraderie and sportsmanship to compete at whatever sporting skill they were blessed to master. It is for this reason that the heinous terrorist attack and cold-blooded murder of 11 members of the Israeli Olympic team by Palestinian terrorists at the 1972 Olympic Games in Munich was unprecedented, unexpected and unfathomable.

The Munich Massacre scarred the psyche of a nation robbed of its young sportsmen. It also forever tarnished

the shine of this iconic global sporting event and damaged the vision of peace and unity that this age-old gathering of nations is supposed represent.

The Athletes

At about 4:30am on 5 September 1972, eight tracksuit-clad members of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) terrorist group, Black September, aided by West German neo-Nazis, broke into the Olympic Village and took 11 Israeli athletes and coaches hostage. Their plan was to trade these hostages of the Israeli team for 234 Palestinian prisoners serving sentences in Israeli jails, along with two West German insurgents held in West German prisons, Andreas Baader and Ulrike Meinhof. Baader and Meinhof were founders of the West German Red

Army Faction. The terrorists almost immediately killed two hostages who resisted, Moshe Weinberg, the wrestling coach, whose intervention allowed one of the wrestlers to escape, and Yossef Romano, a Libyan-born Israeli weightlifter, a veteran of the Six Day War and interior decorator by profession, who had three daughters and a wife, Ilana. Yossef attacked and wounded one of the terrorists and his cohort shot Romano four times and then castrated him. He bled to death in front of his teammates. Ironically, he had ruptured a tendon in his knee earlier and was due to fly home to Israel for an operation the next day. Other hostages included: Yossef Gutfreund wrestling referee; sharpshooting coach Kehat Shorr; track and field coach Amitzur Shapira; fencing master Andre Spitzer; weightlifting judge Yakov Springer; wrestlers Eliezer Halfin

IN REMEMBRANCE OF THE VICTIMS OF THE TERRORIST ATTACK AGAINST THE ISRAELI MEN'S TEAM AT THE 1972 MUNICH OLYMPICS



Killed resisting the terrorist attack on the Israeli Men's Dormitory
L-R: Moshe Weinberg 33, wrestling coach; Yossef Romano 31, weightlifter

Killed by fragmentation grenade, flames and smoke inhalation while bound in the first helicopter
L-R: David Berger 28, weightlifter; Eliezer Halfin 24, wrestler; Ze'ev Friedman 28, weightlifter; Yaakov Springer 51, weightlifting judge



Killed by close range automatic rifle fire while bound in the second helicopter
L-R: Amitzur Shapira 40, track coach; Kehat Shorr 53, shooting coach; Mark Slavin 18, wrestler; Andre Spitzer 27, fencing coach; Yossef Gutfreund 40, wrestling referee

Killed in rescue effort
Anton Fliiegerbauer 32, BDR police

and Mark Slavin; and weightlifters David Berger and Ze'ev Friedman. Berger was an expatriate American with dual citizenship. Slavin, at 18, the youngest of the hostages, had only arrived in Israel from the Soviet Union four months before the Olympic Games began.

“They’re All Gone”

The subsequent standoff in the Olympic Village lasted for almost 18 hours. Several of the hostages were beaten, some until their bones snapped. After negotiation with the terrorists by Munich police chief Manfred Schreiber and Bruno Merk, Interior Minister of Bavaria, it was agreed that the kidnappers along with their nine remaining hostages would be transferred by helicopter to the military airport of Fürstenfeldbruck, a NATO airbase, ostensibly to board a plane bound for an undetermined Arab country. The German authorities had planned to ambush them at the airport but were unprepared, ill-equipped and undermanned to carry out such an operation. The snipers used in the operation were not military-trained and were mere civilians who ‘shot well at competitions’. The rescue attempt failed dramatically when a gun fight broke out at the airfield. All of the Israeli

hostages were killed. Four of them were shot, then incinerated when one of the terrorists detonated a grenade inside the helicopter in which the hostages were sitting. The five remaining hostages were then machine-gunned to death.

“They have now said that there were 11 hostages. Two were killed in their rooms yesterday morning. Nine were killed at the airport tonight. They’re all gone”

After a series of conflicting reports and rumours, Jim McKay of American Broadcasting Company (ABC) announced the news at 3:24 a.m: “Our worst fears have been realised tonight. They have now said that there were 11 hostages. Two were killed in their rooms yesterday morning. Nine were killed at the airport tonight. They’re all gone.” The three terrorists that survived were arrested and imprisoned pending trial, but they were released by the West German government on 29 October

1972, in exchange for a hijacked Lufthansa jet, Flight 615.

The Olympic Games were suspended for several hours after the initial incident, but once the ordeal had ended, the International Olympic Committee president, Avery Brundage, declared that “the Games must go on”. A memorial ceremony was held in the Olympic stadium, and the Games resumed after a 24 hour stoppage. Since that memorial service, no further official memorials were held within subsequent Olympic Games for over 40 years, this despite the many pleas and arguments to support it.

The Fight To Gain Recognition

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) came under severe criticism in 2012, when London played host to the Olympics and which was the 40th anniversary of the Munich massacre. The IOC refused to hold a minute’s silence during the opening ceremony in memory of the slain Israeli athletes. They stated that this move could be viewed as political and would potentially upset the Arab countries competing if a minute’s silence was held. Jaques Rogge, the IOC

President said it would be “inappropriate”, although the opening ceremony included a memorial for the victims of the 7 July 2005 London bombings.

Ankie Spitzer, wife of slain fencing coach, Andre Spitzer addressed a hall of over 1000 people before the 2012 Olympics in London, including the Mayor, the American ambassador to London and a representative of Prince Charles. She was damning in her speech: “Shame on you International Olympic Committee for having forsaken 11 members of your Olympic family. And you did it only because they were Jews and Israelis. I have never taken the word discrimination in my mouth before, but now I am going to use that word. “You are discriminating against the 11 Israeli sportsmen who were brutally murdered because they were Israelis and Jews. Shame on you! Are you, IOC, only about power and money and politics, or are you about the Olympic ideals of peace and brotherhood and fair play? I still believe in the Olympic ideal — but I don’t think you do.”

“We waited for this for 44 years, to have this remembrance and recognition of our loves ones who were killed so brutally in Munich”

But Spitzer’s appeal, along with all the others, fell on deaf ears. The IOC was unmoved. Persistence however eventually paid off when recognition and relief finally came in 2014 as The IOC agreed to contribute \$250,000 towards a memorial to the murdered Israeli athletes and again in 2016 at the Olympics held in Rio de Janeiro, when IOC President, Thomas Bach, led a mourning ceremony for the 11 Israeli athletes and coaches slain in Munich.

Bach gave an emotional and fitting tribute by naming each of the 11 Israelis and the German policeman who died after the raid in the athletes’ village in Munich. He stated that the Munich massacre “was an attack not only on our



fellow Olympians, but also an assault on the values that the Olympic Village stands for.”

The minute of silence was held during the inauguration of a ‘place of mourning’ in the athletes’ village in Rio de Janeiro. Both present, Ankie Spitzer, widow of Andre, and Ilana Romano, widow of weightlifter Yossef Romano, were clearly moved by this moment that they had been fighting so hard, for so long, to achieve.

Ankie & Andre Spitzer: The Story

Ankie Spitzer in particular never gave up the fight to get the IOC to recognise the Minute of Silence. Ankie was born in Holland to a large Catholic family. As a child she was moved by the Diary of Anne Frank, a Dutch girl to whom she could relate, as it took place in Amsterdam. “Anna Frank was a Dutch girl, about my age and the book made such an enormous impression on me that then and there I decided that when I was done with high school, I would spend at least a year in Israel,” she said. “I had to know the Israelis’ history. I had to know what made them tick.”

Ankie finished school at age 15 and spent the next few years travelling and exploring the world, eventually arriving in Israel where she spent a year on kibbutz. The land and people spoke to her. After her travels, she decided

to return to Holland and took up the sport of fencing. It was here that she met Andre Spitzer, an Israeli fencing coach, who was sent to Holland by Israel’s fencing federation to further his own training. Andre was born in Transylvania, the part of Hungary that after World War I, was transferred to Romania. He was the son of Holocaust survivors who had survived the war in Nazi forced labour camps. After the war he made Aliyah, joined the army and then became a fencing coach.

The two struck up a relationship, fell in love and got married shortly thereafter. Ankie and Andre’s first marriage was a civil one in Holland, as Ankie was not Jewish. However, Ankie was determined to make her life with Andre in Israel and chose to convert to Judaism. She was the first convert of Israel’s Chief Rabbi, Shlomo Goren.

Her conversion was completed in 1971, and she and Andre remarried in a Jewish ceremony. “It was a very easy decision for me,” she said “My whole family was very supportive and very loving. They totally accepted it. I was 24.” A year later, Anouk, their daughter was born, two months before the Olympic Games.

Andre was informed that he had been selected as the fencing coach for the Olympic Games — every athlete’s dream. As Anouk was young Ankie suggested that they stay home. Andre was so excited that he insisted she

come with him. So Ankie flew to Holland with Anouk and left her in the care of her parents and her brother, who was a paediatrician.

Andre could have stayed at the Olympic Village, but men and women were separated in those days, and being a young married couple, they decided to rent a room in Munich instead.

Ankie stated, "Andre never slept in his room in the Olympic Village until the fatal night. But we did go into the village every day." Owing to the German Federal Government's security policies being dominated by a pacifist approach, adopted after World War II in order to try and change the image of its Nazi past, security at the Games was kept to a minimum with entrances and exits not being sufficiently guarded or protected.

This later turned out to be the very weakness that the terrorists exploited. Ankie checked in with her parents every night to see how Anouk was doing. Not long after they arrived, Ankie was told that Anouk was hospitalised with an incessant bout of crying. Even though no particular illness had been diagnosed, her brother, the paediatrician, was concerned. Ankie too was concerned, but did not share this with Andre until after the competition. Once their games were over, the Israeli delegation celebrated in a Munich beer hall. It was then that Ankie finally told Andre about Anouk and they left straight away to Holland to see her.

Andre wanted more time off, but he was granted only a few days. Anouk, as it turned out, was fine, but had to stay in the hospital for observation for another few days. Ankie stayed with her. Andre had to return to Munich and nearly missed his train. Ankie, not wanting him to miss out, drove at top speed to get him to the station on time. Ironically, if he had missed the train, there is no doubt that his fate would have been different.

The next morning Ankie was woken at 7am by her parents to tell her that terrorists had infiltrated the Israeli building of the Olympic Village and were holding the athletes hostage. Andre was one of the hostages. Ankie wanted

to go back to Munich immediately, but she was told by the Israeli ambassador that she would not get in as there are thousands of people trying to get in. It was the first time that the Olympics had been televised live, so the terror and horror played out in front of a live international audience. Ankie felt helpless. Sitting in a Dutch hospital, there was nothing she could do but listen to the radio and watch the events unfold on the television.

from the crisis team.

"I could see that he didn't have his glasses on and I knew that he couldn't see anything. He was so humiliated, there with his hands tied behind his back and a terrorist holding him. He said that everyone was okay except for one person and they asked him who it was, and he said something, and he was pushed back into the room, and I could see him being hit in the back, and that was the last time I saw him."



Widows Ilana Romano and Ankie Spitzer at the Rio Olympic memorial

"Shame on you International Olympic Committee for having forsaken 11 members of your Olympic family. And you did it only because they were Jews and Israelis"

Ankie recalls watching the TV, "It was about 05h30 and I saw the curtains at the window on the second floor were open and I suddenly saw Andre in front of the window. His hands were tied behind his back. He was the only one who spoke German, so he was the go-between. He had to answer questions from the crisis team, asking him what the situation was. I couldn't hear him on TV, but I heard that later

Ankie watched that evening with her family when the helicopters arrived to take the terrorists and hostages to the nearby airport six minutes away. She watched as shooting broke out. She heard the gunfire and saw one of the helicopters go up in flames.

A report by a German government official came out after midnight stating that all the Israelis had been saved, and all the terrorists had been killed. Though Ankie heard this, she instinctively knew that this was not the case. Her intuition was right, confirmed only later at 3:10am by ABC sportscaster, Jim McKay.

Ankie, aided by the Israeli ambassador, organised her trip back to Munich at 4am. She made it back in time for the memorial service in a stadium of 80 000 people. She recalled how surreal it was, that despite what had just happened, athletes were going about their regular routines - running and jumping and

training, as if nothing had happened. Following the massacre, in Autumn 1972, Israel's Prime Minister, Golda Meir, authorised 'Operation Wrath of God', in which the members of the PLO and Black September who were in any way involved in the massacre, were systematically tracked down and assassinated by the Israeli intelligence and Mossad.

Ankie raised her daughter, became a successful journalist, remarried and eventually became a grandmother. However, she never forgot nor stopped fighting to ensure that the memory of her slain husband and that of his fellow coaches and Israeli team members were accorded the honour and respect due to them and their families. At the ceremony in Rio in 2016, Ankie said, "We waited for this for 44 years, to have this remembrance and recognition of our loves ones who were killed so brutally in Munich. We wanted them to be really accepted as members of the Olympic family. Now that President Bach had a Minute of Silence in the Olympic

Village, calling out the names of our loves ones, this is closure for us." Ilana Romano, wife of the murdered Israeli weightlifter Yossef Romano added: "I never believed it's going to come after 44 years. This is a moment of history." It is hoped that the 2020 Olympics to be held in Japan, will also rise to the occasion and honour the memory of the slain victims of Munich 1972 - but no confirmation has been given to date.

An Eternal Flame

The dark clouds of the Munich Massacre of September 1972 still hang heavily above our heads. They remain a sober reminder that there are twisted individuals and groups who will stop at nothing. Driven by the venom of hatred, they will cross even the traditionally sacrosanct borders - the neutral sports grounds that serve to bridge people and nations and encourage peace amongst men - in order to to achieve their despicable ends. It is for this very reason that the lights

of the souls extinguished in Munich at the 1972 Olympics be remembered at all subsequent Olympic Games - and their memories commemorated and perpetuated through the pause of the Moment of Silence - The Moment serving as an essential reminder of the horrors of terrorism, the need to be vigilant against it and of mankind's duty to reaffirm the value and sacred dignity of human life.

To establish this for perpetuity would be a victory for good. To neglect to do so would be to perpetuate a stain on the Olympics and have this painful wound rupture every four years, as the Olympic Games takes centre stage. In the true spirit of the Olympics, the memories of the victims of Munich 1972 must live forever, an eternal flame, casting a beacon of light for all humanity.

Dina Diamond, a writer, mom, marketer, banker, emcee. She dabbles in radio, spends time on various committees and is passionate about giving back to the community.

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