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 CORINTH FILMS PRESENTATION

BERLIN 36

“A fascinating real-life story about a most unusual friendship in Nazi Germany on the eve of the ’36 Olympics.” - THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER

"...a moving and thrilling film..." - SPIEGEL ONLINE

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PLOT SUMMARY
Based on the true story of Gretel Bergmann who unwittingly became the biggest threat to the Nazi Party in 1936. Berlin was hosting the summer Olympic Games and Gretel was one of Germany’s best gold medal contenders. She was also Jewish. Her skill and ethnicity undermined the Nazi belief that Aryans were the superior race, so the German authorities schemed to replace Gretel with another woman -- but “she” had a secret that, if uncovered, could be even more embarrassing to the Nazis.

YEAR OF PRODUCTION 2009

GENRE Period Drama

LANGUAGE German with English subtitles

LENGTH 100 minutes

Director Kaspar Heidelbach
Screenplay Lothar Kurzawa (from an idea by Eric Friedler)
Editor Hedy Altschiller
Art Director Achim Poulheim
Set Director Götz Weidner
Costumes Lucia Faust
Music Arno Steffen
Producer Gerhard Schmidt
SHORT SYNOPSIS - Berlin, 1936. The U.S. threatens to boycott the Olympic games because of Hitler’s racial policies. They insist that Nazi Germany allow Jews on their team, and specifically demand the participation of Jewish high jumper Gretel Bergmann (Karoline Herfurth), the leading high jumper of her time. The Nazis reluctantly decide to include her, but to make sure she doesn’t win a gold medal, they send in a rival, the unknown Marie Ketteler (Sebastian Urzendowsky). Their coach, a rabid Nazi, uses every means in the book to undermine Gretel’s preparations. Yet she consistently outscores her other competitors, including Marie. Two weeks before the games, Gretel is barred from participating; the Nazis’ goal to eliminate the team’s Jewish competitor -- yet still win a gold medal -- seems within reach. But Gretel and Marie have forged a strong friendship during their training. It is now up to Marie to decide if the Nazis’ plan will actually succeed… Based on a true story.

NOTE: The character of Marie Ketteler is based on Dora Ratjen.

FULL SYNOPSIS - Berlin, 1936. It is the year in which the Summer Olympics are going to be held for the first time in Germany. A young woman, Marie, is seen running through a forest. It is no ordinary jogging, however; Marie is training rigorously, unflaggingly, ambitiously. Her mother cannot figure out what Marie sees in this kind of training and why she’s so enthusiastic about sports. She has to push Marie to fulfill her duties on the farm, sometimes resorting to physical punishment.

Meanwhile, Reich Sport Leader Hans von Tscharmer und Osten is becoming worried about the performance of the German athletes at the coming Summer Olympics, which are to be carried out in Berlin in August 1936. Especially the women high jumpers are giving him cause to worry: the best German high jumper, Gretel Bergmann, the daughter of an industrialist, is Jewish. Although she left Germany for Great Britain at her father’s request and won the British Championship there, she is now supposed to return to Germany and take part in the games, as the U.S. government is threatening to boycott the games if Jewish athletes are banned from the competition. However, the Reich Sports Leader cannot bear to imagine that a Jew should win the title in high jumping. With his assistant Karl Ritter von Halt, he devises a deceitful plan and begins to search for potential rivals for Gretel Bergmann. Since the pressure imposed by the Americans is increasing, he agrees to let Gretel begin her training.

Upon her arrival in Germany, Gretel is greeted by her family, but feels uncomfortable being back in Germany. She knows what the mood is like in the country and refuses to jump for the Nazis. The Chairman of the Jewish Sports Association, Löwenstein, begs Gretel, precisely because she is Jewish, to take part in the Olympic Games. The prospect of her winning a gold medal would be a huge embarrass for the Nazis. After initial doubts, Gretel agrees and travels to the training camp. Reich Trainer Hans Waldmann, who sees no difference between Jews and Germans, welcomes her. Only their athletic performance counts. In the training camp, Gretel has to assert herself against her rivals Lilly and Thea. Even though they are athletically not up to snuff with her, they let her feel that they despise her and try to make her appear ridiculous.

Confronted by Gretel’s outstanding results, Tscharmer und Osten intensifies his search for a possible rival and discovers Marie. His assistant reports that Marie could turn into a highly delicate matter, but his boss dismisses all possible reasons for doubt and sends her off to the training camp as well. There she is forced to share a room with Gretel. At first the contact between the two rivals is frosty, but as the days go by, the two roommates become friends.
BERLIN 36

At various try-outs it turns out that all four high jumpers have reached the same level and jump higher than 1.55 meters. But only three of them can qualify for the games. Trainer Waldmann expressly praises Gretel for her style and criticizes Marie’s. He keeps asking for Marie’s health certificate, which has yet to be delivered. He is told to be patient...

One day, Waldmann is fired. The reason: he is not able to create a link between sports and politics. The more radical trainer Sigfrid Kulmbach, who toes the party line, is called in to replace Waldmann. He tries to sabotage Gretel with training runs, puts pressure on her, and prevents her from high jumping training. Nevertheless, Marie and Gretel are the only two to make it over 1.60 meters in a test jump.

A new incident disturbs the peace among the athletes: Gretel is locked into the showers by the other girls. As she tries to free herself, she discovers Marie in one of the shower cabins. Marie uses the opportunity to reveal her true identity. She is actually a man, who was forced by the Nazis to pass himself off as a woman. She confesses to Gretel that her violent mother had forced her from her earliest childhood to wear girls’ clothes, since she had wanted a daughter instead. Now Marie puts her hopes in the Nazis’ promise that she will be able to live as a man if she wins the gold medal.

Gretel is horrified and decides to inform the new trainer of this swindle, but stops at the last minute. Kulmbach seems to suspect that Marie has told Gretel the truth and interrogates both women. He makes it loud and clear to Gretel that he doesn’t want any “perverse rumors which could damage German sports.” Shortly thereafter he sends Gretel to the Württemberg Championships, where she is to gather experience in competition. Actually, however, he is following a wicked plan, since Gretel has a foot injury and is badly prepared through her training deficit. Gretel has to take part in the competition as soon as she arrives in Stuttgart, without being able to prepare herself for the event. In addition, the spectators loudly boo her. These circumstances weigh heavily on Gretel, and, sure enough, she does not jump higher than 1.42 meters on two tries. But her former trainer Hans Waldmann is also among the spectators. He gives her tips and encourages her. Finally Gretel sets a new German record and almost jumps a world record. This infuriates the Reich Sports Leader.

After her success, Gretel travels to her family and learns that her younger brother Walter got into a fight over her. Classmates had said bad things about her, says Walter. In the meantime, the Americans have decided not to boycott the games, and are now ready to head for Berlin. An American reporter asks Gretel for an interview. Gretel wants to use this opportunity to describe the true circumstances in Germany. But just before she sets out for the games, she receives an official rejection of her Olympics participation. The letter says that her performance was not good enough. Moreover, a rumor is put out that she has suffered an injury. Gretel is shocked and wants to tell all this to the reporter. But there is no interview: later she learns that the man was injured in a car accident. Then her trainer Kulmbach also shows up and puts pressure on her again, warning that something could happen to her family if she continues to defy instructions.

Finally, the women’s high jumping competition begins, without Gretel Bergmann. She is in the bleachers and watches as Marie makes it among the last four jumpers. But Marie has already brushed the bar twice. Before she gets ready for her third and decisive attempt, the two of them look each other in the eye...
Karoline Herfurth plays the high jumper Gretel Bergmann, whose outstanding accomplishments drove the Nazis to send in a "rival" to beat Gretel in the battle to qualify for the Olympics.

Born in Berlin in 1984, Karoline Herfurth studied at the renowned acting school "Ernst Busch" and is considered as one of the great young German talents of today. International audiences also know Karoline Herfurth through her participation in PERFUME – THE STORY OF A MURDERER and A YEAR AGO IN WINTER.

At the age of 15 she starred with Robert Stadlober in Hans-Christian Schmid's highly praised youth drama CRAZY (2000). One year later she took on a lead role in the German blockbuster GIRLS ON TOP (director: Dennis Gansel), which was followed in 2003 by the lead role in MEIN NAME IST BACH by Dominique de Rivaz. After the sequel GIRLS ON TOP 2 (director: Peter Gersina, 2004) Karoline attracted attention in Buket Alakus' women's football drama IN ANOTHER LEAGUE (2004) as the cancer-stricken Hayat. It was a role that she played with such sensitivity that she was awarded the Grimme Award for it in April 2008. IN ANOTHER LEAGUE was also honored with the Audience Prize at the 26th Max Ophüls Awards of 2004 and the Bernhard Wicki Award at the 16th International Filmfest Emden-Aurich-Norderney in 2005. Her talent as an actress, and her nearly inexhaustible energy and charisma, then steered her toward a further career high point: she played the "small" but unforgettable role of the "Mirabel Girl" in Tom Tykwer's bestseller adaptation PERFUME – THE STORY OF A MURDERER in 2006, a role with which she captured the attention of the international film branch.

Karoline then starred in Marc Rothemund's PORNORAMA (2007) and in the EMMY-Award nominated TV production "Das Wunder von Berlin," directed by Roland Suso Richter. In 2007 Karoline Herfurth was awarded the Deutscher Entertainment Preis (DIVA) as New Talent of the Year and the TV MOVIE Award, which was given for the first time. Moreover, she also won the Undine Award in 2007 as "Best young supporting actress in a feature film." In late 2008 Oscar winner Caroline Link's A YEAR AGO IN WINTER with Karoline Herfurth in the lead role came out in theaters. For her role in A YEAR AGO IN WINTER she won the Bavarian Film Award 2008 as best newcomer. In 2008 she also appeared in a supporting role next to Kate Winslet and Ralph Fiennes in Stephen Daldry's film THE READER, and stars in the upcoming Corinth Films release VINCENT WANTS TO SEA.
Sebastian Urzendowsky is compelling in the complex role of Marie Ketteler, who was forced first by her mother, and later by the Nazis, to pass off as a girl in order to win the high jumping gold medal instead of Gretel Bergmann at the 1936 Olympic Games.

The 24-year-old actor began gathering experience in front of film and TV cameras as a child. Born in Berlin, he was discovered by talent scouts at his school. At the age of eight he made his debut in the TV movie “Babysitter.” From 1997 to 2001 he also worked in children and youth theaters. His first major role was in Hendrik Handloetgen’s directorial debut PAUL IS DEAD (1998) inspired by the conspiracy theory surrounding the alleged auto accident of Paul McCartney in 1966. In the following years he starred in two “Tatort” episodes, and appeared in Dominik Graf’s Berlin Festival entry A MAP OF THE HEART, as well as in Hans-Christian Schmid’s DISTANT LIGHTS. He crafted an impressive performance as youthful child murderer Jürgen Bartsch in the film THE CHILD I NEVER WAS.

Urzendowsky made his real breakthrough with the lead role in Matthias Luthardt’s film PINGPONG, which was invited to the Cannes Film Festival in 2006 in the “Semaine de la Critique” series. Urzendowsky played 16-year-old Paul who, disconcerted by the sudden loss of his father, turns up at his uncle’s family and brings even more problems to the already crumbling family idyll. He seems to be predestined for difficult, unusual roles, for example as a young pedophile in the TV thriller “Guter Junge” alongside Klaus J. Behrendt and as Max in Ed Herzog’s feature film SCHWESTERHERZ (2006) next to Heike Makatsch and Anna Maria Mühe. In Stefan Ruzowitzky’s World War II drama THE COUNTERFEITERS Sebastian Urzendowsky plays the Russian concentration camp inmate Kolya Karloff, who is forced to work in the counterfeiters’ workshop. The film was awarded an Oscar® as “Best Foreign-Language Film.”

Most recently Sebastian Urzendowsky was seen on the big screen in Max Färberböck’s highly noted feature film A WOMAN IN BERLIN (2008) as a young soldier.
Axel Prahl plays the track-and-field trainer Hans Waldmann, who is responsible for leading the German female high jumpers to Olympic honors at the 1936 Olympics. He is one of the few who sticks up for Gretel Bergmann and encourages her to not let herself be browbeaten by the Nazis.

Prahl, born in Eutin, East Holstein, on 26 March 1960, studied acting in Kiel from 1982 to 1985. After his training he obtained a post at the SchleswigHolsteinisches Landestheater, and was later hired by renowned stages in Berlin: the Renaissance Theater, the GRIPS Children’s and Youth Theater, as well as the Kammerspiele of the Deutsches Theater. There he met the director Andreas Dresen, who staged the play "Im Zeugenstand." This approach to the history of the “Red Army” terrorist group is his first collaboration with Dresen.

In 1999 he starred in NIGHTSHAPES, the first of four feature films directed by Andreas Dresen. He made his breakthrough as an actor in 2001 in his first film lead role in Dresen’s “Policewoman”, for which he was awarded the Grimme Award in Gold. This success continued in films such as "Die Hoffnung stirbt zuletzt" (2001, director: Marc Rothemund, Grimme Award in Gold as "Best Actor," Bavarian Film Award as "Best Lead Actor") and the international surprise success GRILL POINT (2001, director: Andreas Dresen, awarded the Silver Bear, the German Film Award, the Bavarian Film Award and several international awards). Since October 2002 Axel Prahl can also be seen as "Tatort" inspector.
In BERLIN '36 Thomas Thieme portrays the Reichs Sports Leader Hans von Tschammer und Osten, a member of the German Olympic Committee, which organized the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin. In order to prevent the Jewish girl Gretel Bergman from possibly winning a medal in high jumping, he orders that Marie Ketteler be inducted into the training team.

Thomas Thieme was born in Weimar in 1948 and studied at the Staatliche Schauspielschule in Berlin. He played a number of title roles from “King Lear” to “Faust” at stages such as the Schauspiel Frankfurt am Main, the Vienna Burgtheater, the Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz in Berlin and the Deutsches Schauspielhaus in Hamburg, where he was honored with the “Actor of the Year” award for his role as Richard III in “Schlachten!” in 2000. Most recently Thieme starred in the title role of “Molière. Eine Passion” (director: Luk Perceval) at the Schaubühne Berlin.

Thieme made a name for himself at the international level with his role as “Bruno Hempf” in Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck’s THE LIFE OF OTHERS, which was awarded the Oscar® as “Best Foreign-Language Film” in 2007, as well as in DOWNFALL (director: Oliver Hirschbiegel, Oscar short-list 2004). He was also seen in TAKING SIDES (director: István Szabó, 2000) and FAT WORLD (director: Jan Schütte, 1997) and, recently, in Hermine Huntgeburth’s EFFI BRIEST.
Gerhard Schmidt was born in Berlin in 1941, and won the photokina award for his first short film on Man Ray. He then made further short films, documentaries, satirical programs, including the early works of Wolf Wondratschek, Günther Wallraff, Bernd Schadewalt, Jan de Bont, Kaspar Heidelbach and Richard Curtis.

Next to more than 1000 TV programs, TV movies and TV series, he produced about 50 international TV movies and feature films, often in English.

Gemini Film has been a partner of the international Eyeworks Group since 2008.

**FILMOGRAPHY** (selection)

**LE SILENCE DE LORNA**, Director: Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne  
**THE WHIPPING BOY**, Director: Sid McCartney  
**BOAT TRIP**, Director: Mort Nathan  
**INVESTIGATING SEX**, Director: Alan Rudolph  
**BARRACUDA**, Director: Philippe Haim  
**MY FRIEND JOE**, Director: Chris Bould  
**PIZZA COLONIA**, Director: Klaus Emmerich  
**ITINERAIRES D’UN ENFANT GATE**, Director: Claude Lelouch  
**WHEREEVER YOU ARE**, Director: Kryzstof Zanussi  
**IN INNIGER FEINDSCHAFT** (TV), Director: Claude Faraldo

**Awards** (Selection)

German Film Award, Adolf Grimme Award, Cable Ace Award, Awards at the festivals of Berlin, Cannes, Venice, Oberhausen, Mannheim, Locarno, Lodz, Edinburgh a.o.
Kaspar Heidelbach
Director

Kaspar Heidelbach was born in Tettnang on Lake Constance in 1954. After studies in Art History and Theater, Film and Television Sciences at the University of Cologne, he was co-author of various TV series, including popular crime dramas such as "Tatort," "A Case for two" and "Wolff’s Turf" before he began directing episodes of "Lindenstrasse." He first drew attention with the six-part TV series "Leo und Charlotte" in 1991. Heidelbach achieved recognition not only through several of his "Tatort" episodes but also through the film "Nie mehr zweite Liga," which he directed in 2000 starring Peter Lohmeyer, Jochen Nickel and Dietmar Bär. Heidelbach further garnered attention with his lavish, historical, and exciting dramas "A Light in Dark Places" (2003), for which he won the Bavarian Television Award and the Grimme Award, as well as "Der Untergang der Pamir" (2006). Most recently Kaspar Heidelbach directed both the successful family comedy "Theo, Agnes, Bibi und die anderen" (2007) as well as the relationship drama "Die Katze" with Götz George and Hannelore Hoger in the lead roles, which had its premiere in fall 2007 at the Hamburg Film Festival. In spring 2008 Heidelbach directed "Es liegt mir auf der Zunge" in which Jan Josef Liefers plays the first TV chef of the then young West Germany, Clemens Wilmenrod.

Following BERLIN '36, Heidelbach has begun working on his next feature film BESONDERE SCHWERE DER SCHULD, which will be shot in spring 2010 with Götz George in the lead role.

Lothar Kurzawa
Screenplay

Lothar Kurzawa studied philosophy and art history in Marburg and Paris. In 1977 he went to Hamburg with Volker Einrauch, whom he had met during his studies. There he did his civil service and later worked on the side as a film critic. Since 1981 Kurzawa has been working as author and producer. In 1985 he founded together with Volker Einrauch the film company Josefine Film Produktion, which director Hermine Huntgeburt joined a few years later. Kurzawa made a name for himself with, among other things, the screenplays to the feature films DIE MUTTER DES KILLERS (1997) with Dieter Landuris and Peter Lohmeyer in the lead roles, as well as the thriller GANGSTER (2000).

He was nominated for the German Television Award in 2000 for his script to "Nie mehr zweite Liga" and, in 2007, won the award for Best Script at the Festival International du Film Policier de Liège for "Der andere Junge". Lothar Kurzawa also works on the side as a translator of books by, for example, Jean F. Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard and Jean-Luc Godard.
What was your first reaction when you heard about the true story of Gretel Bergmann?

At first, I simply couldn’t believe it. Then I found it incredibly fascinating that a man was smuggled into the women’s team. I kept thinking about all kinds of problems he would have had, and how he could have kept this a secret, but luckily scriptwriter Lothar Kurzawa also had many ideas about this. We then dramatized the story, to a certain extent, and added a few more conflicts.

What was your intention in tackling the story of BERLIN '36?

There were three aspects for me: the true story, the historical surroundings and the drama. It was a rare gift that one of the persons involved is still alive today. I visited Gretel Bergmann last year in New York. I was very impressed, since she was a role model for us. In addition, it was also a lot of fun for me to create an artificial world and to set a finale in the Olympic Stadium.

After all your research, how would you describe the feeling of that time?

Independently of the regime, the people were proud that the Olympic Games could take place in Germany.

How did Gretel Bergmann react when she learned that a film about her was to be shot?

She has two sons, and one of them is a producer in California. The Americans once considered filming the story. But she said that if someone was to make it, then it had to be someone from Germany. After she gave her asset, she was exceptionally curious to see the film. She still has a wristwatch with German time, and when we paid her a visit, she cooked for us. Veal goulash, spaetzle and cucumber salad; a typical Swabian meal.
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How did you decide on who to cast for the two lead roles?

I had been following the career of Karoline Herfurth since the very beginning. She was our first choice and I was happy that she immediately accepted. The difficult part, however, was casting the boy who was supposed to play a girl. I felt from the very start that you could not fake it and cast a girl who looked boyish. Sebastian Urzendowsky was my choice since he’s a good actor. When you see the person he plays in the original, Sebastian looks even more feminine.

Does the religious and racial aspect still play as big a role as back then?

When you hear what’s going on in our sports arenas here and in Italy, then it becomes clear that racism is still always latently present, only that it is aimed at Blacks, unfortunately.

Conversation with Producer Gerhard Schmidt

You’ve known director Kaspar Heidelbach for many years now. Is your friendship the basis for the good collaboration on your latest film project?

I’ve known Kaspar Heidelbach for over 35 years now. I was producer and director back then, and he began as a chauffeur, then became assistant director and later took on the direction of many satirical programs that we made at that time. In 1992 we made the film POLSKI CRASH together, which was originally supposed to come out in the theaters. Then we also made the highly praised six-part TV series "Leo und Charlotte" with Kaspar Heidelbach. Two years ago, we did “Die Katze,” a TV movie with Götz George and Hannelore Hoger. It is thus the story of a friendship in which we did lots of television together and two feature films.
It is not easy to recreate the 1930s. How did you approach this task?

The film plays in 1935/36. That is a time that hardly ever occurs in feature films. Most of the films show the period beginning after the Crystal Night. In 1935 Germany was, from the outside at least, a very peaceful and even cheerful land. The Germans were eagerly looking forward to the Olympic Games and tried not to think of the Nazi dictatorship. We thus had to approach the topic carefully and avoid the usual Nazi clichés. We had to show another Germany.

What was the greatest challenge regarding the visual realization?

The biggest problem was in any event the Olympic Stadium. We planned these scenes together with Scanline eight months before shooting. The CGI recordings are very convincing. At the end, you can even see the zeppelin floating over the Olympic Stadium. That was important to us for creating the right atmosphere.

Did you also consult specialists for their advice?

Yes. Our two protagonists were trained for several months by the former second-place Olympics winner in Mexico Klaus Beer. The two actors developed such pride in their abilities that they came to within ten centimeters of the top heights of that time. Back then, 1.60 meters was the maximum. You were an Olympic winner for that. The journalist Volker Kluge also gave us a lot of support. He is an Olympics specialist. He coached Gretel Bergmann at the games in Atlanta, after the German National Olympic Committee, NOK, had expressly invited her there.

In a feature film, you have to dramatize more than recount at certain passages. To what extent does the film correspond to reality?

The entire story happened like that – even the fact that the two of them were put in the same room at the training camp. What we changed is that Gretel Bergmann accepted the standing-room tickets for the competition which had been offered her. We made the close of the film more dramatic and speeded up the preliminary history a bit. The story is already unbelievable enough in reality. That the Nazi officials even dared to risk such a swindle shows how unscrupulous they were. Gretel Bergmann knows the script and understands that we sometimes had to compress things. But so little has been changed that we can say: this film is based on a true story.

If you had to characterize the film in a nutshell, how would you formulate this?

BERLIN '36 tells the story of an extraordinary friendship in a difficult time. While the Nazis hoped that the two rivals would battle one another, they had the courage to become friends.
Wherein lies the uniqueness in playing a historical figure like your role as Gretel Bergmann?

The task that I impose on myself whenever I have to portray a historical figure is to achieve historical accuracy. I love historical films because they tell stories which are based on actual events. But to create this picture authentically, it is my duty to find my way into the special way of thinking, dreaming, speaking, moving and living at that time. Particularly with a film like BERLIN '36, which relates such an important moment of German history, it is important for me to be as authentic as possible. For I feel that the perception of the past is the basis for the behavior of each and every one of us in the present. And I have an almost historical responsibility to show things not in the wrong light or stamped by a modern perspective. It has to be so, that an eyewitness would say: "Yes, that’s how it was back then."

How did you prepare yourself for the portrayal of Gretel Bergmann?

Obviously I got a lot of information from the scriptwriter and the director. But I also read a lot about that time and tried to understand the people and their lives back then. I saw interviews with and documentaries on Gretel Bergmann, gathered together as many photos from the time as I could find, put together a Gretel Bergmann/1930s file, and watched the Leni Riefenstahl films on the Olympics once again.

And, of course, my most valuable source, the biography, which I read over and over again, and from which I pasted certain passages next to the scenes in the script...

Did the special sports training support you in fashioning your role? And to what extent was it helpful, not only intellectually but possibly also athletically, to experience your own limits?

Oh yes! I would never have imagined having to take on historical high-jumping. And of course it helped me to find my way into the character. The struggle for every centimeter, the ambition to make it higher and higher, and the feeling you have when you win or fail. Of course, I could only imagine how Gretel Bergmann leapt - I was still 32 centimeters behind her.
What did you concentrate on mostly in your research on the character of Marie Ketteler?

For me, the research revolved not directly on the relationship between Gretel Bergmann and Marie Ketteler, but also around how someone feels who is forced to live in another body. The question was also: What went wrong in that family? I met with the sexual psychologist Dr. Ahlers, who was also familiar with this case since his mentor had written about it.

To what extent was there an athletic competition between you and Karoline Herfurth during the high jumping training?

The athletic competition wasn’t so pronounced, even though we wanted to bring it off as well as possible. As a boy, I obviously always leapt a bit higher, since I simply have a different build than Karoline Herfurth. It was also important to learn a different jumping technique. We did a fitness program with the track-and-field athlete Klaus Beer, who won the silver medal in Mexico City in 1968, and had to learn the scissors jump. That was more difficult for Karoline, since she had to achieve the technically better results for her role, and, in the end, also ended up technically jumping the best. For me, it was only important to reach one level and to even deliberately incorporate mistakes.

Did you have to adapt your body in any other way?

I didn’t have my hair cut before and had “walking” training with a model who showed me how to walk in high heels so that it looks as natural as possible. I also had to learn how to move in dresses. It is a man that I play, but he embodies a woman. So I didn’t want to move around exaggeratedly. However, I was intent on showing that he had acquired a certain feminine physicalness and was able to move comfortably in dresses and high-heeled shoes. In sports, however, he uses the full strength that he has as a man. In small things, such as brushing his hair out of his face, we can see his background coming through. This conflict was exciting.

In the film he conceals his true identity for a very long time. Is this theoretically plausible or total fiction?

I think that back then nobody would ever have imagined that someone could pass himself off as a woman. Today such an idea is more plausible. Back then no one questioned a person’s sexuality.
Gretel Bergmann was born in Laupheim near Ulm on 12 April 1914. She began her athletic career there as a high jumper. She was also a good shot-putter, tennis player and skier. In 1933 she was barred from her association, the Ulmer Fussball-Verein 1894, on account of her Jewish background. She emigrated to London and became British Master in 1934. She leapt the bar at 1.55 meters.

At the request of the Nazis, who feared that the U.S. and other important nations would withdraw their participation in the 1936 Summer Olympics in Berlin if German Jews were not allowed to participate, Gretel Bergmann returned from London. She was allowed to prepare in a training camp along with 20 other Jewish athletes.Shortly thereafter she won the Württemberg Championship, but was denied a starting slot at the Olympics. In a letter of 16 July 1936, sent one day after the Americans had boarded a ship for the journey to Berlin, she was informed that her achievements were allegedly unsatisfactory – even though she had set a German record with 1.60 meters shortly before and led that year’s list of the 30 best women high jumpers. Disillusioned, she emigrated to the U.S. in 1937 and married the physician Bruno Lambert. Lambert worked as an internist in the New York City borough of Queens for many years. Before, he had been a sprinter. The couple had met in a training camp. In the U.S. Gretel Bergmann won the high jumping championships as Margaret Bergmann-Lambert in 1937 and 1938, and the shot-putting competition in 1937 as well. In 1942 she became an American citizen.

In 1996 Margaret Bergmann-Lambert was inducted in the “National Jewish Sports Hall of Fame.” In 1999 she obtained the Georg von Opel Award, which is presented to athletes who have actively contributed to the welfare of society or who had been active without the expectation of material rewards. A sports hall in Berlin and another in her hometown of Laupheim were named after her. The Washington Holocaust Museum has included in its collections a four-minute-long report of the 1936 Gretel Bergmann affair spoken by Bergmann herself. She still lives in New York today with her husband Bruno.

In 2004, when asked how far she thought she might have gotten at the Olympics, Bergmann replied: “Gold, it couldn’t have been anything else. Gold. The more furious I was, the higher I jumped.” She added: “To show what a Jewish girl was capable of in front of 100,000 people – that would have been sheer heaven.”
The first Olympic Games of modern times took place in Athens in 1896. Back then, only nine disciplines were allowed, and 43 contests were held. From the very start, France’s Pierre de Coubertin, who is considered creator of the modern-day Olympic Games, proclaimed the motto: “All types of sports, all nations.” He demanded that the games should serve peaceful purposes and not be politicall-driven. They were to promote international understanding and tolerance among nations. As their symbol, he proposed in 1913 the five interlocked Olympic rings, which represent unity and harmony among the five continents. When he presented the rings to his colleagues of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), Pierre de Coubertin said: “Its form is to be understood symbolically. The rings represent the five corners of the earth that are united in the Olympic movement; their six colors correspond to those of all the national flags of the present-day world.” This symbol was first seen at the Olympic games of Antwerp in 1920, since the games of 1916 had been canceled due to World War I.

On 13 May 1931 the President of the International Olympic Committee, Count Henri de Baillet-Latour, announced the official result of the vote for the assignment of the XI Olympic Summer Games. Berlin obtained 43 votes and Barcelona 16. There were eight abstentions. Just as today, the countries selected to carry out the games had to uphold the Olympic idea. This met with considerable resistance among the National Socialist German Workers’ Party (NSDAP), however. The humanistic goals of the Olympics stood in crude contrast with the nationalistic world view. The idea of the unification of the peoples of the earth especially displeased the NSDAP, since it ran counter to the party’s own understanding of the dominance of one nation and one race. But since the decision to carry out the Summer Olympics in Berlin for the first time – and the Winter Olympics in Garmisch-Partenkirchen – was irrevocable, the Nazis decided to use the games for their purposes.

On 30 January 1933 Adolf Hitler came to power, and in March the “Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda,” headed by Dr. Joseph Goebbels, was founded. A little over a year later, on 27 July 1934, the “German Reich Society for Gymnastics” was founded, and was headed by Reich Sports Leader Hans von Tschammer und Osten. He was also president of the German Olympic Committee. All other sports associations that had existed previously lost their independent status – sports had thus also been brought into line with Nazi ideology.

As time went by and the discrimination and persecution of German Jews provoked a wave of outrage, especially in the United States, the Americans threatened to boycott Berlin as Olympic site. Under international pressure, the Nazis attempted to present themselves to the world as worldly and tolerant. But the IOC repeatedly demanded a guarantee from the German regime that German Jews would be able to take part in the Olympics. Now the Nazi leadership had to react so as not to expose
THE BERLIN OLYMPICS

Germany to the shame of losing the Games. They promised to remove propaganda signs with the text "Jews undesired," confirmed free access to the Games for "all races and confessions," as well as the acceptance of a politically independent organization committee. Since the Americans initially put no faith in the promises of the Germans, they sent Olympic Committee head Avery Brundage to Germany in 1934 to get an impression of the situation there. After his six-day visit there he announced that the Games were in the right hands. Among his documented statements is: "The Games belong to the athletes and not to the politicians." However, Brundage was not impartial: he had shown no interest in the fate of the Jewish population of Germany from the very start. He ignored reports about the discrimination of Jewish athletes and even before his journey to Germany, had endorsed the Olympics under the swastika, without any reservations. Moreover, he supported the suspension of two of the American sprinters who had qualified for the Games. Sam Stoller and Marty Glickman, the only two Jews in the U.S. team of the 4 x 100 meter relay were suspended. And it is undeniable that German Jewish athletes were prevented from acceding to the Olympic Games. The Germans had promised Brundage that 21 Jewish athletes had been invited to the training camp. Ultimately, only the fencer and "half Jew" Helene Mayer, who lived in the United States, was allowed to take part in the Olympic team at the summer games, and the ice hockey player Rudi Ball was nominated. Although protest from Prague emigrés as well as French newspapers and a specially formed "Comité international pour le respect de l’esprit olympique" continued to warn the world against carrying out the games in Berlin, they were no longer able to prevent them from taking place. The IOC was determined to believe the organizers.

The Olympic Summer Games in Berlin were held from 1 to 16 August 1936 (Winter games: 6 to 16 February) and were considered brilliantly organized. Even the Germany-critical "New York Times" called them the "greatest sports show in history," which was seen by 3.7 million people. Adolf Hitler opened the games on August 1, 1936, in front of no fewer than 120,000 people. As the nations marched by, the Germans gave the Hitler salute. However, since it is practically the same as the Olympic salute (also called Roman salute or Saluto romano), even if the arm is not raised as high, it did not cause any undue commotion.

While the United States was able to win the most gold medals (with one exception) at the first ten Olympic Games of modern times, in Berlin and Garmisch they now had to accept defeat at the hands of the Germans. Of the 77 gold medals awarded, 49 went to German athletes. Altogether, the Germans won 89 medals in Berlin alone: 33 gold, 26 silver, 30 bronze. Among the participants, the men were clearly in the majority. In Berlin there were 4069 athletes, only 328 of whom were women.
Gal, 95, beats Nazis, has 1936 record restore  
By ERIN CALABRESE and ED ROBINSON

At age 95, she’s never soared higher.

A former high jumper now living in Queens finally saw her German national record restored yesterday -- 73 years after the Nazis disallowed it because she’s Jewish.

"I'm very happy they finally did what they did -- I was a damned good high jumper," Margaret Bergmann Lambert said from the Jamaica Estates home she shares with her 99-year-old husband, Bruno.

Lambert, who competed under the name of Gretel Bergmann, set the German high-jump mark of 5 feet, 3 inches on June 30, 1936.

At the time, she was nominally a member of the German Olympic team, which was about to host the Berlin Games. But in truth, she was being used as a political pawn by Adolf Hitler.

The German government discovered Bergmann’s talent after she won the 1934 British high-jump championships while attending school in England.

The Nazis forced her to return to Germany by threatening to harm her family if she didn’t join the Olympic squad.

"I didn’t know if they would kill me. I didn’t know what they would do," she said.

But Lambert knew that she would never be allowed to compete in the Olympics.

At the time, the Germans were putting Jews on their teams to appease Americans who were threatening a boycott. The Nazi government pulled her off the squad at the last minute.

"They waited until the Americans were on the boat, on the way," she said. "Nobody realized that these people had everything planned out." Teammates got a letter claiming she was injured. After the Games, she fled to the United States with just $4 in her pocket. "Nobody dared pack anything else," she said.

She changed her name and settled down with her husband. They’ve been married 71 years and have two children.

As for finally being recognized as the German record holder, Lambert said, "It took a hell of a long time for them to do it, but I’m not going to do cartwheels over it -- and I couldn’t now.

"I used to hate everything German," she acknowledged. "But I’ve made up my mind to not hold it against the next generations."
BERLIN 36

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The Gretel Bergmann story - hope, betrayal, survival
By NADA WEIGELT

New York - At 95, Margaret Lambert retains the demeanor of the star athlete she once was. Slim and fit, with a beautiful, wizened face, when she speaks - even of a dark, horrific past - her eyes get framed by scores of tiny laughter lines.

More than six decades after the end of Nazi Germany and far removed from the land of her birth, Lambert spoke with the German Press Agency dpa at her home in the New York borough of Queens, of a very different time.

It was 1936, with the Summer Olympic Games scheduled to be held, amid much international consternation, in Berlin. She was then known as Gretel Bergmann, a star German Jewish high jumper who would be robbed of the opportunity of winning an Olympic gold.

This September, a film about her life is scheduled to open in theatres in Germany. Berlin '36 tells the long-forgotten story about the athlete from Laupheim in southern Germany, who was excluded from the German Olympic team because she was a Jew.

Lambert was born on April 12, 1914. The daughter of a wealthy Jewish entrepreneur, she quickly discovered her passion for athletics, and excelled. But shortly after Adolf Hitler seized power in 1933, the harassment began. The same year, her longtime coach informed her that she was no longer welcome at the club in Ulm.

"I got a letter from my sports club: 'You are no longer welcome here, because you are Jewish. Heil Hitler'. That was the end of my sports career," she said, according to an audio recording at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Remembering that trying period, she told dpa: "It was awful. Jews were ostracized, they treated us like dirt. Our best friends walked by us in the streets without even looking at us."

She moved to England when she was 19, and found success in her renewed sporting career. But the Nazis unexpectedly ordered her to return in 1936. The United States had threatened to boycott the Olympic Games because of the persecution of Jews in Germany. The Nazi propaganda machine needed to present a token Jew at the Games.

Her father cautioned her that if she refused to come back, their family would be in trouble.

"I came back to Germany to horrible conditions ... even though I was a member of the German Olympic Women’s team, I was not allowed in a stadium. I couldn’t practice," she said last year during the Holocaust Memorial Museum’s ongoing series on anti-Semitism.

"I was a Fata Morgana (mirage). They just used me as a lure for the Americans," Lambert told dpa. "I knew right from the beginning that they would never let me compete. But I wanted to show them that a Jewish girl can be just as good as anybody else - or better."
BERLIN 36

THE GERMAN PRESS AGENCY dpa | July 24, 2009

Selected in the core team of high jumpers and spurred on by her anger, Lambert equaled the German women's national record of 1.60 metres at trials in Stuttgart. It was 30 June, 1936 - one month before the Games.

Then came the shock: No sooner had the US Olympic team set sail from New York than Bergmann received a letter saying she hadn't performed well enough in the trials to participate in the Games and was offered "standing room only" tickets.

When first told that she could compete, Lambert said, "I was hoping I would be in the Olympics because to compete in the Olympic Games is a thrill of a lifetime."
She felt some anxiety, too, over the prospect of winning and going to the podium. "If ... I have to go up there, I can't give the Hitler salute. Impossible."
But when deprived of the chance to compete, she told dpa: "It was a bitter awakening - the worst moment of my life."

Germany participated in the Games with two, instead of three, female high jumpers. The gold medal went to Hungarian Ibolya Csak who was, ironically, Jewish. The bronze went to the German "Aryan" Elfriede Kaun.

After the Games, Lambert managed to emigrate to the United States in 1937. Before World War II broke out, her parents and an athlete who would later become her husband, Bruno Lambert, also moved to the US.

In Hitler's Pawn, a one-hour HBO documentary about her life released in 2004, she says that she decided to use the name Margaret because "it was the quickest way to forget Nazi Germany."

The young immigrant made two vows - that she would never return to Germany and that she would never speak another word of German.

In 1999, Lambert broke her vow and returned "home" reluctantly for the first time to attend the dedication of a stadium in her name in her hometown of Laupheim. She also received an award as a distinguished athlete from Adam Opel AG Deutschland, according to the Jewish Women's Archive.

Lambert told dpa: "I finally told myself that these young people had nothing to do with what happened then. Why hate them? It is not fair. To hate is not nice."
As if to emphasize the reconciliation, Lambert praised Berlin '36 director Kaspar Heidelbach and his team. She said she had even taken to calling the 25-year-old German actress Karoline Herfurth, who portrays her in the movie, her "twin."

"It is done beautifully, however it is not completely true to life. They had to enhance it a little bit because I said, who wants to see someone high jumping for an hour and a half?"

As Lambert and her 98-year-old husband - they celebrated their 70th anniversary last year - were not able to attend the premiere in Berlin, a private screening was organized in New York for their family and friends.

"I like the movie. It hopefully shows that something like this should never, never, never happen again," she said.
BERLIN 36
a KASPAR HEIDELBACH FILM

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