

Whilst the Olympic Movement states that politics have no place in sport, political events have nonetheless exerted a significant effect on modern Olympic Games. Three of the most 'political' Olympic Games are undoubtedly Berlin, 1936; Mexico, 1968; and Munich, 1972.



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1936, BERLIN

The 1936 Olympic Games were awarded, controversially, to Germany. The country was greatly in favour of staging the Games as it was thought that holding them in Germany would contribute to the legitimization of the Nazi regime on a global stage. Hitler's use of the Games as a vehicle for showcasing Aryan supremacy was famously undermined by the US African-American athlete Jesse Owens, who became the hero of the Games winning four gold medals.

It is questionable as to whether the IOC violated the terms of their own (Olympic) Charter (the fundamental principles upon which Olympism is based) by awarding the Games to Germany at this

time. This is because there was already much evidence in existence to indicate what Hitler's Third Reich had in store for Jews: *"We would have been very loath to hurt the feelings of our fellow Jews, by going to a land that would exterminate them if they could."* Sammy Luftspring, Canadian-Jewish boxer, announcing his withdrawal from the 1936 Berlin Olympics.

1968, MEXICO CITY

Tommie Smith and John Carlos, who finished 1st and 3rd in the 200m, created what was to become one of the most memorable sporting images of all time; the Black Power salute. The athletes were protesting against the racial injustices that black Americans continued to experience in the US. The athletes wore OPHR badges (the OPHR was the Olympic Project for Human Rights, a movement headed up by the American Sociologist Professor Harry Edwards).

Smith was later to recall: *"If I win, I am American, not a black American. But if I did something bad, then they would say I am a Negro. We are black and we are proud of being black. Black America will understand what we did tonight."*

Student protests against the Games saw approximately 300 Mexican students killed by the Mexican authorities shortly before the Games began, but the Games were not halted, nor were the deaths acknowledged or commemorated in any way by the IOC.

1972, Munich

The Munich Games are most often remembered for the terrorist attack that resulted in the death of 11 Israeli athletes. With five days of the Games left, 8 Palestinian terrorists broke into the Olympic Village, killing two Israelis and taking nine others hostage. The Palestinians demanded the release of 200 prisoners from Israel. In an ensuing battle, all nine Israeli hostages were killed, as were five of the terrorists and one policeman. International Olympic Committee (IOC) President Avery Brundage took the decision to continue the Games after a brief suspension. This was a controversial decision.

FIND OUT MORE

The Olympic website History Section:

<http://www.olympic.org/en/content/Olympic-Games/All-Past-Olympic-Games/Summer/Munich-1972/>

CREDITS

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