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Hübner, Emanuel. *Olympia in Berlin: Amateur fotografen sehen die Olympischen Spiele 1936*. Munich: Morisel Verlag, 2017. Pp. 200. Photographs. €24.90, hb.

Our visual memory of the 1936 Olympic Games is strongly linked to one source, Leni Riefenstahl's masterful documentary film *Olympia*, but we often forget that there were many others recording the events that were happening in Berlin. I am not talking about the phalanx of news photographers who flooded the city during the games, but, as author Emanuel Hübner shows in his latest work, there were even more camera-wielding non-professionals who recorded events in and around the Olympic Stadium. Giving a sense of what it was like on the ground, they recorded whatever seemed odd, beautiful, or unusual, and, in doing so, they provided a valuable record of this important sporting event.

Because most of the photographs in the book were taken with small, portable devices by untrained amateurs, they often do not display the same polish or clarity as the professionals, but they give us a priceless insight into the events and activities that occurred just outside the range of the more "serious" reporters. Hübner estimates that, by the mid-1930s, there were between five and six million amateur photographers in Germany; naturally, not all of them were at the games, but a good many of them certainly were. The images and many of the personal items in this book are all from the author's own collection, and they constitute a wonderful contribution to the history of German society, sport, and vernacular photography. Considering the brutal and poisonous regime that was running the show, it is somewhat astonishing that amateur lensmen were given such remarkable freedom of movement at the Olympics. They could wander about, recording just about anything that took their fancy—some even approached the Führer's box to take some candid snaps.

This book shows events through both the lens of history as well as the lenses of hundreds of amateur Zeisses, Rolleiflexes, and Leicas. The Nazi regime gave considerable political significance to amateur photography—not only because Germany was one of the prime sources of high-quality, easy-to-use cameras, but also because it represented a way to spread the glories of National Socialism. Swastikas abound on Berlin streets, over posh hotels and at Olympic venues, as well as on thousands of Sieg-healing armbands.

The photographic images presented in this volume are wonderful. They show a side of the games that is quite remarkable. They stretch from the mundane (shots of happy people eating their bratwürsts, enjoying the competitions, and visiting the sights of Berlin) to the magnificent (opening ceremonies, Jesse Owens in mid-jump, foreign competitors). Some are thoroughly amazing: a portly, bespectacled Olympic sightseer stares warily at the camera as the Olympic flame blazes behind him, a well-heeled lady poses before a massive male nude statue, an amazing photo of marathon victor Sohn Kee-chung who flashes past the camera in a blurry blaze while the cheering spectators remain in perfect focus.

The text of the book presents a historical context, and, as such, it covers much material that is already familiar to sports scholars. For me, the most interesting part of the chapters are those that quote the letters and diaries of ordinary folks who were swept up in the festivities. Some correspondents remarked about the broad avenues full of cars, the prosperous and happy pedestrians, and the order and precision of their Nazi hosts. A visitor named Bettie wrote to her friend Gertrud about the massive throngs at the stadium, but she added, "[Y]ou surely heard all about it on the radio broadcast" (61). She mentioned her thrill at seeing the Führer who showed up promptly at 8:15 in the morning, and she was impressed by the way 200,000 spectators exited the stadium quickly and efficiently. In many ways, it presaged the ruthless organization that a few years later would be put to work in a much grimmer business.

The snapshots in the book are often revealing, sometimes beautiful, and every now and then brilliant. For me, however, there is a pervasive melancholy connected to the photos because, less than a decade after the photos were taken, the beautiful city of Berlin would be bombed to a smoldering ruin and a great many of the smiling, happy people captured in the images would be dead. Ironically, the great and impressive Olympic Stadium where many of the photographs were taken would survive the war almost untouched—unlike many of the amateur photographers and bystanders preserved forever in this book.

—David Chapman  
*Independent Scholar*

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