

PRE-WAR BRITAIN

Sport

In 1931 Nazi Germany won the bid to host the 1936 Olympic Games over Barcelona Spain. To outdo the Los Angeles games of 1932 Reich Chancellor Adolf Hitler had a new 100,000 seat track and field stadium built. Film maker Leni Riefenstahl was commissioned to film the games for \$7 million. Her film titled Olympia pioneered many of the techniques used in filming sports which are still employed today.

Jesse Owens from the USA won four gold medals in track and field and became the most successful athlete to compete in Berlin.

Germany won the most medals overall with 89 in total. The USA came second with 56 and Great Britain were tenth with 14. The opening ceremony was held in the Berlin Olympics Stadium and a flypast by the airship Hindenburg was the high point of the event.

Reich Chancellor Adolf Hitler saw the games as an opportunity to promote his government and ideals of racial supremacy. After Olympics Jewish participation in sport was limited, moreover persecution of the Jews became evermore lethal. This philosophy translated all forms of sport for example in soccer, when Hitler came to power in 1933 all Jewish players, club owners, sponsors and journalists were excluded. Various rules were implemented by Germany's soccer federation to aid the bolstering of the Nazi regime, for example their foreign office issued an order that all opposing national teams must perform the Nazi salute. An English team including Stanley Matthews at one point were obliged to do this on one occasion.

In Britain the four most popular sports were Rugby (both Union and League), Football, Boxing and Cricket. Boxing was the sport of the working classes; it became very popular during the depression of the late 1920's and early 1930's. The aim was to become a champion but very few made it. Tommy Farr an unemployed fairground worker from Tonypany was perhaps our most successful boxer and he became "the man who nearly beat Joe Louis." (The world champion from the USA). This period also saw the breakthrough of the "pin up" player, Stanley Matthews being the best example. First capped for England in 1934 he continued to play into the 1950's. Also during this period Sheffield Wednesday were the most successful team finishing in the top three in all but one season in the years 1930 to 1936.

In the 1930's many Rugby Union players switched to Rugby League to receive rewards for their playing talents. Rugby League appeal was simple; it afforded the opportunity for working class players to escape a life of manual labour for a well-paid profession.

In cricket the Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) remained the controlling body in English cricket during this period. The most famous series was the "Bodyline" Ashes series of 1932-1933 which enabled England to regain the Ashes but at the cost of its cricketing prestige. Perhaps the best known player of the time was Len Hutton of Yorkshire who in the first test match of 1938 scored a world record of 364 which stood for more than fifty years.