

Why the Munich Olympics Massacre Is Still in Israel's Psyche 50 Years Later

This week, Mika Slavin and all of Israel should be celebrating. We should be celebrating the milestone of Israel's first Olympic medal, 50 years ago.

Instead, it is a day of mourning. It marks the 50th anniversary of the massacre of 11 Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympic games, and specifically the murder of Mika's brother, Mark. Mark was the youngest member of Israel's Olympic team and the most likely not just to win a medal, but possibly a gold.

For five decades, the massacre of Israel's Olympic team has been an open wound for all of Israel. It's one of the worst acts of terrorism that Israel has faced at the hands of Palestinian Arabs, not just because of the magnitude of the casualties, but because of where and when it took place. The 1972 Munich Olympics were meant to be a rehabilitation of Germany's past, from architects and criminals who conceived and implemented the murder of six million Jews during the Holocaust, to rejoining the family of nations.

Germany had grown, and repented for its role in the singular most horrific genocide in human history. Nazi Germany and the 1936 Berlin Olympics were the past. 1972 Munich was supposed to be about its future.

That the massacre took place during the Olympics, the world's celebration of sportsmanship, regardless of national, religious and ethnic differences, made it all the more horrific and egregious. The Olympics was above politics.

In the interest of portraying a kinder and gentler, and less

anti-Semitic face, reports are that Germany not only had intelligence which it ignored and could have prevented the massacre, along with neo-Nazis providing details to the Palestinian Arab terrorists who planned and implemented the attack. But it failed to do so in order not to have a militaristic appearance at a global event about sportsmanship.

Making matters worse, before the blood dried and the victims were buried, Germany insisted on continuing with the games as if nothing had happened. Throughout the decades, the families of the victims fought Germany and the International Olympic Committee, even for something as basic as a moment of silence which only just happened for the first time last year, and is still not assured for every subsequent Olympics.

The victim's families felt abused by the Germans who, it became clear, had information that could have prevented the massacre. Adding insult to injury, not only did Germany rebuff Israel's request for extra security when the attack took place, Germany refused Israeli security teams from being part of the rescue, for which Germany was completely unprepared, botching it, and even being responsible for the death of some of the Israelis.

Rubbing salt in the wounds, Germany arrested and then quickly released three surviving terrorists, making a mockery of justice for Jews being murdered on German soil. Again.

Until last week, the families were boycotting the 5th anniversary commemoration in Munich. There were several issues including a former apology which Germany had never done, taking responsibility and opening archives to reveal facts of the cover up that's still not yet been fully exposed five decades later. The families also insisted on monetary compensation, a fraction of what their 50 years of pain and suffering actually cost, an amount that was not insulting as Germany had previously offered.

Indeed, 11 families were destroyed and there can be no sufficient compensation for that. But it is important, along with an apology, as part of an acknowledgment that German authorities were at fault for failing to protect the Israeli team, despite their advanced warnings, and for the incompetent rescue attempt.

Finally, Germany stepped up and took responsibility, making amends and monetary compensation, though no amount of money can change the horrors they have had to suffer. Even the German president apologized and admitted shame in it taking so long for Germany to take responsibility and make amends.

Over five decades, Palestinian Arab terrorists have used sports to harm and threaten Israel and Israelis. Other than turning the Olympics into a blood bath, they have boycotted and tried to prevent Israeli participation in international sporting events. And rather than taking responsibility much less apologizing for the 1972 massacre, recently Palestinian Authority president Mahmoud Abbas unleashed a tirade on Israel for committing "50 holocausts" when responding to a reporter's question about Munich for which he had a personal responsibility as one of its architects and financiers.

For the families of the 11 victims, time has not eased their loss. The Israeli Olympians are regarded as heroes. In the case of Mark Slavin, he is among the most heroic. Albeit that he died very young and didn't fulfil his dream of bringing Israel its first Olympic medal, there are several miraculous aspects of his life, such as his family immigrating to Israel from the USSR earlier that same year. It was Mark who led his family to Israel.

Mark was just 18 when he arrived in Israel, yet he navigated himself into the upper tiers of Israel's sports, and was miraculously able to become part of the Israeli Olympic team just a few months later. His story is one of determination and pride as a Jew. It's sad, but it's inspiring.

To be sure that terrorists would think twice about ever engaging in such a terror attack in the future, after Munich, Israel launched "Operation Wrath of God" to kill all the terrorists who had been involved in the attack. Steven Spielberg made a moving film about this which shows the resolve of the Mossad team tasked with the operation, and also some of the conflicts that they endured.

Today, there has been some closure, but the trauma will never be forgotten. While it happened 50 years ago, Munich is very much part of Israel's psyche today. And it must be remembered forever in the future.

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