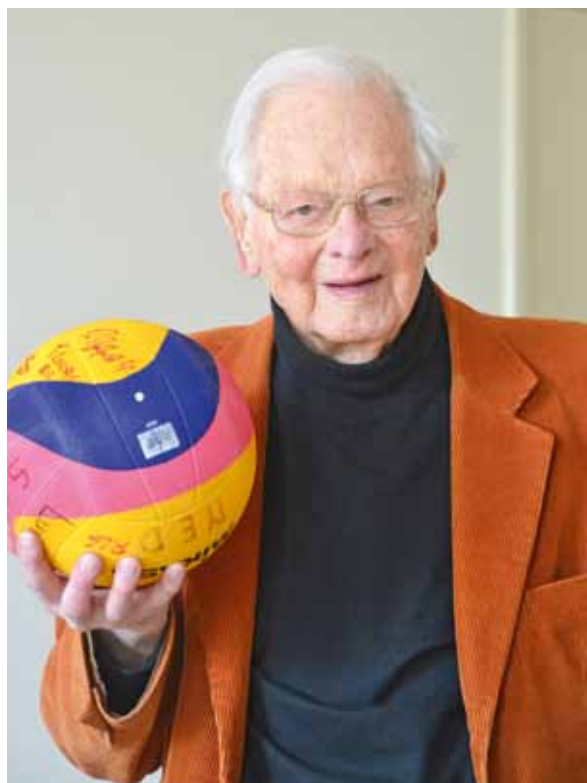


The infamous 1936 Games in Berlin

By Richard Schoonderwoert (NOC*NSF)



His father reached the age of 99 and his sister is still alive. And she is two years older! Hans Maier was born in July 1916 in Madioen, a city on the island of Java, in what was then called the Dutch East Indies, the country nowadays known as Indonesia. His father was an officer in the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army (Koninklijk Nederlandsch-Indisch Leger, KNIL). Maier Senior was one of the founders of swimming club Malangse Zwemclub in Malang in 1924. Of course the young Hans also joined the club. "We had a 25 metres pool where we played our games."

Maier, who revisited the place eight years ago at the age of 91, still remembers it very well. "Our rivals came from Surabaya. One swimming club was only for men and was called "De Krokodillen" (the Crocodiles, RS). The club for women was called "De Waterjuffers" (the Dragonflies, RS). Surabaya was a two hours ride from Malang. That's why we sometimes met halfway, in the city of Trètès. There was a small swimming pool, called Het Nimfenbad (the Nymph pool, RS). The water in the pool streamed directly from the mountains, so it was quite cold."

Water polo player Hans Maier, who turned 100 on 11th July, is the last surviving Dutch Olympic participant from 1936.

Photo: NOC*NSF

A leather football

This August it will be 80 years since the Olympic Games were held in Berlin. They turned out to be infamous Games, because Chancellor Hitler used the event for propaganda purposes, to glorify his ideals of racial supremacy. Hans Maier played seven matches for the Dutch water polo team at the Olympics in 1936. He is the only Dutch competitor who is still alive.

Despite celebrating his hundredth birthday this month, Hans Maier still lives independently in an apartment in The Hague. His body has some limitations – he uses a walker and his hearing is not what it used to be – but mentally he is still in good condition. Maier is even involved with a website, www.humandutiesnetwork.com, where people can debate the unique and essential role of man in conserving our planet. The secret of his age? "Stay interested", he answers. This becomes apparent during the interview. Regularly Maier is the one who asks the questions. "How do the Dutch water polo women play these days? What kind of material are these new balls made of?" And he admits: "His genes were to his advantage as well."

Water polo in the past was not the same as the game we know nowadays. "It looks quite easy this days", Maier states. "In our time we had to swim back to the baseline after every score. It was not permitted to move during dead game moments. We wore caps without earmuffs."

1936 Olympic participants who are still alive

Years	Name	Sports	Birthdate
104	Schaller, Simone (USA)	ATH	22 AUG 1912
102	Lysak, John (USA)	CAN	16 AUG 1914
101	Romsersa, Jos (LUX)	GYM	1 NOV 1915
100	Olszewski, Alfons (POL)	SAI	5 APR 1916
	Havelange, João (BRA)	SWI	8 MAY 1916
	Maier, Hans (NED)	WAT	11 JUL 1916
98	Kiefer, Adolph (USA)	SWI	27 JUN 1918
97	Tunçalp, Talat (TUR)	CYC	1 AUG 1919
96	v. Hartungen (Heinze), Susanne (GER)	DIV	25 MAY 1920
	Cummings, Iris (USA)	SWI	21 DEC 1920
	Cividino, Elda (ITA)	GYM	13 DEC 1921
94	Langdon, Joan (CAN)	SWI	2 DEC 1922
93	Vandernotte, Noël (FRA)	ROW	25 DEC 1923

According to information from Paul Tchir, OlyMADMen

You could turn them around and then they had a different colour. And the ball was completely different. We simply played with a leather football. During the match it became heavier and heavier, because of the water. These modern balls seem very light."

Later Maier moved to Bandung, where he played for "Neptunus". "Our swimming pool was called Tjihampelas. In 2008 I went back there again. It had hardly changed. We played against clubs from Batavia, the city we now know as Jakarta."

There were about five more places on Java like this where people played water polo at a reasonable level. This turned out to be the foundation for a strong group of swimmers, which turned out to be fortuitous for the Dutch. From the ten Dutch water polo players at the 1936 Olympic Games, five were raised in the East Indies. "We were good swimmers", Maier remembers with a smile. "In 1936 a swimming event was held in The Hague: Holland against the Indies. Well, the Indies won that event."

The Dutch water polo team in Amsterdam before their departure in 1936.

Photo: Anthony Th. Bijkerk Archive



At that time Maier already lived in the Netherlands. Two years earlier he moved to Amsterdam to study at the Higher Civic School. Via Piet Metman, a friend he knew from the East-Indies, Maier joined the club "Het Y". The trainer was Fritz Grossmann, a German. Maier: "Grossmann was Jewish and had fled from Hitler. But at that time we weren't aware of that at all."

Central training

"Do you know what pleased me a lot? The achievements of the water polo players, who have performed honorably with their fifth place." Karel Lotsy Chef de Mission of the Dutch team at the 1936 Games in Berlin was very positive in his reaction to the performance of the Dutch seven when he spoke to the *Leeuwarder Nieuwsblad*.

How different the situation was two years earlier, at the European Water Polo Championship in Magdeburg. The

Netherlands competed for the first time at a European Championship, but the performance was far from successful. The squad ended up last in the group stage and finished level with Italy in ninth place overall. The failure of the water polo team was in stark contrast to the successes of the Dutch female swimmers, who collected numerous international titles in those days. The Dutch Swimming Association KNZB saw the appointment of trainer Ma Braun, who coached her daughter Marie in 1928 to the Olympic title in the 100 m backstroke, as the key to the success.

The KNZB felt that the water polo squad should have a permanent trainer as well. Coach Frans Kuyper was appointed to lead the Dutch men on their way to the top. Hans Maier was selected for the central training, twice a week in the Sportfondsenbad in Amsterdam, the same place he studied. "It was tough", he tells. "I remember that between colleges we went by bike to the swimming pool, to swim for half an hour. On Fridays we slept on camp beds and in the weekends we trained very hard."

Discrimination

The squad was training for their next big event – the Olympic Games in Berlin. Soon after the first reports about the prosecution and discrimination of Jews, political opponents and others appeared in the media. Discussions were held about moving the Games away from Germany, but it didn't get any further than discussions.

Some individual athletes decided not to participate. Among them were some well-known Dutch sportsmen and –women, like boxing champion Ben Brill and athletes Tollien Schuurman and Wim Peters. Water polo goalie Hans Paerl – from Jewish origin – withdrew for the same reason. He was replaced by Joop van Woerkom. It didn't cause any concerns for the other players. Maier: "It wasn't an issue. At that time I didn't even know that Hans Paerl didn't want to go because of the anti-Semitic attitude of the German government. We were simply informed: Hans cannot go."

Three swimming suits

The Dutch water polo squad for the Olympic Games consisted of Kees van Aelst (center forward, player of HZ & PC), Lex Franken (left forward, Zwemlust), Ru de Hamer (defender, HZ & PC), Jan van Heteren (defender, HZ & PC), Hans Maier (right forward, 't IJ), Soesoe van OostromSoede (defender, 't IJ), Gerard Regter (defender, RZC), Hans Stam (defender, HZ & PC), Herman Veenstra (goalie, Het Y) and Joop van Woerkom (goalie, ZIAN).

The team traveled to Berlin in an optimistic mood. A clear victory in Amsterdam over Belgium, one month before the tournament, contributed to this state of mind.

“Before we speak about the value of this triumph, let us acknowledge that this fine result is a well-deserved reward for our players and trainer. Thanks to the drastic and significant change in training from Frans Kuyper, our national team made great progress. It was question of time before we would reap the rewards ... Well, here they are: a 5-1 victory over the strong Belgians!”

This is how the magazine *Sport in Beeld/De Revue der Sporten* commented in the edition of 6th July 1936. “Belgium always had a better team than we had”, Maier remembers. “And now we beat them with 5-1. That was quite extraordinary!” And with a smile he adds: “By the way: that match costed me three swimming suits ... We didn’t have swimming trunks at that time.”

In Berlin the Belgian team was again one of the opponents of the Dutch. The clash ended in 1-1. The matches against Uruguay and Great Britain ended in a draw as well. The Dutch beat Team USA, Austria and Sweden and lost to Hungary, a few days later the winner of the gold medal. The Netherlands ended at the fifth place.

Search lights

During the Games Maier hardly noticed that the event took place in a country with a dictatorial regime. “For us it was just a great sports celebration. It was very well organised; you can leave that to the Germans. The total focus was on sports. The Nazi’s took advantage of this. They promoted their country as a strong and modern nation. We didn’t know that this was their underlying objective.”

Maier remembers how they distorted the facts. “Since ancient Greece there has been an Olympic salute. It is done with your arms sideways stretched to the public. The Nazi salute is with your arms stretched forward. At the opening ceremony of the Games the French team did the Olympic salute, but the Nazi’s called it ‘a Germanic salute’. The Americans held their hats in front of their hearts when they entered the stadium. That wasn’t appreciated.”

The Dutch water polo team did not attend the opening ceremony. The swimming events were in the second week of the Games. The athletes were housed at the Olympic Village, which they had to pay for. The Dutch found it too expensive to keep the swimmers for a week in the village without competition, so they decided to arrive later.

Maier does remember the closing ceremony. “That was very impressive. It started with the Awards Ceremony, the Germans called it ‘die Siegerehrung’. Then followed a speech of IOC President de Baillet-Latour. At the end an enormous bronze bell that hung at the stadium was tolled. Enormous speakers sounded the announcement: ‘Ich rufe die Jugend der Welt nach



Tokio!’ (I call the youth of the world to Tokyo, RS). That is where in 1940 the next Olympic Games should have been held. But because of the war they were of course cancelled.”

“The show was beautifully directed by the Germans. Big search lights had been positioned around the stadium, with the lamps focused like bars in the air. Slowly the beams moved towards each other, that gave the impression that you were standing in a huge dome of light. But actually it was military equipment, later used by the Wehrmacht to track English bombers in the air.”

Great success

After the Games, as the train with the Dutch team returned to the Netherlands, an enthusiastic crowd welcomed the athletes. The magazine *Sport in Beeld/De Revue der Sporten* looked back on the Olympic Games in the edition of 17th August 1936. The magazine praised the organisation of the event: “Apart from sympathies and antipathies, the organisational and sportive success of the Germans must be avowedly recognised. This great organisation, this huge harvest of prizes unmistakably show the strength and tremendous energy of our youth. Germany has to take care for the Olympic hangover, but at this moment the honest and objective reviewer should acknowledge the great success of the Germans.”

Critical questions about their participation at the Olympic Games in Berlin came later. Maier: “Afterwards people spoke about the ‘Hitler Games’. But before ... ? People should be aware that Mussolini had by this time been dictator of Italy for ten years longer than Hitler. Hungary was governed by Admiral Horthy and the Soviet Union by Stalin. So we were familiar with an autocratic form of government. The strange thing is that at that time we didn’t see the true face of the German regime. Off course we only had radio and newspapers to inform us. And further to the East, was the dark power of the Soviet Union. Hitler was against communism. I will not say that because of that he had our sympathy in the Netherlands, but the people were more afraid of communism. We never foresaw that we would become victim of the Nazi’s ourselves as well.” ■

In Amsterdam a strong campaign group against the Berlin Games was formed under the name “De Schijnwerper” (headlights). This was a front for the refugee assistance group “Rode Hulp” (Red Help).

It sent postcards to Dutch Olympic participants. These contained the names of German working class sportsman who had been sentenced to long prison sentences by the Nazis. This wording on this card, sent to Martinus Osendarp, said “Do you still believe that the Olympic Games in Berlin can be a free and democratic coming together of all sportsmen?” But only in a few cases did the postcards reach their intended targets. Many were intercepted by the Gestapo.

Illustration: German Bundesarchiv R 58/2320