

# 'Schuhmannaki' versus 'Hercules'

By Volker Kluge

As in 1896 in Athens: olive branches with blue and white bands in the Greek colours for four-time Olympic champion, Carl Schuhmann. The commemorative speech on the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth was given by Berlin Sport Association President Thomas Härtel (right).

Photo: Peter Frenkel



Just a few hundred metres away from Berlin's Olympic Stadium is the Waldfriedhof, a historic cemetery where many German actors, writers, poets, musicians, and well known athletes are buried. On Sunday, 12<sup>th</sup> May 2019 several dozen gathered there to mark the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Carl Schuhmann, the most successful participant in the first modern Olympic Games of 1896 held in Athens. Schuhmann won three titles in gymnastics and a further victory in wrestling. He also placed third in weightlifting.

The modern-day ceremony had been preceded by brunch with his grandson. This may be said to have been in perfect harmony with the historical timetable, since church records indicate that Carl Schuhmann first saw the light of day at 12 noon.<sup>1</sup> He was born in Münster, a fortified city in the west of Germany which had been awarded to Prussia after the 1814–15 Congress of Vienna. His father was a trumpeter for the 7<sup>th</sup> Evangelical Westphalian Field Artillery Regiment, a regiment under the command of Marie of Prussia, the sister-in-law of the future Emperor Wilhelm I.

In 1884, Schuhmann's father was transferred to Cologne. This city had also become a part of Prussia after Napoleon's defeat in 1814. It was of strategic importance as it was close to the border of France, the "arch enemy" so recently defeated. As a result, a modern ring of fortifications had been built far outside the gates of the old town in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This urban expansion also benefited the development of sport in the city. The Mauritius, opened in 1867, it was the first gymnasium in Cologne. Within 10 years there were 22 school gymnasiums in the city.

"I had a good youth," said Carl Schuhmann. His father had become a barracks inspector and the youngster grew up in the barracks yard. There he exercised with the soldiers and would fight with them for fun, building up his muscles. Even before 1896, Schuhmann was considered not only one of the Rhineland's most successful gymnasts, but also one of its best wrestlers. In his own words,

*Gymnastics makes you strong. But wrestling requires a system, perseverance and intense practice. At the time,*

*I slowly pressed a hundred pounds<sup>2</sup> in each hand and wrestled for two hours without interruption.<sup>3</sup>*

In 1886, at the age of 17, he joined the Allgemeiner Turnverein, at the time the second largest sports club in Cologne. At this time in Germany, the term "gymnastics" did not just include exercises on apparatus, but the "totality of all useful physical exercises," which were to be done primarily in the open air.<sup>4</sup> It was all about versatility, including running, jumping, throwing, swimming, hiking, lawn games, fencing, and much more. This included "army gymnastics", which Friedrich Ludwig Jahn, considered the "father of gymnastics",<sup>5</sup> promoted as part of a patriotic education.

The umbrella organisation was the Deutsche Turnerschaft (DT). This was formally established in 1868, but its organisational structures had been gradually developing from 1842 when a ban on gymnastics<sup>6</sup> had been lifted. The DT was led by Dr. Ferdinand Goetz, a physician. Despite holding controversial "democratic" views in the past, after the founding of the German Empire in 1871 he became an ardent admirer of the Kaiser and Chancellor Bismarck.

When Goetz took over the presidency of the DT in 1895, it had already become the largest sports organisation in the world, with half a million adult members.<sup>7</sup> However, the organisation deliberately avoided using the English term "sport", which was viewed as synonymous for "international" and regarded as incompatible with gymnastics as a nationalistic enterprise.

Despite this impressive growth in membership, the type of exercise done day-to-day was rather modest. Speaking of his time in Cologne, Schuhmann said:

*There was a piece of land. It was given to the gymnasts. If members of the Allgemeiner Turnverein [...] wanted to practice high jumping once a week, they would have to clear out the greenhouse of a friendly gardener, which would take about an hour. They would then practice the long jump and the pole vault for an hour and then have to put the plants and flowerpots back in the greenhouse.<sup>8</sup>*

Schuhmann achieved his first major successes in 1889 at a regional gymnastics festival (*Gauturnfest*) in Cologne. He came fourth in the all-around competition, which was called *Wetturnen* (competitive gymnastics). It consisted of three "folk exercises" and three compulsory competitions on the apparatus.<sup>9</sup> Schuhmann also won the wrestling.

At the VII German Gymnastics Festival, held that same year in Munich, however, he did not make a big impression. In fact he was listed as "Karl Schumann". Of 517 competitors in the all-around, he placed 119<sup>th</sup>. He was still described as a winner and given an honourable mention,<sup>10</sup> even if his name had been misspelt.



Carl Schuhmann dedicated this portrait to German professional wrestler Waldemar Sand in London, late 1909. Below: Entry in the Münster church register. Child No. 11, born on 12<sup>th</sup> May 1896, was Carl August Berthold Schuhmann. Next to it: discharge certificate for Musketeer Schuhmann, who was recognised for his impeccable discipline.

Photo: Carl Schuhmann, Jr. Archive

Nr.	Taufnamen des Kindes.	Tag und Stunde der Geburt, in Stunden und Minuten.	Ob es christlich oder nicht.	Vor- und Zunamen des Vaters, auch Stand bezeichnen.	Vor- und Zunamen der Mutter.
9.	Friedrich Christian Samuel	12. Mai 1896, 11 Uhr 15 Min.	christlich	Carl Schuhmann, geb. 12. Mai 1896, 11 Uhr 15 Min.	Berthold, geb. 12. Mai 1896, 11 Uhr 15 Min.
10.	Wilhelmine Maria	12. Mai 1896, 11 Uhr 15 Min.	christlich	August, geb. 12. Mai 1896, 11 Uhr 15 Min.	Berthold, geb. 12. Mai 1896, 11 Uhr 15 Min.
11.	Carl August Berthold	12. Mai 1896, 11 Uhr 15 Min.	christlich	August, geb. 12. Mai 1896, 11 Uhr 15 Min.	Berthold, geb. 12. Mai 1896, 11 Uhr 15 Min.





The Rome team  
from 1895: sitting  
on the far right:  
Carl Schuhmann,  
next to him Hermann  
Weingaertner,  
standing behind:  
Alfred Flatow.

Photo: Volker Kluge Archive



### Success begins in Rome

After Schuhmann had completed an apprenticeship as a mechanic, he was hired by Wiesenthal & Company in Aachen. This was a telegraph construction company that manufactured produced Faller's water metres.<sup>11</sup>

At the end of 1890, he was drafted into the Prussian army and disappeared from the sporting scene for two years. He served as in Strasbourg/Alsace as "Musketeer No. 12" in the 132<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment. He was discharged in September 1892 as a private, his assessment noting that he was good at following orders.

He then moved to Berlin. At this time it was a booming capital with a population that had doubled from about 800,000 to 1.6 million in the last two decades. Schuhmann had always longed to live in the city, where his cheerful Rhineland temperament could mingle with the notorious Berlin attitude.

Since 1890, Schuhmann had been a member of the Berlin Turnerschaft. This had created in 1863 by the merger of several smaller clubs. It had 800 adult members.<sup>12</sup>

These were years when gymnastics in Berlin was in its prime, not least thanks to the construction of the large municipal gymnasium at 70/71 Prinzen street. This had an area of 1,000 square metres.<sup>13</sup> That sport became popular in Germany at that time was due above all to the gymnasts, who staged a great annual public demonstration.

Schuhmann was soon added to the premier squad<sup>14</sup>. This was led by Hermann Weingaertner. He was five years older and came from nearby Frankfurt an der Oder.<sup>15</sup> In 1894, Weingaertner finished second overall in the all-around event at the VIII German Gymnastics Festival in Breslau. Schuhmann, with his name still misspelt, took a respectable sixth place. His teammates Karl Neukirch and Alfred Flatow,<sup>16</sup> with whom he would later travel to Athens, came in tenth and twentieth.

These four and many others were protégés of Reinhold Schulz, who had been one of the most popular German gymnasts between 1875 and 1890. He now worked as a volunteer coach. As yet there were no professional trainers.

After Breslau, Flatow was named head gymnast and, in early 1895, applied to participate in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Italian Federal Gymnastics Festival in September of that year.<sup>17</sup> This bold move was actually against the principles of the DT, but it was well received, especially as the Prussian government showed interest and support. As a result, the leadership of the DT could not help but come up with a grant of 750 marks, enough for a team of nine to be sent to Rome from Berlin.

Their journey was worthwhile. The team placed first and won other special prizes for their efforts. One of the outstanding performers was Weingaertner, who received 97.5 out of a possible 100 points in the all-around (*gara individuale artistica*) and was awarded the honours of the city of Rome. Flatow was second, just a half point



behind. Schuhmann finished sixth.<sup>18</sup> In addition, he earned four prizes in the "special gymnastics" (*gara speciale*): in stone tossing, high jump and weightlifting. He also won in wrestling.

### Goetz or Coubertin: national or international?

It was two Berliners who made it possible for the gymnasts to take part in the Games of the First Olympiad a year later. One was the courageous and far-sighted Berlin chemist Dr. Willibald Gebhardt, the other was Fritz Hofmann, a merchant.

Gebhardt was a cosmopolitan who founded a German committee to promote participation in the Athens Games on 13<sup>th</sup> December 1895. This was a move fiercely opposed by conservative and nationalist circles, especially the leadership of DT.

Despite this opposition, the committee enjoyed the goodwill of the Kaiser, whose sister was married to Crown Prince Constantine of Greece.<sup>19</sup> In an audience with German Chancellor Prince Chlodwig zu Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst, Gebhardt learnt that Wilhelm II was following developments with interest.<sup>20</sup> The prince himself was also keen on participation, especially since his eldest son, Crown Prince Philipp Ernst, had assumed presidency of the participation committee.<sup>21</sup>

Gebhardt's congenial partner was Fritz Hofmann, who came from Köpenick, then a separate town outside Berlin. He was the head gymnast of the Turngemeinde in

Berlin (TiB). He stood 175 cm tall, which meant he was not suited to gymnastics proper. His strength was athletics, especially sprinting, jumping and rope climbing.<sup>22</sup>

Hofmann was Schuhmann's first point of contact, because he "knew all the gymnasts in Berlin and Brandenburg and – read newspapers", he later explained.<sup>23</sup> In fact, Hofmann was assembling the best gymnasts in the region and he knew how to get them excited about the Olympic adventure.

The team for Athens slowly took shape. It included athletes, cyclists, rowers and football players in addition to gymnasts.<sup>24</sup> As it did so, the headwinds intensified. Starting with a rejection of the decisions of the Olympic Founding Congress, it evolved into a furious hatred of the French, directed especially against Pierre de Coubertin.

It had been reported in the *Gil Blas* newspaper that Coubertin had allegedly stated that it was "peut-être à dessein" ("perhaps on purpose") that no official German representative had been invited to Paris in 1894.<sup>25</sup>

Coubertin immediately denied this. He sent a letter to the chief editor of the *National-Zeitung*, which had repeatedly stoked the fires of the "Gil Blas affair".<sup>26</sup> Gebhardt, too, threw himself in the dispute with a polemic published at the end of February 1896.<sup>27</sup>

For the leadership of the DT, the alleged statement by Coubertin offered a convenient pretext to refuse participation. It was justified by the behaviour of the main leadership, "which makes it incompatible with German honour to participate in the Games in Athens". As an alternative, they proposed a German National Olympia, scheduled for 1900 in Leipzig, the site of Napoleon's defeat in 1813.<sup>28</sup>

National or international? The Berlin gymnasts did not find it hard to decide, especially after hearing from their Saxon colleagues how enthusiastically they had been received in Greece during their "tour of the seas" in July 1892.<sup>29</sup> When press reports in March 1896 announced that "Berlin's top gymnasts"<sup>30</sup> would be a part of the Olympic team, Goetz initially disputed this. Instead, he claimed, it was an unknown squad that Gebhardt would have put together "for money and good words". The DT refused to have anything to do with the enterprise.<sup>31</sup>

But when he read the names of their gymnasts and what they had won in the next issue of the journal, Goetz contradicted himself. From then on, he switched sides. He started insulting the rebels and implying that their success in Rome had probably gone to their heads. They were no longer doing gymnastics for honour, "but as business and for fun".<sup>32</sup>

Long after the gymnasts arrived in Athens, Goetz remained agitated. "They are hired hands and are providing their gymnastic performances for money. They are degrading themselves as professional athletes and acrobats", he claimed, eventually even disclaiming that they were German.<sup>33</sup> Some of the press took the same

The three best German gymnasts travelled to Athens in spite of opposition from their federation: Alfred Flatow, Hermann Weingaertner, and the smallest, Carl Schuhmann, carried on shoulders.

Photo: Albert Meyer



Athens 1896: Team competition on the horizontal bars. Only nine German gymnasts took part because one of their numbers suffered a dizzy spell shortly before competition. The tenth apparatus in the second row on the right remained empty.

Photo: Albert Meyer



view. The *Rheinisch-Westfälische Zeitung* which was an extremist journal insisted:

*Any German club or any German that puts his country to shame by promoting or attending these Games deserves to be shunned by his circle and by his people.*<sup>34</sup>

The gymnasts were not deterred by such threats. They may even have been unaware of them. It was Gebhardt who faced with the brunt of this assault, since he was the public face of the group. The participation committee had chosen him "by acclamation" as the "provisional representative" of Germany on the IOC.<sup>35</sup>

Subcommittees, meanwhile, took care of assembling the team. Carl Stangen's travel agency<sup>36</sup> was put in charge of the travel formalities. The departure date for the first group, which included the gymnasts, was set for 26<sup>th</sup> March 1896. A gymnastics demonstration in Vienna was initially scheduled for two days later, but this was cancelled by the German-Austrian Gymnastic Federation as a result of pressure from DT leadership.<sup>37</sup>

There was still the question of finance. The tickets for participants were 231 marks per person. This was a discount but it was still beyond the means of most of the young athletes who were either students, labourers or apprentices. To solve the problem, a special committee was formed. This organised a sports festival which was held on 24<sup>th</sup> March 1896. This had a raffle and tableaux vivants based on Homer's poetry at the Kroll Festival Hall opposite the newly built Reichstag building.

The tickets for spectators were relatively expensive (six marks for a seat, three marks standing), but the event was a success, not least because the Prussian Crown Prince had taken over the patronage and the imperial family bought many tickets, which encouraged other

nobles and celebrities to follow their example.<sup>38</sup> The shortfall was made up in the form a loan to the team by Reinhold Schulz, now running successful swimming baths in the capital.

### A bundle of energy with a sense of humour

As with many athletes of the era, Schuhmann was an accomplished performer in a variety of sports. Never again would there be a competitor in four different sports at the same Games.<sup>39</sup>

On 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> April 1896, the first two days of the Games, Schuhmann competed in the triple jump, long jump and shot put, almost by way of warm-up to what would follow. He did not come close to the results posted by the specialists in those sports, yet he attracted the attention of the Greek public. They teased him with the nickname "Lig' ap'ola", which translated means "something of everything".<sup>40</sup>

On the second day, Schuhmann also competed in two-handed weightlifting, where he came off second best against much bigger and stronger competitors. Nevertheless, he managed to lift 90 kg, which put him in third place. Had he been competing today, he would have received a bronze medal but in 1896 the individual winners received silver medals, while the runner-up received bronze. Those who finished third went home empty-handed.

By the fourth and fifth day of the Games, though, Schuhmann came into his own. The gymnastics competitions began on 9<sup>th</sup> April with team demonstrations of exercises within just four minutes. They were judged on style, rhythm and difficulty with marks ranging from zero to 20.

On the parallel bars, the Germans had it easy since only two Greek clubs competed against them and their skill level was still below that of the Germans.<sup>41</sup> The high bar was more of a challenge; additionally, mishap kept one of the ten from competing. Who that was remains unknown.<sup>42</sup>

In the individual events, the Greeks arranged the competition without compulsory exercises. Instead everyone was allowed to present their own choice of performance, often making the comparison difficult. These started with vaulting, in which any number of jumps could be made within four minutes.

Schuhmann decided to do an entire series of jumps. These he completed flawlessly. "The victory of the people's favourite Schumann [sic] caused never-ending rejoicing", noted Dr. Ferdinand Hueppe of Prague, who had accompanied the German and Austrian participants to Athens.<sup>43</sup>

In a portrait written by Alfred Flatow, he had this to say about the first German Olympic champion:

*His extraordinary versatility allowed him to participate in almost all the competitions held there! This, combined with his steady sense of humour and his somewhat striking figure, quickly made him the darling of the crowd, which, incidentally, often exceeded 50,000.*<sup>44</sup>

Schuhmann's performance on the high bar was typically impressive and Hueppe described it in the following terms:

*Schumann [sic], who quickly understood the Greek audience, said that now he was going to show them something, and began to do wonderful circus tricks, so that there were great cheers and people could not understand why he was not the winner; even two judges were taken in, proving their lack of understanding.*<sup>45</sup>

There was praise for the seven judges, among whom Hueppe was considered one of the few gymnastic experts. Even if the competence of the others had been greater, they still did not have the last word. This privilege was given exclusively to Prince George of Greece, who served as president of the "Ephors", the overseers of the Games.

### Schuhmann as the most popular man in Greece

Given the pride in their history, the Greeks considered wrestling one of the highlights of the first Games alongside the marathon race and discus throwing. But wrestling also enjoyed considerable popularity in Europe and North America by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the boundaries between sport, circus act, and vaudeville being rather nebulous for the professionals.

For example, in Germany, there was the legendary Carl Abs. In 1891 he defeated the Englishman Tom Cannon in front of 1,000 spectators at a Berlin brewery and was proclaimed World Wrestling Champion.

International sport, however, proved to be more difficult because there was no uniform set of rules. The subdivision into "Graeco-Roman" and "freestyle" wrestling was uncommon, if even known. Rules differed from country to country. It was not until 1912 that the decision was taken during the Stockholm Olympics to establish an International Amateur Wrestling Federation (FILA). The formal inauguration of the body took place the following year in Berlin.

Unfortunately, it is not known exactly which rules governed the first Olympic wrestling tournament. It can reasonably be assumed that the organisers based them essentially on those of the ancient world, where wrestling had been a part of pentathlon since the 18<sup>th</sup> Olympiad (708 BCE). In addition, an individual competition was held on the fourth day of games in Olympia.

In those ancient games, there were no weight divisions and the same was true in 1896. The pairings in ancient times were selected by a draw and they fought until one competitor was knocked out. The wrestling took place on a staked sand circle in the Sphendone, just as was the case in 1896.<sup>46</sup>

In antiquity, the fighter who managed to keep his opponent down three times was declared the winner, but at the first modern Games, a single pinning of the shoulders was enough to win a match. It is not certain whether contests were timed or if grappling was allowed. But there is some evidence to suggest both.

There was a certain freedom in the choice of wrestling outfits. As can be seen in an image by Berlin photographer Albert Meyer, Schuhmann wore his gymnast's uniform: a white long-sleeved tricot with short collar, long grey trousers with belt, and black shoes. His

On 9 April 1896, Carl Schuhmann won the vault and thus became the first German Olympic champion. The stadium appears completely empty, so this photo was probably taken later.

Photo: Albert Meyer



The young "Hercules"  
Launceston Elliot  
of Great Britain:  
Later, he showed off  
his great strength  
in European variety  
shows.



opponent in the final, Georgios Tsitas of Greece, was decked out completely in white with a short-sleeved shirt, shorts down to his knees, socks and shoes.

Even Hueppe was unsure how to label the styles of fighting:

*Wrestling: The same was done in "Graeco-Roman" style. For the Romans had learned wrestling from the Greeks and the Greeks used to wrestle naked with all grips allowed. The term "Graeco-Roman" means therefore that the wrestling was neither Roman nor Greek, nor Turkish, nor medieval but modern French, i.e. all grips were allowed from head to hip except for strangulation and direct injury; no leg holds were permitted.*<sup>47</sup>

Surely it was no coincidence that the organising committee had decided to hold wrestling the same afternoon as the marathon race. But it seemed as if the matches would not take too long because, of the nine registered athletes, only five appeared.<sup>48</sup>

In the first round, Stefanos Christopoulos of Greece defeated Momcsillo Tapavicza,<sup>49</sup> a Serbian competing for Hungary, who gave up because of fatigue. In the second match, Schuhmann faced Briton Launceston Elliot, who was admired for his performance and his handsome appearance. He stood 188 cm tall and weighed 101 kg – a true star.

Elliot, born in British India and a close relative of the Earl of Minto,<sup>50</sup> had been a pupil of the famous Eugen Sandow who was considered the father of bodybuilding.<sup>51</sup> In 1891, under the tutelage of Sandow, Elliot had won the first British weightlifting championship held in the fashionable Café Monico in Piccadilly, central London. Elliot was only 16 at the time.

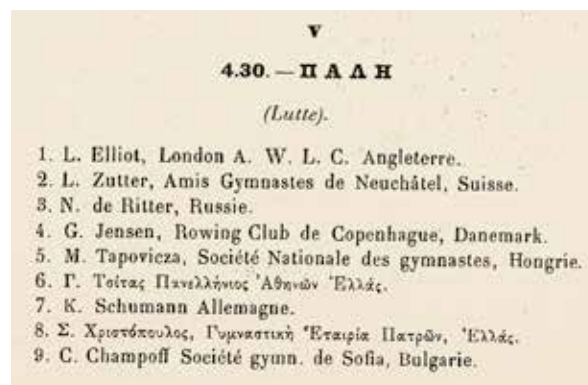
Accompanied by his father, the young "Hercules" had travelled to Athens, where, as expected, on the second day he won the one-handed weightlifting. His self-confidence took a hit, though, when he was given second place by Prince George in the two-armed competition. The prince favoured the style of Viggo Jensen of Denmark, who was better at balancing the same weight upwards, a criterion that could not be found in any rule book.<sup>52</sup>

And now it was up to Schuhmann, just 158 cm,<sup>53</sup> to go up against the famous British "Goliath"! Even Hofmann advised him not to engage in this unequal fight. Everyone in the stadium would surely have been convinced that Schuhmann did not stand a chance against Elliot.

Schuhmann was a full 30 cm shorter than his opponent, a muscled man who entered the arena in a red-silk coat and jersey. But the bout did not turn out as expected. Hueppe describes it like this:

*Elliot was very skilled in Graeco-Roman wrestling and also superior to Schumann [sic!] in strength and size, so much so that everyone believed it would be an easy victory for the Englishman, who, for his part, proudly strutted about with an air of superiority. In the morning, I did a few rounds with Schumann to teach him the most important grips. After all, he had only won with the gymnasts' way of wrestling. But, then as the match progressed, you might think that Elliot had been watching our rehearsal and the style I had demonstrated ... because that's exactly how things went for the two rounds.*

*In the second round, Schumann magnificently forced a deep underhand grip and smashed the tall Englishman onto his back, holding him there for almost half a minute. That's why it was so ridiculous*



According to the list of participants, nine wrestlers had entered, but only five were present at the start. Photos: Volker Kluge Archive





Continuation of the wrestling final which had been abandoned the previous evening. It ended in a victory for Carl Schuhmann over the Greek Georgios Tsitas.

Photo: Albert Meyer

for Elliot to later claim in an English newspaper that he had only touched the ground with the one shoulder. Like Flack,<sup>54</sup> Elliot had succumbed to his underestimation of his opponent, despite his greater strength and better technique. A well-trained man rose to the occasion in an unfamiliar situation and was able to compensate for many a trick with greater, all-round dexterity. The English sports newspaper "Field" also highlighted Schuhmann's natural power, his careful training, and the impressive confidence of his movements, saying: "The best all-round athlete who participated in the games was Schuhmann."

The applause of the Greeks for this unexpected victory by the German was reminiscent of the jubilation upon the arrival of the marathon winner. From then on, Schuhmann was, next to Louis, the most celebrated and best-known man of Athens, greeted everywhere cordially, often with loud cries of "zito".<sup>55</sup>

As Stephanos Christopoulos had broken his shoulder in a match against his fellow Greek Georgios Tsitas and was forced to retire, Schuhmann had a bye to the final. He was greeted by the audience with lively calls of "Schuhmannaki", showing their affection by turning Schuhmann's name into a diminutive.

Warned by Elliot's unexpected defeat, Tsitas, a broad-shouldered Athenian baker, tried to avoid Schuhmann's

attacks. This game of cat and mouse on the mat lasted 40 minutes without the German being able to get a hold of his opponent.

The sun had long since set. The Greeks were already leaving the stadium in great numbers to celebrate the marathon triumph of their compatriot Spyridon Louis. As darkness fell, the jury suspended the match.<sup>56</sup>

The next morning, the match continued, even though the chronicle notes that despite free admission, the attendance was low. This time, it only took Schuhmann fifteen minutes to grab Tsitas by the hip and throw him backwards onto the ground. This decided the match. At this point although the disappointed Greek spectators now began to demand that Christopoulos should be allowed to compete again, even though he had been injured and retired the day before.

To lose in wrestling was a blow to Greek pride because it was a sport they regarded as their ancient birthright. So it was not surprising that rumours soon started that Schuhmann was a professional wrestler, but "this was promptly refuted".<sup>57</sup> The well known "Circus Schuhmann" of Berlin was mentioned in the accusations, but Schuhmann had no connection with this.

For his two individual victories, Schuhmann received silver medals and an Olympic diploma. Gold at the time was scarce in Greece, where the state was insolvent. Offering gold as a prize for sport would also





Left: A team photo taken by Albert Meyer before leaving for Athens. Right: Autographs of German gymnasts on the back. Carl Schuhmann jokingly signed it "Schuhmannaki". Below, he wrote "Lig'ap'ola" a nickname that was somewhat derogatory, and translated as "a little of everything". Photo: Rüdiger Fritz collection

have been viewed as tarnishing the victories with the alleged pursuit of material gain. For the two team wins, Schuhmann was given a certificate, just like his teammates.

The German team had also been awarded a silver by the jury, but only received a single medal for the entire team. The gymnasts agreed that it should go to Hofmann, who had also won a bronze for finishing second in the 100 metre race.

The real sensation, however, was Schuhmann's victory in wrestling. As Flatow, who had earned the highest marks on the parallel bars, wrote:

*When he [Schuhmann] went up for wrestling, a sport that enjoys great popularity in Greece, and emerged victorious over adversaries who were far bigger than he, the enthusiasm of the Greeks knew no limits. Even King George of Greece greeted him with the words: "Mr. Schuhmann, you are currently the most popular man in Greece."*<sup>58</sup>

### From traitor to folk hero

There were, however, no congratulations from Schuhmann's homeland. The gymnasts who had represented Germany so splendidly found themselves banned from national competitions because they had participated at Athens contrary to the decisions of the DT board.<sup>59</sup> It was only two years later that they were pardoned at their clubs' request; this meant that Schuhmann was free to participate again at the IX German Gymnastics Festival in Hamburg. In the all-around, he finished second behind Flatow. Then, in December 1898, Schuhmann was called to London, where he worked as an instructor for the German Gymnastic Society as the successor to Rudolf Oberholzer.<sup>60</sup>

Over next seventeen years, he found himself working at one of London's busiest transport hubs, with the gymnasium's location between St. Pancras and King's Cross railway stations. The German Gymnasium can be visited today as a listed building.

During the 2012 Olympics, tens of thousands of people walked past it every day as they boarded the "Javelin" express train to the Olympic Park in Stratford.<sup>61</sup> A century earlier, this was where Schuhmann had trained his



Olympic rarities: Carl Schuhmann received silver medals for his two individual victories. Photo: Volker Kluge

students, including the gymnast Otto Bauscher, who competed for Great Britain in both 1906 and 1908.

From time to time, Schuhmann returned to Berlin. The first occasion was in May 1899, when he married Luise Wittzang, a sales clerk. The couple began a family. Of their six children, five were born in London.

But soon after the outbreak of the First World War, Schuhmann was interned as an enemy alien on 31<sup>st</sup> May 1915 with his family.<sup>62</sup> Like many German civilians, he was taken to the Isle of Man, where with the approval of the camp commandant, he was permitted to give the 23,000 inmates lessons in gymnastics. This, at least, made his enforced detention behind barbed wire a little more varied.

Above all, Camp IV Knockaloe became known for its extensive sporting activity. The gymnastics club there had 90 members and organised a festival for 15<sup>th</sup> August 1916 under the direction of Schuhmann. The internees were able to play tennis and cricket, and there was even a golf course, albeit with only three holes. Between 1915 and 1919, there were 36 football teams which played around 600 games in the different compounds.<sup>63</sup>

But this was still not freedom. Even before the end of the war, in January 1918, Schuhmann was allowed to return to Germany via the neutral Netherlands. His family had already been deported to Berlin. The majority of their property in England was left behind and auctioned off by the public trustee on 21<sup>st</sup> August 1919. In the nick of time, Schuhmann's two Olympic medals were saved, but his diploma were lost.

Starting in 1921, Schuhmann worked as a precision mechanic at the Askania works in Berlin. His speciality: telegraph and water meters. At the 1936 Olympics, he was one of the 50 senior gymnasts who took part in national gymnastic displays. Their skill received great applause. Even at the age of 73, he was head of the men's division at Charlottenburg VfL of 1858. He survived the next war, but lost his home in a bombing raid. In

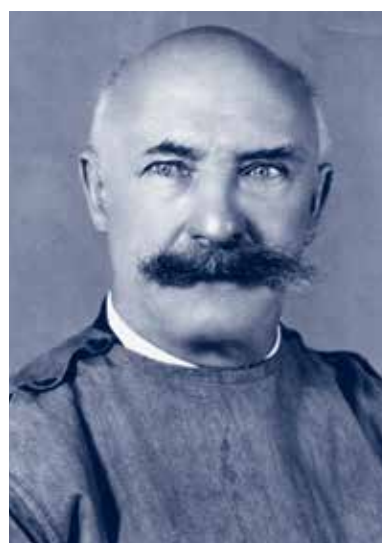


A successful comeback after two years in exile: Alfred Flatow and Carl Schuhmann, who took the first two places at the German Gymnastics Festival in 1898. Photo: Albert Meyer

March 1946, a few months after the war, he fell into a bomb crater and died shortly afterwards.

Many Germans have only heard of Schuhmann's achievements in the past three decades, during which he has received numerous posthumous honours. The Berlin Senate granted him an honorary place in the cemetery in 1990. In 1996, a special stamp was issued to mark the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first modern Olympic Games. The stamp depicts Schuhmann on the vault in Athens in a photograph by Meyer. Two Berlin sports halls bear his name, and, in August 2018, the Carl Schuhmann path was inaugurated at the Olympic Stadium.

He had earned these accolades. Schuhmann may have been small of stature, but he was one of the greats among athletes. ■



Far left: Carl Schuhmann as a sport teacher in London in the circle of his family. Left: Schuhmann aged 50 after his internment on the Isle of Man.

Photo: Carl Schuhmann, Jr. Archive

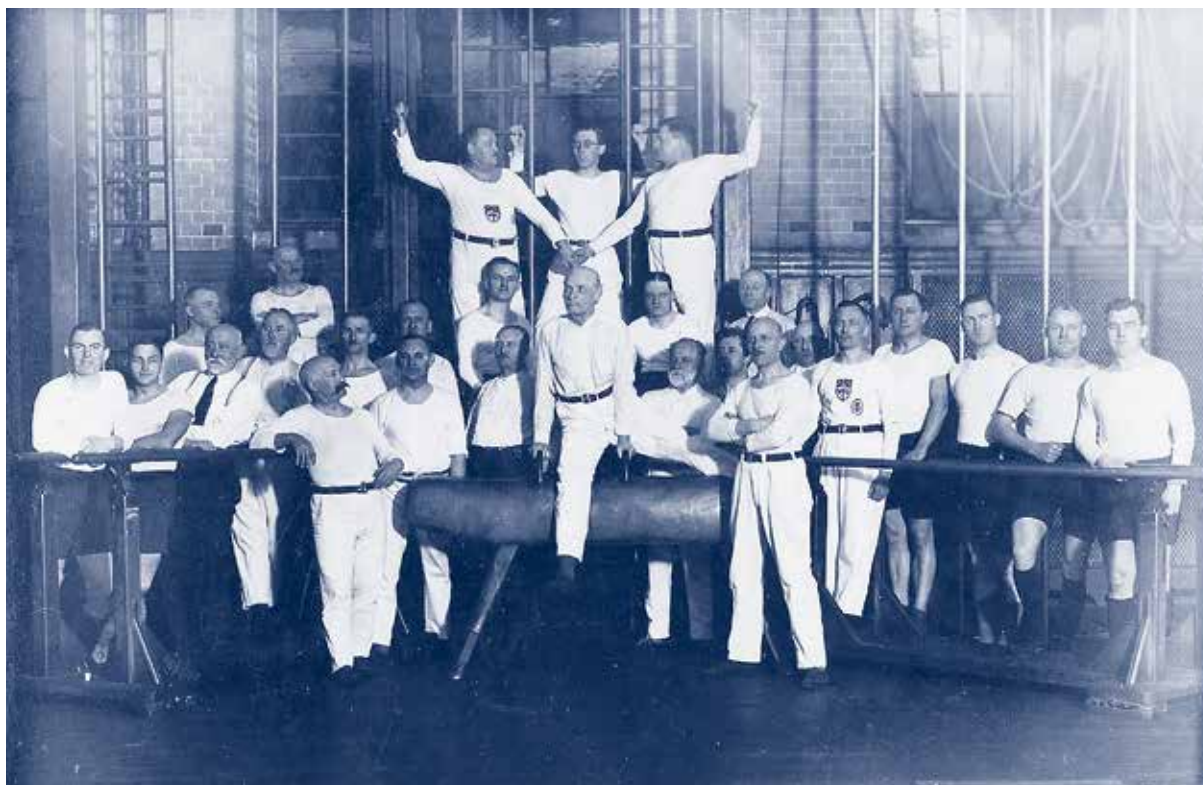


- 1 Church Records 1865–1869, Evangelical Church, Garrison Parish, Münster (Westphalia).
- 2 100 German pounds = 50 kg.
- 3 German Federal Archive (BArch), R 43/87303, "Ein Besuch bei Carl Schuhmann", undated newspaper article, April 1934.
- 4 *Beckmanns Sport Lexikon A–Z*, Otto Beckmann, Leipzig/Wien 1933, p. 2298.
- 5 Friedrich Ludwig Jahn (1778–1852) was considered the founder of the German gymnastics movement. He set up the first gym in Berlin in 1811 and in 1812 he invented the parallel and high bars.
- 6 A royal decree banned gymnastics in Prussia following the murder of August von Kotzebue, a poet and diplomat. Jahn, who was regarded as the intellectual instigator, was incarcerated. The *Turnsperre* (ban on gymnastics) was adopted by most other German states and was not lifted until 1842 by King Friedrich Wilhelm IV, when physical exercise was declared an indispensable part of male education.
- 7 Cf. *Beckmanns Sport Lexikon*, p. 680. In 1894, there were 490,000 members. By 1898, the number had grown to 600,000.
- 8 BArch, R 43/87303, April 1934.
- 9 The combination was decided by DT leadership and changed from year to year. The so-called "folk" exercises at the Gymnastics Festival of 1894 consisted of high jump, two-handed weightlifting, and rope climbing. The high bar, parallel bars, pommel horse and horse vault were compulsory apparatus exercises.
- 10 *Fest-Zeitung VII. Deutsches Turnfest, Munich 1889*.
- 11 Fallers's water metre, used in cities to regulate the flow of water, was first presented at the 1878 Paris World's Fair.
- 12 In order to be able to accept a private inheritance of 15,000 marks, the association was incorporated in 1874. It was then officially called the Berlin Turnerschaft Corporation.



A participant certificate for "elderly gymnast" Carl Schuhmann at the 1936 Olympics. Photo: Carl Schuhmann, Jr. Archive

- 13 The hall, built by the city of Berlin and opened in October 1864, was rented by the Berliner Turnerschaft (BT). The building where the office and the archive were located, was hit by bombs and completely destroyed on 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1945.
- 14 In German gymnastics, active members were divided into *Riegen* (squads). The training was in a constantly repeating order and sequence.
- 15 Gymnastics founder Friedrich Ludwig Jahn called the person leading the exercises the *Vorturner* (lead gymnast). It was his task to demonstrate the sequence of exercises before the start of the training and to give assistance during the training. The merchant Hermann Weingaertner (1864–1919) had lived in Berlin since 1885, joining the BT that same year. After the death of his father, he took over management of the swimming bath on the island of Ziegenwerder in Frankfurt an der Oder in late 1896. Cf. *Journal of Olympic History (JOH)*, Vol. 21, No. 1, 2013, pp. 36–39.
- 16 Alfred Flatow (1869–1942), who came from a Jewish family, had belonged to the BT since 1887. At the age of 21, he became the youngest German gymnastics instructor. Despite his training, he never worked in this profession. Instead, he became an independent gymnastics writer. He later owned a bicycle shop. After the Nazis ordered the expulsion of all non-Aryans from German associations in 1933, he resigned from the club to avoid being expelled. A further discriminatory law forced Flatow to add "Israel" to his first name in 1938. On 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1942 he was deported to the Theresienstadt concentration camp, where he died on 28<sup>th</sup> December. Cf. *JOH*, Vol. 20, No. 3, pp. 16–17.
- 17 The Revolution celebration on 20<sup>th</sup> September 1895, which marked the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Garibaldi's taking of Rome, was initiated with a national shooting and gymnastics festival.
- 18 *Festschrift, Berliner Turnerschaft Korporation 1863–1913*, Berlin 1913, pp. 116–117. According to Flatow, Schuhmann took 5<sup>th</sup> place. Cf. Alfred Flatow/Georg Jahns, *Handbuch für Wettturner*, Berlin 1902, pp. 368–369.
- 19 Sophie of Prussia (1870–1932) married Crown Prince Constantine in 1889. He became president of the Athens Organising Committee in 1895.
- 20 *National-Zeitung*, 7 January 1896.
- 21 Philipp Ernst Fürst zu Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst (1853–1915) married Greek Princess Chariclée Ypsilanti (1863–1912) in 1882. Even his brother Alexander (1862–1924), who advised his father and was called the Red Prince because of his pacifism, was positive about participating in the Olympics.
- 22 Fritz Hofmann (1871–1927) was 1893 German champion at 100 yards and 440 yards (10.4 and 53.2 seconds, respectively) and the high jump (1.60 m). Additionally he won the 100 yards in 1894. Hofmann led German gymnastics teams to the Olympic Games from 1900 to 1906. From 1904, he was a member of the German Reich Committee for Olympic Games (DRAfOS) and later of the German Reich Committee for Physical Exercise (DRA).
- 23 BArch, R 43/87303, April 1934.
- 24 The team had already been nominated and Strasbourg student Walter Benemann (1873–1934) had been named as its leader. The squad eventually decided not to travel and the football tournament planned for Athens did not take place.
- 25 Albert Cellarius, "Les jeux olympiques", in: *Gil Blas*, Paris, No. 5695, 12 June 1895.
- 26 *National-Zeitung*, Berlin, 24 December 1895. Coubertin's denial was published on 4 January 1896.
- 27 Willibald Gebhardt, *Soll Deutschland sich an den Olympischen Spielen beteiligen? Ein Mahnruf an die Deutschen Turner und Sports männer*, Karl Siegmund, Berlin 1896.
- 28 *Deutsche Turn-Zeitung (DTZ)*, 24 October 1895, pp. 937–939; *DTZ*, 7 November 1895, pp. 986–987; *Jahrbuch für Jugend-Volksspiele*, Vol. 4, 1895, p. 307. The project was discussed many times, but the "German Combat Games" were only realised from 1922 to 1934 on a quadrennial basis.
- 29 *DTZ*, 12 May 1892, pp. 359–362., 350 Saxon gymnasts took part in the "First Sea Tour of German Gymnasts to the Orient" from 18<sup>th</sup> July to 11<sup>th</sup> August 1892, under the direction of Dr. Woldemar Bier (1840–1906), director of the Gymnastics Instructor Training Institute in Dresden.
- 30 *Spiel und Sport*, Berlin, 14 March 1896, p. 232.



Carl Schuhmann (left next to the pommel horse) remained active into old age at the Turnverein Charlottenburg (local gymnastics association) in Berlin.

Photo: Carl Schuhmann, Jr. Archive

- 31 DTZ, 19 March 1896, p. 232.
- 32 Ibid., 26 March 1896, p. 252.
- 33 Ibid., 9 April 1896, p. 296.
- 34 *Rheinisch-Westfälische Zeitung*, Essen, 27 December 1895.
- 35 Letter from Gebhardt to Coubertin, 25 February and 14 March 1896, Olympic Studies Centre (OSC), Lausanne.
- 36 The company, founded by writer and globetrotter Carl Stangen (1833–1911), located at the Arabisches Haus at Friedrich street 72, Berlin, was the first German travel agency to operate internationally. It offered its first world journeys in 1878. In 1905, Stangen sold the company to the Hamburg–Amerika–Linie shipping company (Hapag).
- 37 *Allgemeine Sport-Zeitung*, Vienna, 5 April 1896, p. 301.
- 38 *Sport im Bild*, No. 12, 20 March 1896, p. 186; *Rad-Welt*, No. 29, 18 March 1896, p. 1.
- 39 In addition to Schuhmann, two other athletes participated in four sports in 1896, but without the same success: Viggo Jensen (DEN/1874–1930), athletics, gymnastics, shooting and weightlifting; Launceston Elliot (GBR/1874–1930), athletics, gymnastics, weightlifting and wrestling.
- 40 Schuhmann's results are not known. Allegedly, he finished fourth, fifth and eighth. Hueppe says the result in the triple jump was "about 11 m". In the shot put, Schuhmann threw "approx. 10 metres". Cf. Ferdinand Hueppe, "Griechenland und die jetzigen und einstigen olympischen Spiele", in: *Allgemeine Sport-Zeitung*, Vienna, Sonderdruck, December 1896.
- 41 The Panellinios team, which finished second, included 32 gymnasts from different Greek clubs. The second team (Ethnikos) consisted of 16 students from a high school.
- 42 Hueppe, p. 11. In the photo of Albert Meyer, it can be seen that the tenth horizontal bar in the second row (far right) remained empty.
- 43 Ibid.
- 44 Flatow/Jahns, *Handbuch*, pp. 368–369.
- 45 Hueppe, p. 11.
- 46 The Sphendone was the curve of the antique stadium, where the turning marks for the longer races (*diaulos* and *dolichos*) were located.
- 47 Ibid., p. 9.
- 48 Premiers Jeux Olympiques internationaux, Sports athletiques, 10 April 1896, programme, p. 5. Registered, but failed to participate: Nikolai de Ritter (RUS), Viggo Jensen (DEN), Louis Zutter (SUI) and Charles Champoff (BUL).
- 49 Momcsillo Tapavicza (1872–1949), a native of Vojvodina, was a student in Budapest.
- 50 Scotsman Gilbert John Elliot–Murray–Kynmound (1845–1914) became the 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of Minto in 1891. He was appointed Governor-General of Canada in 1898 and then Viceroy of India in 1905.
- 51 Eugen Sandow (1867–1925), actually Friedrich Wilhelm Müller, was the son of a German father and a Russian mother. He had fled Germany to escape military service. He toured Europe and the USA where he popularized weight training.
- 52 Cf. Ian Buchanan, "Britain's first Olympic champion: Launceston Elliot", in: *JOH*, vol. 3, No. 1/1995, pp. 20–22.
- 53 Schuhmann's height and weight vary in different sources. According to his grandson, he was 158 cm tall. Flatow (*Handbuch*, p. 369) gives a height of 156 cm and a weight of 76 kg. In various German newspapers between 1932 and 1942 based on interviews with Schuhmann, the height mentioned is 157 cm.
- 54 After his Olympic victories in the 800 and 1500 m races, the Australian Edwin Flack was also considered favourite for the marathon. But after 37 km, he was exhausted and forced to give up.
- 55 Hueppe, pp. 9–10. "Zito" means "Long may he live!"
- 56 Pierre de Coubertin / Timoleon J. Philimon / N.G. Politis, Charalambos Anninos, *The Olympic Games. B.C. 776 – A.D. 1896* ('Official Report'), Vol. 2, Karl Beck, Athens 1896, pp. 90–93.
- 57 Hueppe, p. 10.
- 58 Flatow/Jahns, *Handbuch*, pp. 369.
- 59 *Festschrift, Berliner Turnerschaft Korporation 1863–1913*, p. 41.
- 60 Rudolf Oberholzer (1863–?) was assistant master at the German Gymnastic School, King's Cross. At the German Gymnastics Festival of 1889, he placed 19<sup>th</sup> in the all-around; in 1894, he was 76<sup>th</sup>. After his time as an instructor at the German Gymnastic Society, he trained the British gymnastics team from 1912 to 1921. His son Henry (1893–1953) was part of the British team, which won a medal (bronze) for the first time in 1912.
- 61 Don Anthony, "La Turnhalle in London", in: *Olympic Review*, No. 4–5, 2002, pp. 67–68.
- 62 Carl Schuhmann Archive. The entry in the family book on p. 86 ("Commemorative Pages") reads: "31 May, Carl interned".
- 63 Panikos Panayi, *Prisoners of Britain: German Civilian and Combatant Internees during the First World War*, Manchester University Press, New York 2012, pp. 190–192.