



1972 Olympics: Backgrounder

At 4:30 A.M. on September 5, 1972, five Arab terrorists wearing sweat suits climbed a six-foot fence to enter the Olympic Village in Munich, Germany. Although several people saw them, no one thought anything was suspicious because athletes routinely hopped the fence into the village, and the terrorists had thought to hide their weapons in athletic bags. Three more men who are presumed to have obtained Olympic credentials met the five terrorists inside the village.

Just before 5:00 A.M. on September 5, 1972, the terrorists knocked on the door of Israeli wrestling coach Moshe Weinberg. When Weinberg opened the door he immediately realized something was very wrong and shouted a warning to his comrades. He and weightlifter Joseph Romano attempted to block the door giving the other Israelis time to escape. Unfortunately, they were unsuccessful. The terrorists killed Weinberg and Romano and then succeeded in rounding up nine other Israelis to hold hostage.

At 9:30 A.M. on September 5, 1972, the terrorists announced to the world that they were Palestinians. They demanded that Israel release 200 Arabs being held prisoner and that the terrorists themselves be given safe passage out of Germany.

After hours of tense negotiations, the Palestinians, who belonged to a PLO faction called Black September, agreed to a plan that would fly them and their hostages to Cairo. As the group began to board several helicopters, German sharpshooters attempted to kill the eight terrorists and a bloody firefight ensued.

At 11:00 P.M. on September 5, 1972, new fighting broke out in Munich and a terrorist grenade blew up one of the helicopters holding Israeli athletes. The remaining hostages in the second helicopter were shot to death by one of the surviving terrorists.

At 3:00 A.M. on September 6, 1972, a drawn and teary-eyed Jim McKay, who had been reporting the drama throughout the day as part of ABC's Olympic coverage, made the devastating announcement: "They're all gone."

At the time, the massacre of 11 Israeli athletes was not considered serious enough to merit canceling or postponing the Olympics. "Incredibly, they're going on with it," Jim Murray of the Los Angeles Times wrote at the time. "It's almost like having a dance at Dachau."

The JCC Maccabi Games honor and remember the Munich 11 athletes by memorializing their lives at every Opening Ceremonies. We will never forget the past, but continue looking into the future and encouraging you, Jewish teens, to play sports and live a full and active Jewish life.

--source: JCC Maccabi Games