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**„Hall of Fame“ - a Challenge for Sport-Historians, illustrated among others by the curricula vitae Adolf Metzner's and Elfriede (Rahn-) Kaun's.**

Lecture, held 24. Sept. 2010 at the XV<sup>th</sup> Internat. CESH congress in Monastir (Tunisia);

cf. the German version:

<[www.sportwissenschaft.uni-hamburg.de/tiedemann/documents/VortragMonastir2010Deutsch.pdf](http://www.sportwissenschaft.uni-hamburg.de/tiedemann/documents/VortragMonastir2010Deutsch.pdf)>

The concept “hero” is used inflationarily. Not only thereby remains unclear, what should be indicated by this word. Just in the area of sport the fans and, unfortunately, also most sport journalists are quite unscrupulous to call sportsmen and -women “heroes” resp. “heroines”, who are towering by sports results - and merely by that.<sup>1</sup> In the subject of this congress such an unclear position has been taken up.

If such so-called heroes only tower by sports results, it might be more reasonable to name them “stars” or “celebrities”, because the term “hero”, for me, implies not only measurable quantities like results, victories, championships, but moral qualities. I'll clarify my understanding of the term “hero” later.

In every big sports event, we experience - particularly in times of olympic<sup>2</sup> games - that a lot of people become “fans”. They develop - at least periodically - a need to revere “their sports heroes” and to experience victories and defeats passionately with them as if these were their own. This identifying position strengthens emotionality and diminishes at the same time the readiness to critical distance.

Adoration of heroes for me is near to a religious position. As a scientist, I basically try not to let this uncritical position overwhelm me, if possible, although I am not free of it as a person and (former) sportsman. I would like to invite you, my listeners, to accompany my efforts towards a (self-)critical consideration of this phenomenon: adoration of “heroes” in sport, exemplified by the lives of two well-known German sports persons.

Especially for sport-historians, it's a challenge to hold up the scientific basic position in spite of a certain readiness to participate emotionally. In this sense, I'll approach the discussion about the “hall of fame of German sport”<sup>3</sup>, opened 2008 in Berlin, and about the

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Scharenberg, Swantje (2010): “(Gibt es Sporthelden?) Leistung allein genügt nicht.” In: DAMALS. Das Magazin für Geschichte (42), 3, p. 38-41.

<sup>2</sup> There is no need to print the word “olympic” with a capital “O” - besides the economically motivated efforts of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), enforced especially by legal means to push through this word as a “registered trademark”.

<sup>3</sup> The German name of this institution is “Hall of fame des deutschen Sports”.

40 personalities taken up at the beginning.<sup>4</sup> They are not literally called heroes, but their status in the “hall of fame of German sport” absolutely corresponds to this central concept of our congress in a common sense.

That this German institution is named by English words “hall of fame”, and not - translated correctly to German - “Ruhmeshalle”, is an awkward situation without any given reason. This embarrassment might partly be owed to the long tradition of such “halls of fame”, especially in the United States of America. But the more important reason might be an (unconscious, but well-founded) hesitation to glorify German history, even the history of German sport. That such hesitation is very appropriate will be exemplified later on by the curriculum vitae of Adolf Metzner.

This institution, founded 2006 by the society named “Stiftung Deutsche Sporthilfe” (German Sports Aid Foundation), follows a model carried out in the USA since quite a long time to maintain sports tradition. This German foundation, after their own stating, is meant to remind “of the value and the meaning of élites” and “(create) a remaining forum for personalities which have become a model by achievement, fair play and cooperation”<sup>5</sup>. This is explained on the website as follows:

*“The Hall of fame of German sport is a forum of the recollection of people who have written history by their success in competition and by their commitment for the ideas of sport. The German Sports Aid Foundation would like to help through the institution founded by itself to preserve the more than one hundred years history of German sport and its great personalities in the memory of our country and to stimulate at the same time discussions about this past.”<sup>6</sup>*

Here we have the official basic ideas for the “hall of fame of German sport”.<sup>7</sup> First, I want to check them critically. Then, on the basis of my concept of “hero / heroine”, I will

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<sup>4</sup> See <<http://www.hall-of-fame-sport.de>>, there also the following quotations. Cf. Gernandt, Michael (2008): “Hall of Fame des Sports. Deutsche Helden gesucht.” In: Süddeutsche Zeitung, 03.05.2008, and Rüttenauer, Andreas (2008): “Eine Frage der Haltung. Die Stiftung Deutsche Sporthilfe feiert in den kommenden Wochen den Gründungsakt ihrer Hall of Fame. Schon die ersten 40 Ruhmeskandidaten zeigen: Die Auswahl ist so diffus wie konfliktrüchig.” In: “taz” (“tageszeitung”), 03./04.05.2008, p. 23.

<sup>5</sup> My own translation to English; in German: “an den Wert und die Bedeutung von Eliten” erinnern und “ein bleibendes Forum (schaffen) für Persönlichkeiten, die durch Leistung, Fairplay und Miteinander Vorbild geworden sind”.

<sup>6</sup> My own translation to English; in German: “Die Hall of Fame des deutschen Sports ist ein Forum der Erinnerung an Menschen, die durch ihren Erfolg im Wettkampf und durch ihren Einsatz für die Ideen des Sports Geschichte geschrieben haben. Die Stiftung Deutsche Sporthilfe möchte mit der von ihr gegründeten Einrichtung mithelfen, die mehr als hundertjährige Geschichte des deutschen Sports und seiner großen Persönlichkeiten im Gedächtnis unseres Landes zu bewahren und gleichzeitig Diskussionen über diese Vergangenheit anzuregen.”

<sup>7</sup> For me, the position is worth discussing, that this institution is to foster an uncritical admiration of people who merely won sports medals and championship titles and therefore should not be promoted neither by sponsors nor by public institutions. In this paper, I won't deepen this position but go with this mental reservation into the secondary discussion of the historical / ethical criteria of such a hall of fame.

discuss my principles and criteria for the choice of the personalities which might be taken up in such a “hall of fame of German sport”. Finally, by the *curricula vitae* of two participants of the olympic games in 1936, both of them I have been acquainted with, I try to make clear the difficult but unavoidable task to pass value sentences on those candidates.

**Who** is or would be a hero / heroine? **What** is or would be a sports hero / heroine? Would this concept be useful as a criterion - maybe even the decisive one - for an admission of a person to the “hall of fame of German sport”?

The concept “hero” is not at all used by the leading spokesmen of the foundation. They name “*élites*” or “*personalities which have become a model by achievement, fair play and cooperation*”. These are interpretation-needy words. Moreover, they are very general and not bound substantially to sport.

The criterion “*success in competition*” is simple; it seems apt to be more exact, fairly objective. But the fact that those people are supposed to “*have written history by their (...) commitment for the ideas of the sport*”, is a thoughtless phrase, unfortunately used increasingly in connection with “heroic admiration”. “*To write history*” is the activity of historians, not of sportsmen. And what might be “*the ideas of sport*”, if not even the concept “sport” is clarified?<sup>8</sup>

Such thoughtlessly proclaimed “leading ideas” of the “German Sports Aid Foundation” and its “hall of fame of German sport” might be explained - at least also - by the fact that in the jury deciding on the admission of “great personalities” to this “*élite*” nearly no sport-historical expertise was represented. Manfred Lämmer was the only professional sport historian in the 28-headed jury. Beside him, the jury is an aggregation of mighty financiers and traders, media stars, and sports journalists.

In my opinion, if such institution should be founded and run at all, it were a task for sports historians to deliver the determining political-historical arguments on the basis of conceptual and ethical clarity in such questions. If, instead, such an unprofessional jury decides, then the results may be problematic. At least, the “German Sports Aid Foundation” also declares, that she “*wants to help to preserve the more than hundred-year-old history of the German sport and its great personalities in memory of our country and to stimulate at the same time discussions about this past*”.

Before I formulate my ethical-moral position to the problem of the sports hero's admiration and indicate my scientific position, I want to clear my understanding of the central concepts.

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Tiedemann, Claus (2010a): “‘Sport’ - Vorschlag einer Definition.” <<http://www.sportwissenschaft.uni-hamburg.de/tiedemann/documents/sportdefinition.html>>.

“**Sport**” (for me) is a field of cultural activity, in which human beings voluntarily establish a real or only imagined relationship with other people, consciously intending to develop their abilities and accomplishments - particularly in the area of skilled motion - in order to compare themselves with these other people, according to rules set by themselves or adopted, without intending to cause harm to them or themselves.<sup>9</sup>

From decades of practical work and from the mentioned texts of the “German Sports Aid Foundation”, I take an *implicitly* similar understanding of “sport” as granted. A detailed discussion seems not necessary to me *in this case*. It remains nevertheless absolutely unclear, what should be meant by “ideas of sport”, to whom the candidates for the “hall of fame” should have been “committed”.

I do not want to deal further with the lack of clarity of the other leading concepts: “*élites*” (in the plural!) as well as “*personalities which have become a model by achievement, fair play and cooperation*”. I now offhand will clear the central concept of this problem field, my general conception of “hero”.

A “**hero**” (for me) is an outstanding person according to my feelings and to my judgement in the good and on the whole.

What I feel or judge to be good, will differ from what others deem good; and putting the quality of outstanding into perspective may remain subjective, too. By introducing the criterion “on the whole”, I point out to the fact that I take as a basis for my feelings and judgement not only a special life period of this person, but the whole life (up to now). The fact that I call my judgement and feelings subjective, points on the one hand to the ambit of my judgement, which is valid just for me. On the other hand, this does not mean that everything is arbitrary. If we - even as scientists - don’t want to talk at cross-purposes, we must exchange our respective understanding.

About “*standing out*”, no big discussion is necessary in sport, if one follows my definition. In the field of sport, people try to find out, who is the better one, who wins the comparison. The sporty “achievement” is measured primarily by “success in a competition”, delivered according to approved rules and the “here-and-now-principle”. So far, so little problematic, if one only looks upon results.<sup>10</sup>

But if one looks for an outstanding “*person / personality*”, things become more *complex*. For me, the number and rank of won sports medals and championships is not sufficient to gauge a person’s quality of “outstanding”. To measure only the quantity of medals and championships may be sufficient to call a person a “celebrity” or a “star”, but not a “hero”

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Tiedemann (2010a): “Sport”.

<sup>10</sup> For me, the meaning of sport is bound to direct comparison here and now, grammatically spoken to the *comparative* (!). The *superlative*, represented by the “record”-principle, is not essential in my eyes; a “record” (= note, gauge) is only “necessary”, if in comparison the “here-and-now-principle” is given up and an idea of “eternity” is introduced; this extension has meaningful consequences which regarding anthropological aspects are very questionable (e.g. doping).

or “heroine”.

Furthermore, problems arise - already inside sport - from the apparently worldwide spread and de-emphasised doping practise. The thus achieved results are rightly doubted in their legitimacy. Olympic medals of caught dopers have been deprived and taken away, in some cases years later. Indeed, the present results of the discussions about the denial of “records” put up by sportsmen and -women with proved doping, don’t let me be optimistic concerning the clarity and consequence of the ethical-moral position, at least in Germany. To look at the whole life of a person and not only at a period of sporty success is helpful and needy to make sure that a value judgement like the attribution “hero” or “heroine” will stand the test of time.

When the “German Sports Aid Foundation” offers “*fair play and cooperation*” as a criterion, they might address the personal qualification. By “fair play”, the ethical dimension, which I address by the concept of the “good”, might be meant. But “fair play” remains a blurred criterion. And what could be meant by “cooperation”, remains absolutely unclear to me: By cooperation, one can commit crimes. This term alone doesn’t mark a positive value for me, even not in sport.

According to my definition of “hero”, I will now check, whether a sportsman / -woman has “deserved” in my eyes to be taken up to the “hall of fame of German sport”.<sup>11</sup>

I’ll take the bull by the horns: In German history, also in sport history, the most important ethical-moral criterion for a value judgement about a person is - in my eyes - his or her acting during the Nazi time and later on. Not wrongfully the allies have expected of the Germans after liberation from fascism to face a “denazification” procedure, in which they were checked, whether they had helped in the biggest crimes of the latest history, and according to the results were divided into one of five categories: Major offenders, loaded, less-loaded, fellow travellers or non-loaded. Whether the denazification has been accomplished consistently, is an other deplorable question.

For a “hall of fame of German sport”, of course also people are to be considered, who have not witnessed the Nazi time, and also the same ethical-moral criteria are valid for them, in principle. But because of the atrocity of the crimes, the Nazi time is that period, in which judgement and assessment criteria are put to the greatest test and therefore must prove true in complete clarity.

The criticism opening since decades over and over again about Carl Diem as a leading person of German sport history and sport politics can be traced back to the question: Has Carl Diem taken part by his own action in the criminal politics of the Nazis, and if so, in

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<sup>11</sup> I remind the above mentioned position that it’s questionable, whether such a hall of fame of (German) sport should be founded and run at all (cf. footnote 7).

which extent? I do not want to renegotiate the “case of Carl Diem” today.<sup>12</sup> Probably because of the many critical statements reported for over 60 years, Carl Diem - at least up to now - has not been taken up in the “hall of fame of German sport”.

I would like to check the arguments for or against an admission to the “hall of fame of German sport” dealing with two less prominent persons, both of them participants of the olympic games 1936: the 400-m runner Adolf Metzner, and the high-jumper Elfriede Kaun. Relating to sporty success both stand nearly on the same step.

**Adolf Metzner** (1910 - 1978) was a multiple German champion over 400 m as well as in the relay competitions 4x100 and 4x400 m with his club companions of “Eintracht Frankfurt”; 1934 he won the European championship over 400 m in excellent 47.9 sec. His starts at the olympics 1932 in Los Angeles as well as 1936 in Berlin were less successful: in each case he retired in the intermediate heat.<sup>13</sup>



**Photo # 1:** Adolf Metzner ca. 1932

**Elfriede Kaun** (1914 - 2008) was several times German champion in the high jump; 1935 she improved the German record to 1.60 m and won 1936 in Berlin with the same height the olympic bronze medal; later on she cleared 1.63 m.<sup>14</sup>



**Photo # 2:** Elfriede Kaun, 9.8.1936 Berlin

However, both differ in my eyes very much concerning their position to “National Socialism” and its politics, in the Nazi time as well as, above all, in the time afterwards.

Adolf Metzner, as a young student of medicine, in September 1933 joined the SS, in 1937 (when the admission stop had been repealed) also the NSDAP.<sup>15</sup> Already by this documented facts, it is clear that he was an active Nazi. Whether he later was involved personally as a SS doctor in any of the numerous and systematic crimes committed

by the members of his organisation, which the International Nuremberg Tribunal marked

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Laude, Achim & Bausch, Wolfgang (2000): *Der Sport-Führer: Die Legende um Carl Diem*. Göttingen; Krüger, Michael (2010): “In Sachen Carl Diem - Auf den Spuren der Wahrheit.” In: *Olympisches Feuer* (59), 4-5, p. 42-47; Schäfer, Ralf (2010): “Sportgeschichte und Erinnerungspolitik: Der Fall Carl Diem.” In: *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* (58), 11, p. 877-899; Rüttenauer, Andreas (2010): “Krieg der Experten: Sportgeschichte. Wissenschaftler streiten über die Rolle des Sportfunktionärs Carl Diem. War er Gründungsvater des organisierten Sports in Deutschland oder Nazi und Antisemit?” In: “taz” (“tageszeitung”), 06.12.2010, p. 18.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Nestler, Gerhard (2010): “Adolf Metzner. Eine deutsche Biographie.” In: *Frankenthal einst und jetzt* 2010, p. 28-36, and Tiedemann, Claus (2010b): “Adolf Metzner und das Erbe der NS-Vergangenheit.” Lecture, held in Frankenthal 14.09.2010 (still unpublished).

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Tiedemann, Claus (2006): “Elfriede Rahn-Kaun - eine sportliche ‘Heldin’ in schwieriger Zeit.” Lecture in Hoya 21.10.2006, revised 2009: <<http://www.sportwissenschaft.uni-hamburg.de/tiedemann/documents/VortragHoya2006.pdf>>.

<sup>15</sup> Bundesarchiv Berlin (former “Berlin Document Center”), VBS 286, Metzner, Adolf, 25.4.1910.

as a “criminal organisation”, I do not know. 1938, Adolf Metzner became one of two “Führer” (leaders) of his sport club “Sportgemeinde Eintracht Frankfurt”. October 1939, he was drafted into the “Waffen-SS” as a medical doctor, engaged mostly behind the front, so far as actually is known. Not before 1949 (!), he was de-nazified in Fritzlar, classified as “fellow traveller” and sentenced to a fine of 50 DM.<sup>16</sup>

Dr. Adolf Metzner was since 1951 chairperson of the “Union of Old Athletes” and worked since 1953 as a “sports doctor” at the university of Hamburg. There he developed with Prof. Dr. Ernst Gadermann a telemetrical test procedure and got 1971, one year before his premature retirement, the appointment as a professor. Beside his university job, he was since 1961 (up to his death) the first and main sports journalist of the weekly magazine “DIE ZEIT”, appearing in Hamburg.<sup>17</sup>

Metzner accomplished by concealment and partly inexact information in his curricula vitae or with questionnaires, that his commitment to SS and NSDAP was as good as unknown. He never publicly took a stand on his Nazi past, apart from the latish de-nazification procedure 1949 in Fritzlar, where he had lived not long and was able to occur, therefore, as an unknown person with incomplete information to his Nazi career, so that he could cheat through for the classification as “fellow traveller”.

Elfriede Kaun was a young woman from poorest origins. She lived in Kiel and began in 1934 a steep career as a high-jumper culminating at the olympic games 1936 in winning the bronze medal. She was a qualified kindergarten teacher and not interested or even engaged in politics. She accepted the nice sides of the Nazi time naively, concerning her job and her career as a sportswoman, and the same way she shared the loads of the civil population then in the years of war.

After the Nazi time, she developed - lately though, but, at least seldom among the German participants of the Nazi olympic games - a critical position towards her own past. Some year, in her older times, she consciously no more joined the traditional meetings of the “old-36ers” in the Bavarian vicinity of old fascists and pro-fascists like Leni Riefenstahl, Dr. Gisela Mauermayer and other fans of the Nazis and their olympics - on the contrary: In numerous interviews, talks, and meetings she told younger sportsmen and -women self-critically about her life in the Nazi time. The regional sports association of Schleswig - Holstein honoured her naming a yearly awarded price after her.

To my feeling and judgement, Adolf Metzner probably stands out in some regards, certainly as a sportsman, in a way probably also as a sports journalist, finally also as a donor of his inherited property, but on the whole he does not stand out for me in the

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<sup>16</sup> Several informations are due to Gerhard Nestler’s professional archival research, cf. Nestler (2010): Adolf Metzner.

<sup>17</sup> Nestler, Gerhard (2010), and Tiedemann, Claus (2010b).



good. His participation in the Nazi crimes - to be fixed at least in his early entry into the SS and his NSDAP-membership - he later did not comment honestly in the public. On the contrary: He maintained furthermore old “NS-connections”. Therefore, he is not good for me as a sports hero or olympic hero.

Elfriede Kaun (later married Rahn-Kaun), however, a great sportswoman and olympic bronze medallist, showed by her self-critical reformation, even if late, that she did not continue glorifying the experienced Nazi time like many others. This unpretentious lady processed her life experience herself and represented the position won anew also publicly, at least in sporting circles. A nice sign for her purification is also, that she in her old age was accepted again friendly by emigrated Jewish sportswoman Gretel Bergmann-Lambert, her high jump competitor and companion, whom 1936 the Nazi sports-officials kicked out from the olympic games thus shamefully. This all together seems to me good on the whole, and therefore Elfriede Rahn-Kaun for me is a sports heroine or olympic heroine, who would have deserved an admission to a “hall of fame of German sport”.<sup>18</sup>

It would be very interesting for me to examine, who of the first 40 personalities taken up in this “hall of fame of German sport” in 2008 would have passed *my* criteria. Only a short time ago one of these “heroes”, Willi Daume, the most important post-war sports official of the FRG and vice president of the IOC, has become known not only as a NSDAP member since 1937, but also as an informer for the SD (security service) of the SS.<sup>19</sup> According to my criteria, shown for instance regarding Adolf Metzner, this should lead to a new check of Daume’s admission to the “hall of fame of German sport” and might result in a take back of his admission there.

The only sports historian in the electing jury, Manfred Lämmer, came out with the statement “*to distinguish only members of the resistance would not do justice to the claim of the hall of fame*”. Nobody had actually required this; Lämmer argued absurdly, presumably for to prevent a serious discussion about the Nazi times. And what is or should be “the claim of the hall of fame”? Glorifying some Nazi sport stars and officials like Rudolf Caracciola, Sepp Herberger, Gustav Kilian, or a beneficiary of the dispossession and expulsion of Jewish merchants like Josef Neckermann?

Compared with the emotions with which up to now events and people of the GDR (DDR) sport are judged and often condemned, the critical readiness to judge (and condemn) events and people of the Nazi sport appears to me underdeveloped. In this point, graduations have shifted. I personally will never lose out of sight which great grief the Nazis have brought to the world, namely *according to their programme*. The wrong undoubtedly exercised in the GDR is not only of a lower grade for me, but was above all

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<sup>18</sup> Remember my mental reservation (cf. footnote 7)!

<sup>19</sup> Rode, Jan C. (2008): *Willi Daume und die Entwicklung des Sports in der BR Deutschland zwischen 1945 und 1970*. Universität Hannover, Diss. phil.



not originally according to the programme of the leading antifascists, it actually *contradicted their initial ideals and ideas*. This is not to play down the wrong that happened in the GDR and her sport. However, to me, the wrong in Nazi Germany seems to be played down strongly and often. I am afraid, that this is not only a question of the number of years these two periods of German history / sport history have passed away. In this respect, most of the persons glorified in the “hall of fame of German sport” have not been chosen wisely.