



Hitler's Pawn, a new documentary from HBO, tells the story of Margaret Lambert, a world-class Jewish high jumper dropped by the Nazis from the 1936 Berlin Olympics on the eve of the competition.

Hitler's Pawn: A Thwarted Olympian Tells Her Story

In 1936, Margaret Lambert was not unlike the gold-medal hopefuls at the Athens Games today. She was one of the best high jumpers in her country, the *crème de la crème* in a nation that valued top athletes almost as highly as intellectuals, artists, and musicians. It seemed she was a born Olympian, destined to compete on the world stage at the 1936 Summer Games in Berlin. But she never got the chance. Margaret Lambert (born Gretel Bergmann), was in the wrong place at the wrong time. She was a Jew, and she lived in Nazi Germany.

Hitler's Pawn, a new documentary released on July 14 by HBO, chronicles Lambert's story. Nazi Germany, under threat of an American boycott of the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, promised Lambert a spot on her country's Olympic team. Once Nazi officials determined they had appeased American calls for non-discrimination of Jewish athletes at the Games, they bounced her out of the competition, almost literally at the last minute. Lambert's story is testimony to the hardships faced by Jews in Nazi Germany.

George Roy, producer and editor, *Hitler's Pawn*, came up with the idea for the documentary after reading an article about Lambert in the *New York Times* in 1996. "It was a nice article, but the author didn't seem to have much space to go into detail," he said. That's

where Roy wanted to step in. He felt Lambert's story was important. "It's far more than just a story about the Olympics," he said. "It's really a story about humanity."

PRODUCING MEMORIES

Production on *Hitler's Pawn* began in August of 2003. Shooting took place over the course of three months, with most of the b-roll footage being shot in less than ten days. "We went to Germany and all these other locations with a 20-page shotlist," said Roy. Crew members shot various locations from Lambert's past, including the town of Ettlingen, scene of a camp where the Nazi Party sent the athlete for "training" as part of her bogus acceptance to the Olympics. The 90-year-old Lambert was filmed in various parts of Germany, as well as at her home in Queens, New York City.

Germany was also where HBO shot the chief visual feature of *Hitler's Pawn*, a series of dramatic reenactments recounting the story of Lambert's childhood and the years leading up to the 1936 Olympics. "I envisioned [*Hitler's Pawn*] unfolding as a real personal saga," said Roy about his use of the reenactments. "There was a recreation or dramatization aspect to it, but it was coupled with the sense of an unfolding thought

process," as though Lambert is recalling, almost in a dream-like state, her memories of this time in her life.

Indeed, unlike your garden-variety Court TV reenactments, *Hitler's Pawn's* dramatizations have a grainy, almost ethereal feel. Roy says the look accomplished two things: he wanted certain scenes, such as the ones at the Ettlingen training camp, to seem almost too good to be true (and in Lambert's case, they were). "They were meant to be eerie, but in a happy way," he said. He also wanted the scenes to look like archival footage. "We wanted to get that sort of stripped-down, 1930s look."

To accomplish this, the footage, which was shot on 16mm film stock, was manipulated during a tape-to-tape transfer of the entire film. "We supersaturated a lot of the recreation scenes," said Brian Lockhart, who supervised the post production on *Hitler's Pawn*. "We brought the colors to life by adding a lot of saturation in chroma to a lot of the shots." Lockhart also enhanced the grain in many shots and manipulated the black and white levels of the actual archival footage of Gretel Bergmann.

Another unique visual element of *Hitler's Pawn* includes several shots depicting Lambert today in the foreground of the reenactments showing her past. Although Lambert looks to have been superimposed into the scenes in post she was in fact shot in the same scenes with the actress who played Gretel Bergmann. "We created 'power windows' around her in the post," said Lockhart. This helped differentiate her from the rest of the scene. Additionally, she was shot at a different focal point than the actress who played Gretel Bergmann.

EDITING THE PAST

Editing *Hitler's Pawn* was a challenge of multitasking for Roy. "I was generally editing parts of sections as we got completed interview transcripts and other elements back from Germany," he said. "So I generally built most of this film as a sort of glorified radio dialogue. I built it all audio first, and did the sort of talking heads and just knew in my head where and when I was going to need transitions and copy points."

This method seems to have paid off. *Hitler's Pawn* is now on rotation on HBO Sports, and it has generally received good reviews. More importantly, it has given voice to a forgotten victim of the Nazis. Something to think about as world-class athletes step up to the plate at Athens.

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