

# Never ending story

by Zeev Avrahami

*"Are you a football player?"*

The story has all the ingredients: Germany, Israel, Jews, Nazis, anti-Semitism, terrorists, academic, history, science, German humor, sports, Olympic games, one Jewish professor who walked away from Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, walked away from the terrorists and never stopped walking since, one German professor, a centimeter before his retirement, who all his life stood and wrote against Nazism, finding his mailbox filled with e-mails calling him a Nazi or from Nazi lovers who call him a hero. We have here security, and this horrible feeling that everything you took for granted and thought would be there for you, is not there all of a sudden.

But it is a simpler story. About misunderstandings, fear, lies, the attempt to crave the warm attention of the spotlight before retirement. It is a story about human beings because we can't prove all the other things in this story, and it would be better if we don't even try: it is a story that buried deep in the archive and the deaths' memory, a story that is been surrounded by circle upon circles of landmines.

*"Are you a football player?"*

## The case

From the conference room on the fifth floor of the Sport institution at Goettingen University there's a wonderful scene, a view that some investors would pay dozens of million for it if some European artist would put it on canvas. A view that comes packaged with the pastoral silent of this university town. But on June 20<sup>th</sup> someone sprayed the picture, played screeching loud music to disturb the serenity. If that someone was an outsider, the city would have spit it out, remove it like a stain in the laundry. But that someone was the distinguished Professor Arnd Krueger, the director of the Sport institute at the university.

June 20<sup>th</sup> was supposed to be another day in the life of Krueger. At 64, he was on the cusp of retirement, far away from his zenith both as an academic and as an athlete. The institution was hosting at that day another sport conference: lecture, applauds, questions, coffee or tea, cookies, a break, lecture, and a paper to summarize the day. Nobody, other than the participants, was supposed to hear anything about the conference. Krueger, as the host, thought that he shouldn't just say pleasantries. That he is supposed to put some spice in it. If Krueger could have turned the clock back one month, he would have probably said: "welcome, enjoy it", and leave.

But instead of spice, Krueger stormed the conference, took the conference as hostage and started throwing grenades. His lecture, "Hebron and Munich: How do we communicate sports history without getting caught in [the] snare of anti-Semitism?", launched his thesis about what really happened in Munich 72': that the Israeli athletes in Munich had a clear official warning about the attack, that the athletes were distributed in apartments all around Munich, that those who stayed in the village were secret agent and reserve officers who volunteered to stay, that they sacrificed themselves so Germans

would still feel guilty and pay, that their death will raise the Israeli cause in the struggle against Palestinians. Krueger even based some of his thesis by quoting off an Israeli dissertation and said that in Israel there are different perceptions of the body compared with other industrialized countries, that Israeli do whatever they can to eliminate life with disabilities, that that's why the abortion rate in Israel is higher than any industrialized country.

Three or four participants protested his words, but if it wasn't for one who doubled as a freelancer for a radio station, this conference would have also died into the archives of the ivory tower. Now, all these newspapers that never spoke to Krueger, never took interest in his work and never read any of the 40 books he wrote and edited, put him in the headlines.

The Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung claimed that it was the biggest piece of hatred to come out of the academy in years; Ilan Mor, the chargé d'affaires at the Israeli Embassy, told the *Jerusalem Post*: "This is the worst form of dehumanizing the State of Israel." According to Mor, attacking Israel in order to discredit Jews is the new face of Anti-Semitism; the famous writer Henryk Broder told the *Post* that even in the 70's academics were repeating the claims that the Jews declared war in the 30's and that part of modern anti-Semitism mantra is to claim that Jews collaborated with the Nazis and accepted their death in order to achieve their goal, the creation of Israel; Alex Feuerherdt, a journalist who has written extensively about anti-Semitism within the German soccer federation, told *The Post*, "First, a police psychologist assigned to Munich claimed that the murder was the fault of the Israeli operatives. Now a sports historian tells us that these athletes died as martyrs for Israel. These are nothing but anti-Semitic conspiracy theories. What absurd theory will come next? That the Palestinian terrorists in Munich in 1972 were actually Mossad agents?"

And all of a sudden Krueger turned himself into a martyr. His university distanced itself from the political context of his claims and appointed an ombudsman to check whether he was conducting in a proper scientific way. The German Society of Sport Science started its own investigation to check if Krueger had broken the chapter's ethical code and start a move to expel him. His mailbox was filled with mails telling him he should be ashamed because he is a Nazi, or that he should be proud of himself for being a Nazi.

Two weeks after the conference Krueger apologized for the victims' family. He apologized for using the quoted dissertation because, he said, it was a research that was conducted in these times and not at the time of the attack. He didn't apologize for using the content at all, he didn't back off his claims, and he only added a disclaimer that he is not anti-Semite. He also believe that the Israelis were fooled by the peacefulness promise of the Olympics ideal, just like the Jews in Hebron were sure that their Arab neighbors would not butcher them in 1929.

As a researcher, Munich is accompanying Krueger for 36 years. In 1999 he already wrote the same claims on page 20 of a book about sport and politics in the 20<sup>th</sup> century where Krueger wrote the chapter about the Olympics. No one but one person responded to his writing then.

### **The visit**

It might be a story about breaking walls and rules. Rigid German walls and clear Prussians rules that no one supposed to break. Arnd Krueger always insisted on watering his thirst for knowledge, experiences, new cultures, people and countries. It might be a story about Jews and Germans and

how the Holocaust covered everything with guilt, fear and hatred and made sure that there will always be distance and layers between these entities: policemen in front of Jewish cafes in Berlin, a blockade in front of the synagogue, an armored car in front of the embassy. There are not many Germans who ever touched their own victims, the people who make them be ashamed of themselves forever. Krueger was determined to break this wall also.

Krueger represented Germany in the 1500 meters competition in the Olympic Games of Mexico City in 1968. Uncharacteristically for that time he moved to Mexico six months before the games in order to get use to the altitude. At the games he met Hannah Shezifi, an Israeli middle distance runner, for the first time. In 1971 they met again when Shezifi came to train in Leverkusen, Germany.

Shezifi, a current member of the Israeli national Bridge team shows strong yearning when she talks about Krueger, her voice become softer, like a schoolgirl. "He is a wonderful and smart man", she says on the phone from Israel. "I made my parents babysitters for my 6-month-old baby and flew to train in Leverkusen for three months in 1971. Krueger used to run with me but he was also my coach. When I returned to Israel he used to send us letters with training instructions and my husband was translating them into action. Even then he had crazy ideas like periodical checkups, health clubs and weight lifting. He was crazy but smart. We used to talk for hours and I had really good time".

Esther Rot, another Israeli runner was also training at the time in Leverkusen. In the Christmas vacation between 1971-2, Krueger and his future wife came for a two-week visit in Israel. They slept one week at the Shezifis and one week at Shezifi's parents' garden house. Krueger remembers how every morning he used to go with Hannah Shezifi to an airport base in Haifa, where her husband was working as an airplane mechanic, and they would run around the fences, notifying the guards about holes in the fence. Krueger thought that if he is allowed into this kind place it means that they have a friendship of trust. Shezifi would become the cornerstone of Krueger thesis.

During that visit Krueger also met with the Israeli track and field coach, Amitzur Shapira. Krueger took great interest in Shapira's tales about training athletes under the military influence. The highlight of the visit for Krueger was being a guest on Rot's wedding. In his speech in June 20<sup>th</sup>, Krueger even emphasized in his power point presentation the fact that he was a guest in a Jewish wedding, strengthening his authority over Israel and Judaism.

### **The security**

Krueger was wearing a few hats for the Munich games. The year before the Olympics he helped some Israeli athletes, among them the race walker Shaul Ladany, to train and acclaim themselves in Munich. He tries to participate but his time, the same time he recorded in the 68' trials was good only for fifth place this time. He is using steroids and gives a dirty urine sample so the organizers can check whether the computer, used for the first time to track steroids in the Olympic Games, is really working. And he is also the chief editor of the coaches' journal of the German sports federation. So he sleeps in the media village, watches the competition from the best seats and passes some information to the German team. A messenger boy with a PhD – that is how he remembers himself.

Krueger notices that the security in the village is completely loose. He doesn't want to stand in line with the rest of the journalists to get accredited so he just jogs into the village, he enters where

there's a clear sign that it is only an exit. He knows some of the guards: they are athletes from the police team who failed in the Olympic trials and just wanted to be as close as possible to the games. They can give you instructions, but they are useless against a terror attack.

But who thought then about terror attack? Not even the Israelis. Ladany remembers a report in an Israeli paper warning about a possible attack on the Israeli delegation, but he doesn't remember any official warning. Shmuel Lalkin, the head of the Israeli team to Munich remembers that there was one security person who was assigned to the team, and that the Israeli embassy also was involved, but mostly he remembers general instructions: check the cars, make sure the doors are locked, and keep an eye on the maids.

"Before the games I met in Munich with the police deputy. I remember he had a cast on his leg. We went through everything and he told me that all is coordinated with the Israeli security", remembers Lalkin, "I, with my military background, had my doubts. I contacted that head of security of the Ministry of education and told him that we are located by a pedestrian and that underneath our apartments there are roads where drivers can stop and take the spiral stairs right into the apartments. Also, we were surrounded by Muslim delegations so I thought the location wasn't proper, security or sport wise, but I was told to care for the sports, that I should leave security for the experts".

### **The meeting**

On the night of September 4, the Israeli delegation, with the exception of two rowers who lived in Kiel, was supposed to go out and see the play "fiddler on the roof" starring Shmuel Rodensky. Shezifi, who came to the Olympics as a prize for her winning the Asian championship and not as part of the delegation, saw the play a few days before in Israel. Together with her husband, she makes plans with a local friend. They go out to a club at night and were planned to go on a trip to Brussels in the morning. Instead of sleeping in apartment number 4 together with the doctors, they sleep at the friend's house.

Earlier, Krueger is running into Shezifi inside the Olympic village. Krueger is enthusiastic about seeing her, asking for her plans for that night and trying to find out if there is a possibility that they can have coffee together. Shezifi, according to Krueger, tells him that the Israeli delegation was warned and distributed around Munich, one man in an apartment so they wouldn't become targets. Shezifi ask Krueger to swear that he will keep the information as a secret. We had a relationship of trust, he says now, that's why I didn't use her words as a journalist.

Krueger and Shezifi would never meet or talk after their meeting in Munich, but her words kept echoing in his head for 36 years.

### **The loose ends**

In 2002, thirty years after Munich, some archives are opened to the public and Krueger starts to deal with Munich almost obsessively. He reads every available material written about the subject in French, German and English, but the archives with the details he is looking for are still closed. They might be close forever.

As historian and researcher, Krueger is looking for the context. Everything he read deal with the Palestinian and German aspects, but almost nothing deals with the Israeli one. Everything he read relate to the incident from the time it started and later, there are no documentations or research about what preceded the event. "It is as if I research about Israel and start in 1948", he says. Krueger is eager to know where were the rest of the Israelis, why, considering what Shezifi had told him, there were any athletes in the apartments, and why people who are coming from a country of such security alert don't smell the danger. Germans would flee the village in a millisecond, he thinks to himself.

Krueger, as mentioned before, is writing about his claims as early as 1999. Despite selling a few thousands copies, the book generate only one response. In 2005 PhD. Amichai Alperovich, a researcher and teacher at the University of Haifa in Israel, is reading the book and sends an E-mail to Krueger. Krueger and Alperovich already met in 2001 when Alperovich, then a student in Cologne, arrived to Goettingen for a conference of sport scientists. Alperovich won there a prize for a paper written by an historian under the age of 35. Krueger was heading the committee that decides on the winner.

Alperovich, according to Krueger, writes an E-mail in 2005, telling him that he used to work for an Israeli newspaper at the time and that he remembers how there was a huge coverage before the attack about the lack of security, but that after the attack nobody dealt with the warnings. Before his lecture on June 20<sup>th</sup>, Krueger send an E-mail to Alperovich, telling him that he needs someone who can read Hebrew and if he, Alperovich, would like to collaborate with him. Alperovich responds that he will be honored to work and publish something with Krueger. Alperovich, according to Krueger, was also the person who pointed out to him the link between Munich and Hebron and how the Jews behaved the same way in both instances.

So now Krueger have all the ends to launch a thesis about Jewish martyrdom, about Mossad agents disguised as athletes, about the fact that all those who opted to stay were from the strength fields—wrestlers and weightlifters--, that those who wanted to flee could have done so, like Shaul Ladany who managed to escape despite being legally blind. And Krueger can launch all of this behind the shield of scientific process. He is not saying anything but just ask questions. He is just trying to bring down another wall of mystery.

### **The scientist**

But Krueger who once suggested on a TV talk show to allow free use of drugs for athletes is much better in bringing down walls than in building scientific thesis. Michael Krueger, a sport historian from the University of Muenster claims that Arnd Krueger was always chaotic. "I know him for years and he is definitely not an anti-Semite", he says on a phone conversation. "But he should be punished for his work. He asked question with no sources and questions that can't be answered and this is not acceptable in the scientific world. His paper was bad and his thesis was confused and so people could have translated it into anti-Semitism".

Michael Krueger is also interested in Munich and he would really like to collaborate with other Israeli scientists and research the matter, but he know it is not possible as long as the German and Israeli sources are not completely open. He thinks that Arnd Krueger thesis about Munich is absurd and that he, Michael Krueger, would be much more interested in the role of East Germany in the incident and

about the links between the Palestinian terrorists and anti-Zionist German terrorists. Before we hang up he asks me to mention that other than the last name and field of expertise he is not connected to Arnd Krueger.

Prof. Moshe Zimmerman, head of the German studies department at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, uses a sarcastic voice when talking about Prof. Arnd Krueger. "I met him 15 years ago and he made an impression of a serious man", says Zimmerman. "I think he understands sports but he has a lot of weaknesses as a scientist. I can also launch a thesis saying that Germans have congenital perversion, but once I ask something like that I already made the statement. It is a mischief, a prank. I think he has a bug since 1972 and he had to get it out. The fact he knew some Israeli athletes made him believe that he knows something about Israel or Jews".

Martin Krauss, a freelance journalist who covered the Krueger incident for the *Judische Allgemeine*, can't think what Krueger motives were when he gave his speech at the conference. Krauss rejects any notion of Krueger being an anti-Semite, and thinks that if anything, Krueger is a Philo-semite, someone who loves and appreciates everything Jewish. "He always mentions his Israeli friends and for him Jews or Israelis are very special people", observes Krauss. "I think he has an image about Jews that has nothing to do with reality, that they are special and willing to sacrifice themselves for a greater cause. What he claims about them, from his point of view, is a compliment.

"He thought that if he knows some Israelis it makes him an authoritarian voice. I don't think he has sufficient knowledge about Judaism so what he did is a complete arrogance. He didn't even prepare himself for the lecture, and in his power point he outlined that he was once at a Jewish wedding which has nothing to do with science. I spoke with many scientists and historians and in their view Arnd Krueger is not a good researcher".

### **The lies**

But a weak scientific method, arrogance and absurd thesis pale when facing the possibility that Arnd Krueger based his entire controversial thesis on lies. Hannah Shezifi categorically denies saying anything about a warning and distribution of Israeli athletes in Munich when she encountered Krueger in the Olympic village. Prof. Shaul Ladany, speaking from Nijmegen, where he participated in another race walk at the age of 72, denies that Krueger ever assisted him in Munich. Ladany, who escaped the Bergen Belsen concentration camp in January 1945, claims that the terrorists were assisted by someone from the village planning department. That someone pointed out that in apartment number 2 (where Ladany slept) there were 2 shooters who by rules carry around their weapons, and that's why the terrorists went to apartments 1 and 3.

Alperovich, who was two years old at the time of the event (and therefore wasn't a journalist then as Krueger claims), is taking special cautions when dealing with Munich. Not all the protocols are accessible, he says, and besides, the whole issue is a minefield. He says that there was an internal investigation in Israel's secret services and three agents were fired for failing to communicate information. He also can't understand why Mossad agents working in Germany failed to inform Israeli authorities that Germany doesn't have a counter terrorism unit.

But Alperovich, the only Israeli scientist who Krueger knows, is disgusted by how his name was drawn into the mix. "Krueger sent me an E-mail asking me about the link between Hebron and

Munich", he says, "I told him that I don't know what he is talking about and that I don't understand how he came up with this link. I never told him such thing".

Alperovich can think that Krueger used his name because the German Professor came out with illogical conclusion and he didn't want his failure to be orphan. As for the greater thesis? Alperovich thinks that this was Krueger last attempt to get recognized before his retirement. "There aren't many things that were discussed, written about and made movie about like Munich and we still don't know everything", he explains, "it is something that happened for the first time, where the cameras were already there so it is carried alive, the whole world is looking, and you have the charged issue of Jews in Germany. And it all happens in one day. It is the perfect manuscript that unfortunately materialized. If Krueger was talking about anything else, nobody would care, but he chose the topic of Munich and from the dozens of things he has done that gave him the most publicity".

### **The ignorance**

The ombudsman at the University of Goettingen didn't care much about Krueger motives or him basing a thesis on half truths. On July 19<sup>th</sup>, the ombudsman published its results on the University Internet web site's front page. The ombudsman found that Krueger didn't break any scientific methods or rules, and that he acted under his right and with accordance of the freedom of science. Phone calls and E-mail exchanges with the University's spokeswoman, Marietta Fuhrmann-Koch (answering on behalf of the university president, Dr. Kurt von Figura), verified that the ombudsman contacted neither Shezifi nor Alperovich.

Fuhrmann-Koch who was asked at the time whether there are any anti-Semitism experts in the ombudsman and incredibly responded that "We Germans are all anti-Semitism experts", reiterated that the university distanced itself from the political impact and context of Krueger words, but said that the university will not punish Prof. Krueger as it can't prove his claims as anti-Semitism and since the freedom of science also protect crazy thesis and isn't hinged on wrong results. When she mentioned the word anti-Semitism in German during our conversation she mispronounced the word.

(The German Society of Sport Science made a three-hour hearing for Prof. Krueger on July 17, and it will announce its decision about him in mid-September).

The university also chose to ignore an interview Prof. Arnd Krueger gave for the university's sports magazine June edition. Krueger claimed that the interview in the magazine, "Seitenwechsel", that included the same claims he raised in his lecture, was satirical, but by reading the interview it is clear that whereas the questions were satirical, Prof. Krueger answers, especially about Munich, were serious.

Julia Cutler, one of the interviewers (and a student at Goettingen who writes her master thesis under the supervision of Arnd Krueger) refused to answer when I asked her if she thinks the 11 victims are a source for satire. But maybe it is just me who don't get German humor.

### **The runner**

It might be a story about perceptions, about identity, about the gap between who one is and who one thinks he is, about spending your entire life breaking walls only to find out that all these walls are collapsing on you.

The only time that Prof. Arnd Krueger feels uncomfortable during our three-hour interview was when I asked him about his name and the legacy he will leave behind. He moves anxiously in his chair, moves a drop of sweat from his forehead, pour a glass of water followed by another glass, fidgeting his fingers between the stripes of his shirt. He still protects his claims and thesis, say that what he did scientifically was state of the art, and promise to continue the research about Munich, even hopping that Alperovich would still collaborate with him.

But he also say that he can't get really good sleep, that he lost weight, that he has pains resulting from stress. He says that he didn't stand on his back feet and fought for his reputation because he doesn't know how to fight an avalanche, that he was hoping that the thunderstorm would pass without lightning striking him, that he might got bad advice and maybe he should have hire a lawyer and fought the accusation. That he reads all the reports and can't believe that it is him they are writing about, that he doesn't recognize himself in these reports, and that he is willing to pay a lot of money to anyone who would find even a hint of anti-Semitism in his writings.

*"Are you a football player?"* Prof. Arnd Kruger asked me this question the minute we met, even before saying hello. When we finished the interview he reminded me of his weird question and told me that he asked it to differentiate between us. That I looked to him like a football player, a fighter who doesn't back off a war. "I am a runner", he told me, "I don't know how to fight. When I see a problem I run away from it".

And this is the worst thing that can happen to a person, especially one step before his retirement, that everything he considered himself to be start to disintegrate in the outside world, and he start to believe what they say and try to change. So instead of being a runner Arnd Krueger must now be a weight lifter, a wrestler, a football player.

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