

German Gymnastics Festival in Munich (1923)

Abstract

This film documented the July 1923 German Gymnastics Festival [*Deutsches Turnfest*], at which a record number of participants—around 200,000—displayed their athletic ability and demonstrated the continued popularity of this specifically German, traditional form of physical culture, even as more explicitly competitive modern sports grabbed more and more of the headlines. Excerpted from an eight-part documentary about the festival, the intertitles proclaimed the German Gymnastics Association's conservative nationalist politics from the get-go by quoting the festival's official motto, "*Für Deutsches Volkstum, Deutsche Einheit, Ehre und Freiheit*" [For German heritage, German unity, honor, and freedom]. Subsequent footage featured the arrival in Munich of gymnastics clubs from around the world; the pageantry of the opening ceremonies; and performances of physical feats by women and men on the Theresienwiese, home to the annual Oktoberfest. German-American gymnastics clubs made the trip, too, and the film's focus on their athletic skills suggested the vast reach and success of Germany's cultural heritage abroad. The film's concluding frames showed the closing ceremony at which a participant carried the sign "*Deutsch bleibt die Ruhr!*" [The Ruhr remains German!], a pointed reference to the Franco-Belgian occupation of the Ruhr region that had begun in January of that year and a clear protest against France's rumored plans to stay there permanently.

Typically held every five years in a different host city, the 1923 festival allowed women to participate for the first time in its 60-year history, a clear recognition of women's increasing emancipation and engagement in all forms of physical culture. In addition to the ongoing Ruhr occupation, this massive festival took place as spiraling prices tipped the German economy into hyperinflation and just four months before Hitler's infamous "Beer Hall Putsch"—hardly an auspicious time for such a gathering. Indeed, the Nazis sought to commandeer this public event in Munich for their own propaganda purposes by demanding that the festival bar Jewish and foreign participants. Munich's SPD mayor and its police force, however, banned all Nazi uniforms and party insignia from the festival, and it went off smoothly.

Source

Intertitles:

"Unity, Honor, Freedom" is the motto of the German Gymnastics Festival in Munich, which, with the unprecedented participation of over 200,000 gymnasts from all German tribes, is the most obvious embodiment of the skills and spirit of a national education and a powerful declaration of belonging to the "German nation."

Performances by Munich's gymnastics schools for men and women.

The German-Americans' club exercises

Rudolf Kobs of the gymnastics club *Vorwärts*, Breslau. 1st place in the decathlon.

The parade turned into a unique rally, attended by 240,000 male and female gymnasts, greeted by a vast crowd of cheering people.

[Woman carries sign reading "The Ruhr remains German"]

The mass gymnastic exercises, in which more than 45,000 gymnasts carrying thousands of flags take part. Despite a gale-force storm, they persevere.

Source: *Das größte Deutsche Turnfest München 1923*, Münchener Lichtspielkunst AG EMELKA, 1923.
Bundesarchiv Filmarchiv Filmwerk ID: 1112.
<https://digitaler-lesesaal.bundesarchiv.de/video/1112/665507>

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Recommended Citation: German Gymnastics Festival in Munich (1923), published in: German History in Documents and Images,
<<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/weimar-germany-1918-1933/ghdi:video-5212>> [March 16, 2026].