

# **FC Bayern Munich: Too Jewish for the Nazis**

**Jalees Rehman**

**Correspondence to:**

Jalees Rehman, M.D.  
University of Illinois at Chicago, College of Medicine  
Departments of Medicine and Pharmacology  
835 South Wolcott Ave, Room E403, Chicago, IL 60612, USA

**Email:** [jalees.rehman\[at\]gmail\[dot\]com](mailto:jalees.rehman[at]gmail[dot]com)

**Scientific Blog: The Next Regeneration** <https://thenextregeneration.wordpress.com/>

**Personal Blog: Fragments of Truth** <http://www.fragments-of-truth.blogspot.com/>

**Keywords:** soccer, national socialism, Nazi Germany, FC Bayern Munich, history

## FC Bayern Munich: Too Jewish for the Nazis

Konrad Heitkamp was taken aback by the extraordinary ordinariness present in the lobby of the Zurich hotel. In November of 1943, life in Zurich seemed unperturbed by the fact that the countries surrounding Switzerland were embroiled in one of the most devastating wars in the history of the world. Heitkamp realized that as the coach of the FC Bayern München soccer team, he was one of the privileged few who could bask in this oasis of normalcy for a few days before he would have to head back home to Munich. He surveyed the lobby and began waving his hand at some of his players standing across the vestibule. Hopefully, the Gestapo men watching him thought of this as an innocuous gesture, a soccer team coach acknowledging the arrival of his players and performing a headcount. But he could not bank on it.



The Gestapo must have known that for the past weeks, Heitkamp and his players were looking forward to the friendly match against the Swiss national soccer team because it would give them a chance to finally see their friend Kurt Landauer again. Before the team embarked on their trip to Zurich, the Gestapo had ordered all Bayern München players to attend a special “education” session in Gestapo headquarters of Munich. The team was informed that the Gestapo would accompany the team on their brief trip to Switzerland. The Gestapo explicitly forbade the team members to have any contact with German emigrants in Switzerland.

The Nazis were always wary of any potential contact between Germans and German emigrants who were seen as traitors and collaborators of the Allied forces. But FC Bayern München was a special thorn in the flesh of the Nazi machinery. Nazis routinely referred to FC Bayern München as a “Judenclub” (“Jew Club”) because German Jews had held some of the key leadership positions. The club won its first German national soccer championship in 1932 under the leadership of the Jewish club president Kurt Landauer and the coach Richard Dombi, an Austrian Jew. Only a few months later in January 1933, Hitler came to power, and soon all leaders of Jewish origin were forced to give up their leadership positions.

Kurt Landauer was one of the first to resign from the club presidency. He even lost his job as the manager of a Munich newspaper’s advertising department and was only able to find work in a textile shop owned by a Jewish family. In the wake of the anti-Semitic pogroms the night of the 9<sup>th</sup> November 1938 (*Kristallnacht* oder *Reichspogromnacht*), this shop was attacked and devastated. Landauer was arrested and sent to the Dachau concentration camp. After a brief period of internment, he was released, and he used this opportunity to emigrate to Switzerland and survived the Holocaust. Most of his siblings were less fortunate and were murdered by the Nazis.

Konrad Heitkamp and his wife Magdalena are about to walk toward their hotel room when a bellhop appears in front of them and hands Heitkamp a note. It is a message from Kurt Landauer. Heitkamp tries to suppress his excitement, but it is already too late. Before he can even read the note, a man taps him on the shoulder and says, “Gestapo. Give me the note. We know who it is from, and we absolutely forbid you to have any contact with that man. We are watching you!”

For the remainder of the trip, the Gestapo closely walls off Heitkamp and his players, making it impossible for them to have any contact with Landauer. But the players still manage to embarrass the Nazis and the Gestapo. Immediately after the whistle is blown to start the game, the FC Bayern München players run up to the area of the soccer field in front of Kurt Landauer and greet their former president from afar.

The book [\*Der FC Bayern und seine Juden: Aufstieg und Zerschlagung einer liberalen Fußballkultur\*](#) (1) (*FC Bayern and its Jews: The Rise and Destruction of a Liberal Soccer Culture*) by the German soccer historian Dietrich Schulze-Marmeling describes the prevalent culture of tolerance at FC Bayern München in the years prior to the Nazi takeover of Germany. Many members, players, and leaders of the club were Jewish, but the question of ethnicity or religion was not even a real issue for the club. All that really mattered was whether or not they were members of the club. Once the Nazis came to power in 1933, they tried to install their henchmen at leadership positions of all institutions, including sport clubs. TSV 1860, the other big Munich soccer club, immediately acquiesced to the new Nazi masters, allowing SA men to take control of the club from 1934 onward. Players and members of FC Bayern München, on the other hand, staved off Nazi leadership up until 1943. The Nazis were often frustrated by the recalcitrant “*Judenclub*,” which resisted and delayed the implementation of Nazi ordinances.

I have been an FC Bayern München fan all my life. My childhood home in Munich was just a 10-minute walk away from the club's headquarters at the *Säbener Strasse*. It is not difficult to be proud of its achievements. In 2013, the club won every major trophy that it was eligible for – Bundesliga champions, the German soccer federation cup (DFB-Pokal), the European Champions League, and the 2013 FIFA Club World Cup – thus underscoring its dominance as the world's best soccer club. But none of these victories made me as proud of my club as finding out about how it defied anti-Semitism and the Nazis.

**Acknowledgements:**

Image Credit: The headquarters of FC Bayern München in the Säbener Strasse (photo by J. Rehman)

An earlier version of this article was first published on May 26, 2014, at [3QuarksDaily.com](http://3QuarksDaily.com).

## Reference

1. Schulze-Marmeling, D. (2011). *Der FC Bayern und seine Juden: Aufstieg und Zerschlagung einer liberalen Fußballkultur*. Werkstatt GmbH.