

THE GERMAN SOCIETY OF
PENNSYLVANIA
Friday Film Fest Series



Das Duell der Brüder
Die Geschichte von Adidas und Puma (2016)

Directed by Oliver Dommenges

April 22, 2022

• 6:30 PM •

Film, Food & Discussion

The German Society of Pennsylvania

611 Spring Garden St.

Philadelphia, PA 19123

Support provided in part by the
Philadelphia Cultural Fund.



Das Duell der Brüder
Die Geschichte von Adidas und Puma (2016)

Director: Oliver Dommenges
Screenplay: Christioan Schnalke
Production: Daniel Mann, Michael Souvignier
Uwe Kersken
Music: Frederik Wiedmann
Camera: Georgij Pestov
Cut: Ingo Becker
Cast: **Ken Duken** as Adi Dassler
Torbern Liebrecht as Rudolf Dassler
Nadja Becker as Friedl Strasser-Dassler
Picco von Groote as Käthe Martz-Dassler
Jesse Albert as Karl
Florian Bartholomai as Gerber
Christoph Gareisen as Sepp Herberger
Alexander Cudreasov as Ferenc Puskás
Kamghe Gaba as Jesse Owens



Commentary by Karl Moehlmann

Adidas und Puma heute

The Adidas corporation has its headquarters in the small town of Herzogenaurach near Nürnberg where it was founded in 1949 by Adolf Dassler. Today, it is the second largest *Sportartikelhersteller* in the world after Nike. In 2019, it had an income of 23.6 billion Euros, employing more than 62,000 people. Its logo, “Die Mark mit den drei Streifen” has a *Markenbekanntheitsgrad* of 97% in Germany and similar percentages around the world. Adidas is the sponsor of important international soccer teams and soccer clubs around the world, including Bayern München, Real Madrid, Manchester United, Arsenal, and Juventus. In 2006, it acquired the US company Reebok but sold it again in 2021 after disappointing sales numbers. Adidas had remained a family property until its stock market IPO was offered in 1995.



Puma is today a multinational corporation that is also headquartered in Herzogenaurach, on the other side of the Aurach River. The company was founded in 1948 by Rudolf Dassler, Adolf Dassler's older brother, and is today the third largest sportswear manufacturer in the world behind Nike and Adidas. It employs more than 13,000 people worldwide and sponsors many important



soccer teams like Borussia Dortmund, Borussia Mönchengladbach, and Manchester City, as well as several athletic associations in track and field and other sports. The descendants of Rudolf Dassler relinquished their shares of the company in 1989 after it had become a publicly traded firm in 1986.

Jesse Owens

The fact that two of the top three sportswear companies worldwide are located in a small town of 23,000 inhabitants is in itself truly remarkable. That these two firms were founded by two dueling brothers adds to the mystery and begs the question: What happened? What led to the feud and split of the Dassler brothers? Rudolf and Adolf Dassler started the Dassler Shoe Factory in 1918 after World War I and transformed it from a small regional shoe factory to an international distributor by the time of the 1936 Berlin Olympics. Although Adi Dassler, who knew Josef Waitzer (coach of the German track and field team), had ensured that most German athletes wore Dassler footwear, it was Adi's association with Jesse Owens that made the Dassler Shoe Factory an international player in the sale of spiked shoes. Owens wore the Dassler spikes in his winning long jump, the 100- and 200- meters dash, and the 4x100 meter relay team that set a long lasting world record. One cannot fail to see the irony in the fact that the Dasslers, who had joined the NSDAP in May 1933, contributed to a major international embarrassment as well as a refutation of the racist white/Aryan supremacist ideology by aiding a Black athlete with their advanced shoe wear. This association later literally saved the company from destruction after World War II. American troops were set to blow up the Dassler factory after it had been partly converted by the Nazis to an anti-tank gun making facility. However, pictures of Owens holding and wearing Dassler spikes during the 1936 Olympics convinced the Americans to spare the factory.

Family Feud

Although the American troops saved the Dassler factory from physical destruction in 1945, they were unable to stop the growing post-war rift between the two brothers. After Adi was conscripted into the Wehrmacht in August 1940, he was able to return to Herzogenaurach in February 1941 to resume his essential role as head of the Dassler factory. Rudolf volunteered for the army in 1941 and served in Tuschin, Poland from 1943 on. Rudolf resented the favorable treatment that his brother had received. His feelings grew to outright disdain when he suspected that his brother had denounced him to the American denazification panel, investigating information that Rudolf had worked for the security service of the SS in Poland. After almost a year of investigation and after Rudolf's internment for 12 months, he was released in July 1946 with all prisoners who were not deemed to be a security threat. In the meantime, Adi himself had to appear before the denazification panel. With testimony from friends and supporters, his classification was changed first from *Belasteter* to *Minderbelasteter* and finally to *Mitläufer*, enabling him to

resume full ownership and management of the firm in February 1947. The accusation of denouncement and their conduct during the hearings after the war did irreparable damage to the relationship of the two brothers. They decided to separate in 1948 and divide the business.



While this narrative of their feud and separation seems *historisch belegt*, the movie suggests another reason for the "*irreparable Zerstörung des Vertrauens zwischen den Brüdern*". In the movie, after witnessing a close encounter between Rudolf and Adi's wife Käthe during a swimming scene at a local lake, Rudolf's wife Friedl accuses Käthe of ruining her marriage during an intense dinner conversation. She then flatly states that Rudolf is the father of Adi's oldest

and only son Horst. Although Käthe vehemently denies this and begs Rudolf "*diese Behauptung nicht einfach so im Raum stehen zu lassen*", the damage is done. This accusation shifts the reason for the rift between the two brothers to an extremely personal context.

It seems unlikely that the accusation about Horst was true. Horst was born in 1936, and at this time there were no reports of a liaison and feud of this kind in the Dassler family. The 2007 book by investigative journalist Rolf-Herbert Peters about Rudolf Dassler (*Die Puma-Story*), states however that "*es gibt keinen Zweifel*" that Rudolf had a brief affair with Käthe in the early 1940s and that this caused the split in March/April of 1948.

Although the movie **does not** claim "*die Darstellung historisch wahren Geschehens, insbesondere für die privaten Beziehungen und Zerwürfnisse*", the fact that Adi and Rudolf never talked to each other again and that they refused to discuss the real *Anlass* of their enmity seems to suggest that more than resentment about their Nazi past was involved. As Frank Dassler, Rudolf's grandson said: "No one knows how it started. They took it to their graves. Some older family members simply talk of a big misunderstanding that was never solved."

Whatever the truth might be, this movie injects an intriguing possibility into the enduring mystery of the origins of Adidas and Puma.