

“SEPTEMBER 5”

Historical drama that chronicles the events of the 1972 Munich Massacre of Israeli athletes

Link to Trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Azud40CQ3IE&t=19s>

SF Chronicle 1/12/2025:

<https://edition.sfchronicle.com/html5/reader/production/default.aspx?pubname=&edid=ffcac8e5-4442-4243-ae53-694d0d54c5d8&pnum=48>

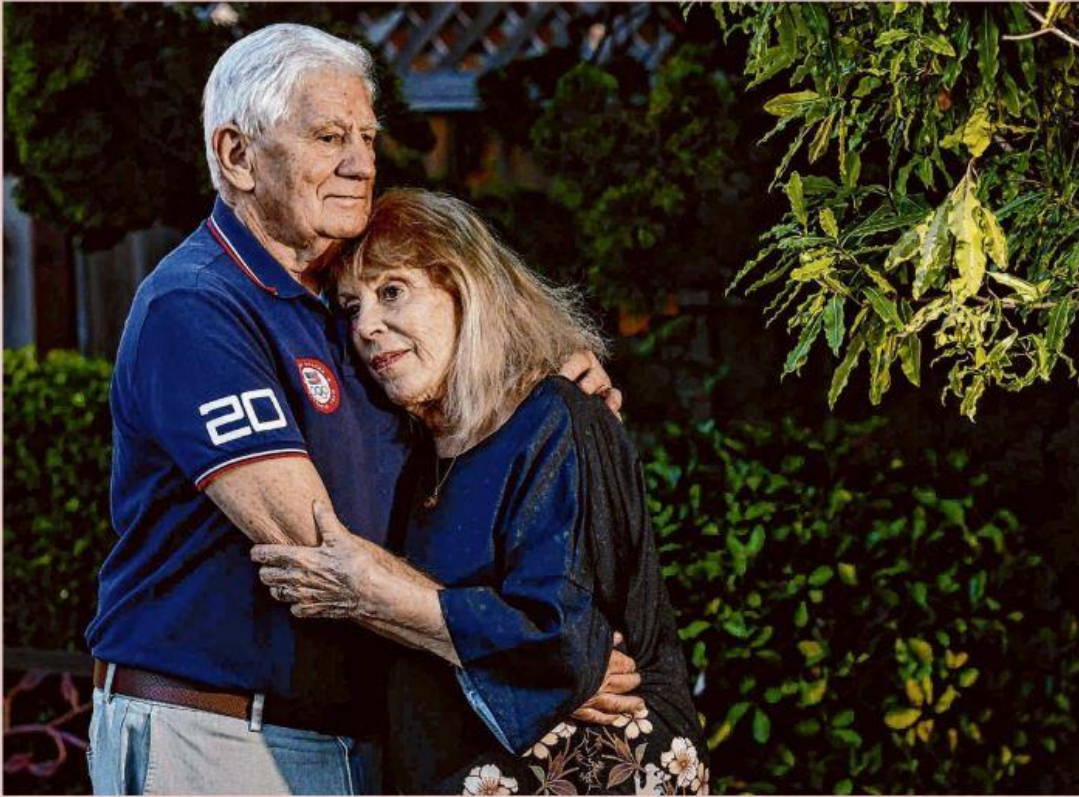
September 5 (read "September five")^[4] is a 2024 [historical drama thriller](#) film directed, co-produced, and co-written by [Tim Fehlbaum](#). Starring [Peter Sarsgaard](#), [John Magaro](#), [Ben Chaplin](#), and [Leonie Benesch](#), the film chronicles the [Munich massacre of 1972](#) from the perspective of the [ABC Sports](#) crew and their [coverage](#) of the events.^[5]

The film premiered at the [81st Venice International Film Festival](#) on August 29, 2024, and was released in [select cinemas](#) in the United States by [Paramount Pictures](#) and [Republic Pictures](#) on December 13, 2024, and will expand wide on January 17, 2025.^[6] It was widely acclaimed by critics for its direction, screenplay, and performances, and received a nomination for [Best Motion Picture – Drama](#) at the [82nd Golden Globe Awards](#), among other accolades.

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DATEBOOK



When a sports story becomes a news story

New film recounts 1972 Olympics tragedy through eyes of TV media. **PAGE 63**

Fred Baer and wife Francine

COVER STORY



John O'Hara/The Chronicle

A police car is parked on the field at Candlestick Park after the Loma Prieta quake struck before Game 3 of the World Series in 1989.

'It's never far away from us'

How Munich Olympics tragedy affected lives of Bay Area witnesses

By G. Allen Johnson

On a fall day in 1989, Geoffrey Mason was at his home away from home — the ABC Sports mobile control room. This time, it was parked outside Candlestick Park, ready to bring the nation Game 3 of the World Series between the Giants and the A's.

But before the first pitch, the ground shook. Earthquake. A bad one. Suddenly Mason, one of the best producers in the business, knew he was covering a news story, not a sports story. Just like he knew 17



Legendary sports television producer Geoffrey Mason at age 32 and recently. Mason, 82, is a subject of "September 5," about ABC Sports coverage of the 1972 Olympics terror attack.

years before, when terrorists took hostages at the Olympic Games in Munich.

"After the earthquake came and went, I had the same voice in my ear that I had when sitting in Munich. Mr. (Roone) Arledge was in the newsroom in New York," Mason recalled to the Chronicle during a video interview from New York. "It was like old times. We just walked ourselves through what to do that day in San Francisco and to tell the story the best way we could."

Witnesses continues on G6

COVER STORY

WITNESSES

From page G3

Mason is front and center in a new drama, "September 5," that re-creates that fateful day in Munich, when members of the Palestinian terrorist group Black September entered the Olympic Village, killed two Israeli team members and took nine other Israelis hostage. Directed by Tim Fehlbaum, the film takes place almost entirely inside the ABC Sports control room, which brought the world the tragic events as they unfolded.

John Magaro ("Past Lives") plays Mason, who was a consultant on the film, and Peter Sarsgaard plays Arledge, the groundbreaking executive who died in 2002.

What the ABC Sports crew did — pivoting from sports to breaking news — changed television journalism forever. But the events of that day also changed the lives and careers of those who covered those Games, including retired Chronicle sports writer Dwight Chapin, who covered the 1972 Olympics for the Los Angeles Times, and Fred Baer, a freelance writer and sports information man and former president of USA Track & Field Pacific who in '72 worked as a statistician and spotter for legendary ABC Sports anchor Jim McKay.

The release of "September 5" took both local men down memory lane.

"I have never, ever forgotten what happened," the 87-year-old Chapin said while sitting in his home in Mill Valley. "I became a little more compassionate to certain things, a little more attuned to the real world."

Baer, 84, and his wife, Francine, traveled to Europe in 1972 leading up to the Olympics mainly working for CBS on its track and field coverage. In an era when comput-



ABC Sports control room personnel cover the terrorist attack at the 1972 Munich Olympics in "September 5." Network executives had wanted to use its regular anchors on the East Coast.

"September 5" (R) is in theaters on Friday, Jan. 10.

erized timing and statistics

were in their infancy. Fred Baer's expertise proved invaluable. Since ABC had the American television rights for the Olympics, Baer was asked to freelance for ABC Sports, while Francine, who later went on to a career as a registered nurse, worked as a secretary for the network.

"It's the first major tragedy that anybody has ever covered like this, and while I was not on the front lines, it made such an impression on me still to this day," said Baer from his Foster City home.

A big part of "September 5" is the behind-the-scenes tug-

of-war between the on-site sports crew, who insisted on covering the first terror attack on live television, and the news division, who preferred veterans such as Howard K. Smith and Harry Reasoner to anchor coverage from their desks in New York.

Mason and Arledge faced that same scenario in San Francisco after Loma Prieta,



Russell McPhedran/The Sydney Morning Herald/Fairfax Media via Getty Images
A masked Black September terrorist appears on the balcony of the Olympic Village on Sept. 5, 1972, in this famous photo.

the first earthquake broadcast on live TV.

The sports division won out over the news division again, partly because of play-by-play man Al Michaels, who now calls "Thursday Night Football" for Prime Video. Michaels, who first came into the nation's consciousness by calling the "Miracle on Ice"

hockey games at the Lake Placid Winter Olympics in 1980, was intimately familiar with San Francisco, having lived in Menlo Park while calling Giants games in the 1970s.

"Al was absolutely fantastic. I got Al out of the announcer booth up in the stadium, and brought him into the

control truck to stand right next to me and handed him a mic," Mason recalled. "Al was responsible for a lot of what you saw that day and the following days to tell the story for Arledge. He helped immeasurably in driving the coverage for us. He would point, you know, 'Look over there. There's something going on there.'

"Because he was so familiar with the landscape of this crisis, he was really, really helpful."

Chapin also was at Candlestick when the quake hit. By then he was a veteran news-hound and storyteller, and pivoting to news coverage was natural; he navigated his way back to the offices of the San Francisco Examiner, where he worked at the time, through darkness and broken glass and wrote stories by flashlight.

But in Munich, Chapin was on his own as an overworked young sportswriter, rushing from event to event, including covering record-setting swimmer Mark Spitz, boxing matches while sitting next to ABC's Howard Cosell, and the controversial ending to the gold medal basketball game between the U.S. and USSR.

On the day the terrorists entered the Olympic Village, an off day for the marquee events of track and field, Chapin was assigned to do a scene piece from downtown Munich.

"I was having lunch in a small cafe in the center of Munich, and I saw a guy holding a newspaper and it said, 'MORT' across the top," recalled Chapin upon seeing the French word for death. "I walked over, looked at it, and there were (photos of) bodies lying dead in the village. I thought, 'For Christ's sake, I've got to get back.' So I went back immediately and it was like an armed camp. Machine guns and all kinds of armament and all kinds of troops.

Witnesses continues on G8

COVER STORY

WITNESSES

From page G6

"I was sort of in shock trying to cover it. There was a huge question of whether the Games should be stopped. I started interviewing athletes to see what they thought. It was mixed. Some wanted to go on with the Games; a lot didn't."

Meanwhile, Baer, who was mentioned by McKay in the broadcaster's post-Olympics memoir "My Wide World," was providing an assist for ABC. He had been entering and leaving the Olympic Village for much of the Games in his quest to compile information on athletes that he could use for his statistical analysis. When Francine alerted him to what was happening, he suggested that ABC correspondents and crew get in the way he had: posing as an athlete.

"I found out if I wore a sweatsuit and had my credential dangling, even though my press credential wasn't supposed to let me in, the guards would stand to the side," Baer recalled. "You just waved like you belonged because you looked like you belonged."

Soon, as depicted in "September 5," ABC personnel were slipping in and out of the village the same way.

Later, all of the hostages, five of the terrorists and a West German policeman were killed. All of those who were in Munich were forever changed by the tragedy.

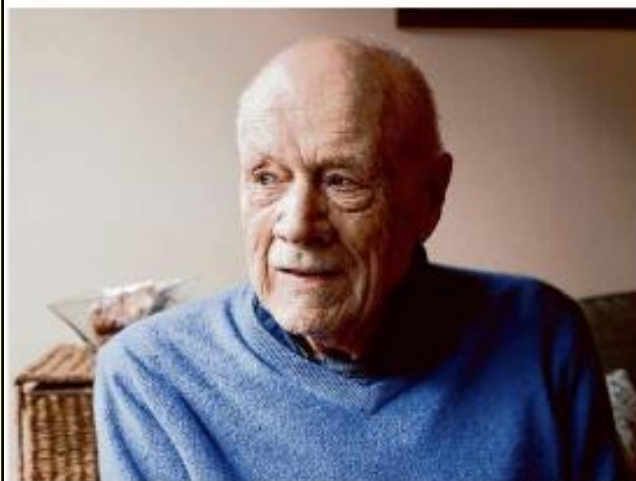
"It has affected me forever," said Baer, who has worked 17 Olympics, including last summer's in Paris. "I had to go to work the next day and work on track the next day. So you process it and do your job. You continue to move forward and do what you need to do."

Mason said he matured as a person and as a journalist that day, and he and the people in the control room he spent 22 hours with have a special bond.



Yelonda M. James/The Chronicle

Francine Baer, a registered nurse, and her husband Fred Baer, former president of USA Track & Field Pacific in Foster City. The couple covered the 1972 Munich Olympics during the terrorist attack.



Jessica Christian/The Chronicle

Retired sports columnist Dwight Chapin at his Mill Valley home. Chapin covered the 1972 Munich Olympics during the attack.

"Over the years, we've all spoken often with each other about that day," Mason said. "Jim McKay got a telegram from (CBS anchor) Walter Cronkite a couple of days later congratulating McKay on having done such a brilliant

job of communicating a very difficult message. That was the first time we all began to realize, my goodness, yeah, this is a big deal.

"Years down the road, we'd be doing a ski-jumping event in Austria or wherever. Very

often, the dinner conversation would ultimately get back to that day. It's never far away from us."

Chapin was perhaps most affected. Incredibly, at the behest of tone-deaf International Olympic Committee chairman Avery Brundage, the Games continued after a 34-hour break. A memorial service was held for those killed in the main Olympic stadium, which moved Chapin.

"I was on my way back to my dormitory, and in order to get there from the stadium, I had to walk past the actual place where the people were killed," Chapin recalled. "There were a huge number of floral bouquets all the way down to the actual place where they were killed. I just lost it. I couldn't go another step further, and I sank down on my knees and just started crying."

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