

“SEPTEMBER 5”

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

Link to Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/September_5_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/September_5_(film))

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>

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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**

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.

COVER STORY

WITNESSES

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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,



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.

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