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SPORTS BUSINESS

Naming Rights and Historical Wrongs

By [RICHARD SANDOMIR](#)

The [Giants](#) and [the Jets](#) face moral and public-relations questions as they negotiate the possible sale of the naming rights to their new stadium with [Allianz](#), a Munich-based insurer and financial services company with disturbing connections to Nazi Germany.

Allianz insured facilities and personnel at concentration camps like Auschwitz and Dachau. Kurt Schmitt, its chief executive in the 1930s, served as [Hitler's](#) second economics minister and can be seen in a photograph from a rally wearing an SS-Oberführer's uniform and delivering the Nazi salute with Hitler standing in front of him.

Like other insurers in Germany at the time, Allianz followed anti-Semitic policies by terminating or refusing to pay off the life insurance policies of Jews, and sent cash that was due beneficiaries and survivors to the Nazis.

It also became the insurer of Jewish valuables taken by the Nazis.

Gerald Feldman was a historian asked by Allianz in 1997 to produce an unfettered history of its role in Hitler's Germany. He wrote in "Allianz and the German Insurance Business, 1933-1945" about when the company extended its group accident insurance for engineers working for the notorious I.G. Farben chemical company at Auschwitz.

"It was just one more piece of business in the Third Reich," he wrote in his book, which was published in 2001, "but it demonstrated that such pieces on any large scale made contact at some point with all that is represented by the name 'Auschwitz' — from slave labor to extermination — virtually inescapable."

A deal with Allianz would not be easy to sell publicly, like [Citigroup](#)'s with the Mets. The possibility of an Allianz Stadium will make some people cringe, especially in a market that is home to many Jewish people, and in which the Tisch family, which owns half of the Giants, has supported many Jewish causes.

“There must be sensitivity to the psychological impact this would have,” said Elan Steinberg, a vice president of the American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors and Their Descendants. “Survivors are still alive. It would not be appropriate to affix the Allianz name to a stadium name in an area where a lot of survivors still living.”

A serious burden will be on the Giants and the Jets to persuade fans and others of the propriety of naming a stadium for Allianz, even if its terrible era is more than 60 years past. The teams have hired a crisis management firm to vet all naming rights candidates, but it is certain that most of its time has been spent on Allianz.

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Even the best arguments in Allianz's favor are imperfect. The teams can say that Allianz has done much to atone for its role before and during the war, but no amount of apologies or restitution to victims and survivors can make full amends for its past.

The teams can say Allianz participated in two major efforts that began in the 1990s to compensate slave and forced laborers as well as insurance policy holders — but only after pressure from the American government, state insurance regulators and Jewish groups, and class-action suits filed in federal court.

The teams refused to speak about Allianz, which has United States subsidiaries like Fireman's Fund Insurance and Oppenheimer Capital, because a deal is not done. And Allianz refused to discuss the naming-rights negotiations.

But Peter Lefkin, a senior vice president of Allianz of America, said, “Over the years, Allianz has done everything possible to redress all the wrongs perpetuated by the Third Reich.”

Stuart Eizenstat, who was President Clinton’s special representative on Holocaust-era issues, said that Allianz cooperated on compensation, but only after it demanded legal protection from being sued, which he felt was appropriate.

“Allianz paid all its claims under I.C.H.E.I.C.,” he said, referring to the International Commission on Holocaust Era Insurance Claims, which has distributed more than \$300 million to 48,000 claimants. “It paid its dues, participated in a good-faith process, and has continued to pay claims even after I.C.H.E.I.C. closed its doors last year.”

Critics insist that Allianz and other companies have not paid nearly enough under a very flawed process. Sidney Zabludoff, an economist who specializes in restitution finances, said Allianz acted “reasonably,” but operated under “German rules” that kept its payments at a lower rate than those paid by insurers in other European countries.

In all, he said, Allianz has paid claimants about \$12 million through International Commission on Holocaust Era Insurance Claims.

The Jets and the Giants will now determine if Allianz will be able to use their stadium to extend its global brand to the United States by paying them \$20 million or \$30 million a year.

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