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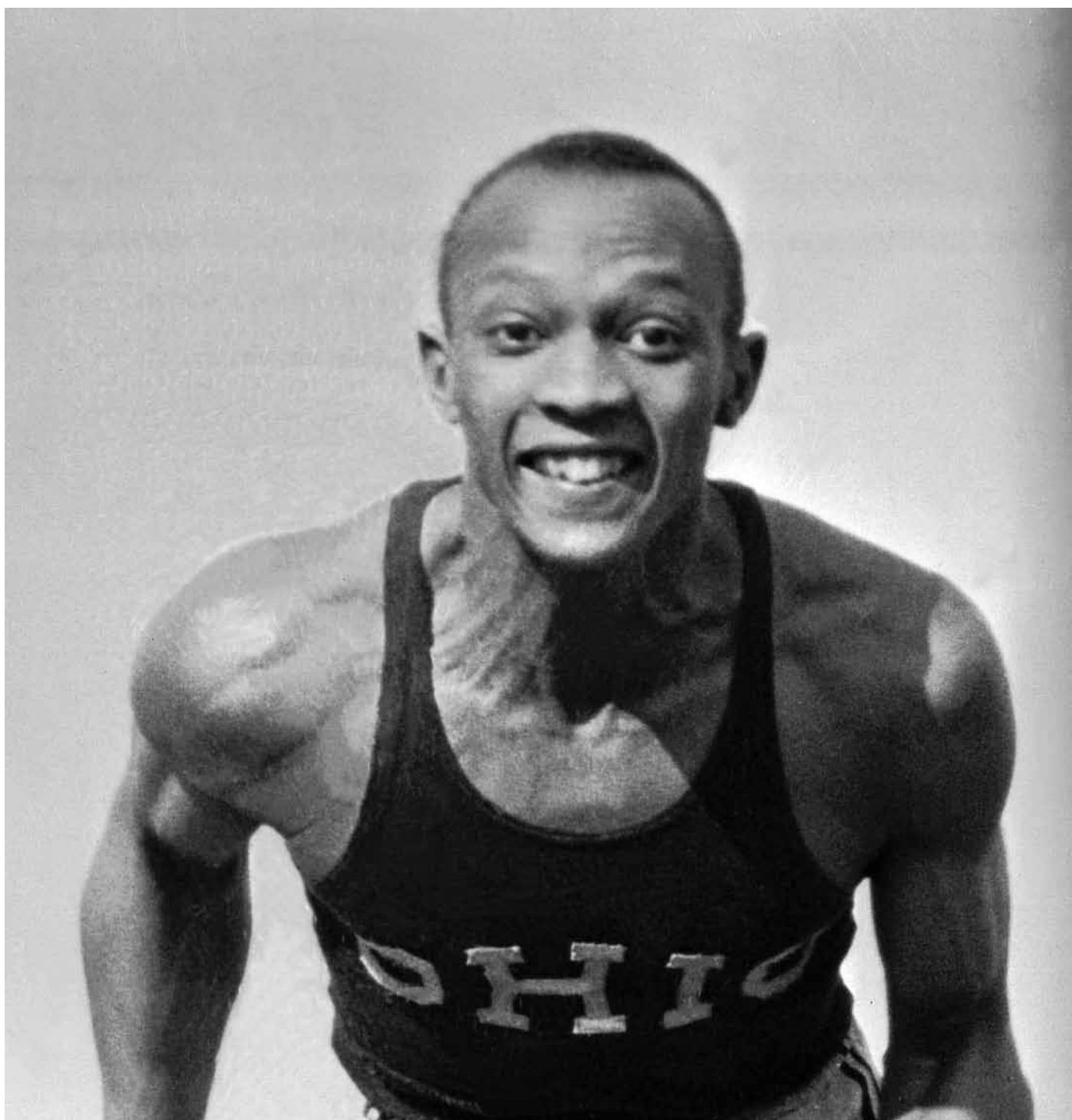
ZOOM

in on america

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Jesse Owens: America's Greatest Track and Field Athlete



Jesse Owens (AP Photo)

In this issue: Jesse Owens

Zoom in on America

How School Changed James Cleveland Owens

At school Jesse Owens used to shorten his first and middle names James Cleveland to the initials "J. C.," but when his family moved to a new city and he introduced himself to his new teacher, she thought he said "Jesse." In the roll book she wrote "Jesse Owens" and the name stuck. Today, it is by this name that the world remembers one of the best athletes of all time.

James Cleveland Owens was born on September 12, 1913 in Oakville, northern Alabama, as the tenth surviving child of Henry and Emma Owens. His parents worked on land as sharecroppers. The economic situation of their large family was difficult and in the early 1920s the Owens moved to Cleveland, Ohio in search of better opportunities. The father and older sons found employment in steel mills while the youngest one started education in a new elementary school and ... with a new name.

Jesse Owens loved running and jumping and the secret to his stunning achievements is perhaps best described in one of his own statements: "I let my feet spend as little time on the ground as possible. From the air, fast down, and from the ground, fast up." However, his inborn talent may not have developed to the extent it did had he not come across a dynamic and devoted teacher, Charles Riley, who was Owens's physical education teacher in junior high school and continued to train him in high school. Owens

did extremely well in inter-scholastic competitions setting a few track records at East Technical High School.

When he was 19 he tried to win a place on the 1932 U.S. Olympic team, but at that time his dreams fell through. Soon after, however, when he was in his senior year of high school, success after success on the track opened the door to several universities.

Owens accepted a work and study "scholarship" from Ohio State University. At that time, his coach was Larry Snyder, and it was then that Owens began setting Big Ten and national track records. On May 25, 1935, in a span of 45 minutes at the Big Ten championships in Ann Arbor, Michigan, he set new world records in the 220-yard (201.2m) sprint at 20.3 seconds, the 220-yard low hurdles at 22.6 seconds, and the long jump (called broad jump then) at 8.13 m and tied the world record in the 100-yard dash at 9.4 seconds. His record in the long jump was unbeaten for 25 years.



Jesse Owens of Ohio State University at the Big Ten Western Conference track meet in Ann Arbor, Michigan, May 25, 1935. (AP Photo)

Jesse Owens at the Berlin Olympic Games in 1936

The 1932 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles (for which Owens was not selected,) was unlike other such events due to the worldwide Great Depression, which made it hard for many nations and athletes to attend. The next Summer Games, in Berlin in 1936, was even more difficult. The Games of the XI Olympiad - as it was officially called - took place in Nazi Germany. For Reich Chancellor, Adolf Hitler, it was an occasion to show off and make a political statement of the racial supremacy of the white race. However, fearing a boycott of the Games by other nations, Hitler allowed athletes of other ethnicities from other countries to come.

A new 100,000-seat track and field stadium, six gymnasiums, and many other smaller arenas were built. The games were the first to be televised and broadcast by radio to 41 countries. Filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl was commissioned by the German Olympic Committee to film the Games.

Hitler counted on white German athletes to win most events. But history assigned a black American athlete

Jesse Owens the role of one who thwarted Hitler's plans. For it was he who took the highest podium winning gold four times.

On August 3, Owens got his first gold for winning the 100 m sprint with a time of 10.3 s. On August 4, he won the long jump with a leap of 26 ft 5 in (8.06 m). On August 5, he won the 200 m sprint with a time of 20.7 s, defeating Mack Robinson. On August 9, Owens won his fourth gold medal in the 4 × 100 m sprint relay when coach Dean Cromwell replaced sprinters Marty Glickman and Sam Stoller with Owens and Ralph Metcalfe. Together with Frank Wykoff and Foy Draper the team set a world record of 39.8 s.

Jesse Owens's success at the Berlin Games not only discredited the Nazi idea of white race supremacy, but showed that kindness and friendship wins over ideologies. It was a German athlete, Carl Lutz Long, who offered Owens advice that helped him win gold in the long jump. Lutz Long finished third. The two men remained lifelong friends.



Jesse Owens on the podium after winning the long jump at the 1936 Summer Olympics. (Left to right) Naoto Tajima, Owens, Lutz Long. (AP Photo)

The “Buckeye Bullet” Tries to Make a Living

Olympic gold, as well as previous achievements, earned the “Buckeye Bullet,” as Owens was affectionately called, much popularity. Upon coming back from Berlin, however, things did not work for Owens as he might have expected as an American sports hero. He perceived it as a result of racial inequality that was present in America at the time. The first rebuff, which he took to heart, was that he did not get an invitation to the White House to be congratulated by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, which was typical for champions. Although a ticker-tape parade was organized along Broadway in New York in his honor upon his return from the Berlin Games, he was forced to travel up to the reception that followed it in a freight elevator as he could not use the hotel front door.

This was not exactly new to him - as a black student he was not eligible for scholarships while at the university and, when he traveled across the country with his team, he had to eat and sleep in restaurants and hotels for black people. What troubled him was that he needed a job to support his wife and daughter. In an interview at a much later time he said: “I had four gold medals, but you can’t eat four gold medals. There was no television, no big advertising, no endorsements then. Not for a black man, anyway.”

Following his success in Berlin, in order to earn some money Owens accepted a few commercial offers. This prompted athletic officials to exclude him from amateur

sports. This decision of athletic officials ended Owens’s sports career.

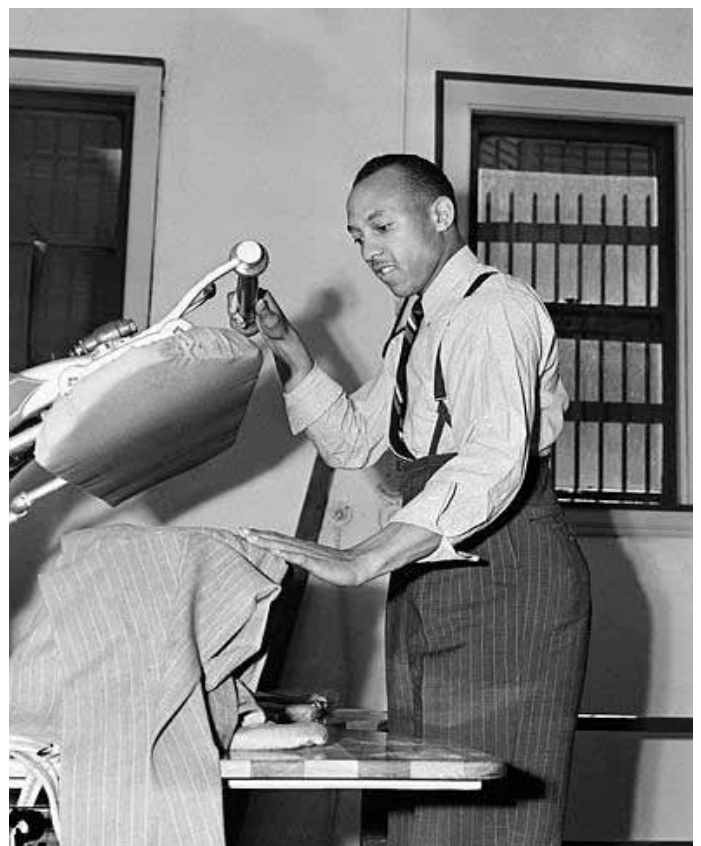
Owens tried his hand at different jobs outside sport to earn his living. He traveled with a jazz band, made appearances at baseball games and worked at Ford Motor Company in the 1940s. Then in 1946 he helped to found a new Negro baseball league. He became engaged in public meetings as a sports promoter and an entertainer, racing with ... horses. Owens tried his hand at running his own business and opened a dry cleaner, which eventually went bankrupt. The tax office prosecuted Owens for tax evasion.

During Owens’s life America underwent many changes. Segregation was abolished. Black people had now equal rights with the white population. The government appointed Owens as a US goodwill ambassador. This at last turned out to be a suitable occupation for the great speaker and open person Jesse Owens had always been. In this new role Owens found rewarding audiences of young listeners who looked up to the genius athlete as a role model and a true hero. Also, 40 years after the Berlin Games President Gerald Ford awarded him the Presidential Medal of Freedom giving the athlete proper recognition.

A heavy cigarette smoker for 35 years Owens fell ill with lung cancer. He died at age 66 in Tucson, Arizona, on March 31, 1980.



Olympic athlete Jesse Owens and his wife, Ruth, pose aboard a ship on their arrival from Berlin in New York City on August 24, 1936. (AP Photo)



Jesse Owens, former Olympic speedster, opened a dry cleaning shop in Cleveland, and is shown working on the first suit to be brought in, August 25, 1938. (AP Photo)

He Is Still With Us

Jesse Owens is a legend who lives on in human memory, in documentaries and movies, in various old and new initiatives, and what is perhaps the most important his example is inspiration for so many young athletes. There are streets named after him, even an asteroid discovered in 1980 bears the name “6758 Jesseowens” in his honor.

On March 28, 1990, Owens was posthumously awarded the Congressional Gold Medal by President George H. W. Bush.

At the 2009 World Athletic Championships in Berlin, the members of the United States Track & Field team wore badges with “JO” to commemorate Owens’s victories in the same stadium 73 years before.

Films made about him include a 1984 Emmy Award-winning biographical television film of his life, *The Jesse Owens Story* and a feature film titled *Race* about Owens with Stephan James portraying Owens, released in February, 2016.

Established in 1981, The Jesse Owens Award is USA Track & Field’s highest accolade, presented annually to outstanding U.S. track & field performers. The program was co-funded by Jesse Owens’s widow Ruthand, their

three daughters, and Herb Douglas Jr., bronze medalist in the 1948 Olympics and protégé of Jesse Owens. The award aims to recognize sports legends who exemplify the ideals embodied by Jesse Owens: integrity, perseverance and service. The first awardee was hurdler Edwin Moses in 1981.

2016 marks the 80th anniversary of the 1936 Berlin Olympics where Jesse Owens won four gold medals. It has already been announced that the awardees this year are Serena Williams and Muhammad Ali.

Tennis player Serena Williams will receive Jesse Owens Athlete Trophy. Previous trophy winners include: Carl Lewis, Greg Louganis, Sebastian Coe, Edwin Moses and many others.

Late heavyweight boxing champion Muhammad Ali, who became an international hero and was one of the most recognizable global sports figures of the 20th century, will posthumously receive the Jesse Owens Global Award for Peace.

The awards will be handed in at a gala on Thursday, October 6 at the New York Athletic Club.



Jesse Owens, 50, four-time gold medalist at the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin, crouches in starting position on the track, during a nostalgic visit at the scene of his triumphs, at Olympia Stadium in West Berlin, on June 9, 1964. (AP Photo)

Jesse Owens in His Own Words



Jesse Owens of Ohio State University crosses the finish line in the 220-yard dash with a record speed of 20.3 seconds at the Big Ten Western Conference Track and Field meet at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, Michigan, May 25, 1935. (AP Photo)

About his running:

** I let my feet spend as little time on the ground as possible. From the air, fast down, and from the ground, fast up.*

** I always loved running – it was something you could do by yourself and under your own power. You could go in any direction, fast or slow as you wanted, fighting the wind if you felt like it, seeking out new sights just on the strength of your feet and the courage of your lungs.*

About his final leap in long-jump competition:

** I decided I wasn't going to come down. I was going to fly. I was going to stay up in the air forever.*

About the value of friendship:

** Friendships born on the field of athletic strife are the real gold of competition. Awards become corroded, friends gather no dust.*

And finally two general, short and powerful quotes:

** Find the good. It's all around you. Find it, showcase it and you'll start believing in it.*

** One chance is all you need.*

ACTIVITY PAGE

SEPTEMBER 2016 TRIVIA QUESTION

What was the full name of
Jesse Owens?

Send the answer
(with your home address) to:
KrakowAIRC@state.gov

The 3rd, the 5th and 10th
sender of the correct answer
will be awarded with a book
prize.

Deadline: October 5, 2016

SUMMER 2016 Answer:

You sent us many ideas why
students take up summer jobs.
There were no wrong answers.

The winners are:
Karolina from Gaj, Agnieszka
from Krakow and Ola from
Wielun

CONGRATULATIONS!!!

The prizes will be sent to you
by mail.



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Exercise 1: Vocabulary

What skills are important in track and field?
Yes, these are: running, jumping, and throwing.

Divide the events below into three groups according to the four categories below:

The fastest time - F
The greatest distance - D
The greatest height - H
The combined or multi events - C

For example: shot put: D

1. middle- and long-distance sprints
2. decathlon
3. race walking
4. relay
5. hurdling
6. pole vault
7. discus
8. javelin
9. heptathlon
10. triple jump
11. hammer
12. pentathlon
13. high jump
14. steeplechase
15. long jump

Now match the descriptions below with sport events above:

- a. It is a track and field event that involves throwing (in a pushing motion) a heavy spherical object.
- b. It is a track and field event where a spear (also called a) of about 2.5 m in length, is thrown.
- c. It incorporates five track and field events.
- d. In this event an athlete uses a long, flexible pole as an aid to jump over a bar.
- e. It is an obstacle race.
- f. It is a track and field combined events contest made up of seven events.
- g. It is a track and field event in which an athlete must jump unaided over a horizontal bar without dislodging it.
- h. It is a foot race.
- i. It is similar to the long jump in which an athlete performs a hop, a bound and then a jump into the sand pit.
- j. ... consists of ten track and field events.

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High school student Jesse Owens is shown in Cleveland, Ohio, June 13, 1932. (AP Photo)



Jesse Owens at his home in Chicago, in his forties, showing his four gold medals which he won in the 1936 Olympic Games. (AP Photo)



President Gerald Ford with Olympic gold medalist Jesse Owens after presenting him with the Medal of Freedom in a White House East Garden ceremony in Washington on August 5, 1976. (AP Photo) (AP Photo)