

# Lawrence Co. officials reverse decision of Jesse Owens honor

MOULTON (AP) — Lawrence County officials, in an about-face on a what has been called a racial issue, have agreed that a committee should study a "permanent tribute" to Jesse Owens, a native son and Olympic great.

Stung by accusations of racism, the County Commission voted Monday, the anniversary of the black athlete's birthday, to reverse their opposition to an Owens monument.

The commissioners agreed to appoint the biracial committee to study a "permanent tribute to Jesse Owens, including but not limited to the placement of a suitable monument on the courthouse lawn."

A commission spokeswoman said the commissioners have agreed to meet next week to discuss the appointments.

Some residents of Oakville, Owens' birthplace six miles southeast of the county seat, had accused the commissioners of racism after they rejected an offer by state Rep. Roger Dutton of Trinity, who is white, to erect the monument in the courthouse square.

The rejection sent Dutton, who won state discretionary funds for the monument from Gov. George C. Wallace, seeking an alternate site for the \$2,300 fixture.

Residents in Oakville cleared a ½-acre tract that Dutton vowed he would turn into park. A dedication scheduled Oct. 2 in the aftermath of the commissioners' rejection, has been cancelled.

"The bottom line is this, either the monument goes on the courthouse square or it goes in Oakville," Dutton said.

Owens won four gold medals at the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, embarrassing Nazi leaders who claimed black athletes were genetically inferior.

"I think we're at a workable solution," Lawrence County Commissioner Clyde Cameron said after the commissioners reversed their decision.

Cameron argued for erecting Dutton's monument at the courthouse.

"It seems logical to me that if a monument were to be installed on the courthouse lawn, it would be the one the gov-

ernor's paid for," Cameron said.

A mostly white delegation of county residents attended the meeting to argue that proper recognition of Owens was "long overdue."

Among those making the request were organizers of a 6.2 mile Jesse Owens Run, a cancer benefit organized in 1981, a year after his death from the disease.

"It seemed like what was happening was kind of downgrading Jesse Owens and we decided to do something," said Lawrence Rousell, an organizer of the benefit run.

The track and field events at the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles are to be dedicated in Owens name next year.

Rousell said Dutton told him he would delay the dedication at Oakville until May 3, 1984, the day of the next Jesse Owens Run.

"I think it was a question of just not being able to agree, more than any racism," Rousell said. "The people of Lawrence County are more or less for him (Owens), it was more political than race."