

# Region

TUESDAY  
AUGUST 23, 1994  
TimesDaily

## Olympics torch could pass through Lawrence

### Tribute planned for Jesse Owens

*The Associated Press*

OAKVILLE — Olympic tributes planned for the 1996 games in Atlanta may include a route for the torch bearer that passes a north Alabama park dedicated to Jesse Owens, the black hero of the 1936 Olympic Games.

"I think the torch is going through Alabama. At this point, we're researching and evaluating routes and times and mileage," said Charlie Battle, managing director of sports and international organizations for the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games.

the guy in the white hat. Jesse represents that, not only to Americans but to people all over the world."

Battle said Atlanta Olympics officials are "talking about ideas of how we can pay tribute to Jesse Owens during the Olympic Games."

Jesse Owens was born in a simple "dog-trot house" a few hundred yards from the park, said James Pinion, who has worked to develop the memorial site. Owens' family moved to Cleveland, Ohio, when he was 9 years old.

Pinion said visitors often are disappointed at the park.

"They say, 'Is this all there is to honor him?,'" Pinion said.

In a small lot on one side of the road is a display case containing stories and photographs from Owens' career.

The modest park is near Oakville, Owens' birthplace in Lawrence County. An effort is under way to improve it.

Park architect Kenneth Owens of Birmingham, who never met his famous distant cousin, said no matter what progress is made on the park by the summer of 1996, an Olympic torch visit to Owens' birthplace would be a fitting tribute on the 60th anniversary of his landmark achievement.

Owens won four gold medals at the Berlin Olympics in a stunning athletic answer to the Aryan supremacy claims of Adolf Hitler and race-baiting Nazis hosting the games.

"I think African-Americans and non-African-Americans who look to freedom, and how evil can be defeated by good, will take pride," said Kenneth Owens. "We go to the movies to see

Two monuments in front of the display case disagree about the year of Owens' birth — one saying "On this site in 1914 was born Jesse Owens, all-time track great," and the other noting his life span as 1913-1980, which is correct.

Across the road is a 17-acre tract, also marked by a Jesse Owens Memorial Park sign, featuring a basketball court with backboards and rims badly in need of repair.

A bronze statue of Jesse Owens could be in the Owens park for unveiling at the time the torch passes, according to the park's supporters who are working on an overhaul.

Organizers of the park development effort say they have raised about \$250,000 — in government grants, corporate and private donations — of the more than \$1 million they need.