

MONDAY, JANUARY 22, 1996

UPDATE

Oakville races to finish Jesse Owens park

The race to finish an Oakville park and museum dedicated to Olympic legend Jesse Owens in time for a June 29 visit by the Olympic torch is picking up speed, with officials confident they can complete most of the work.

James Pinion, vice chairman of the Jesse Owens Memorial Park Board, said about half the \$1 million needed for the project has been collected, and he is confident the remaining funds will be raised.

Owens, who died in 1980, became an international hero when he won four gold medals at the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin and upstaged Adolf Hitler.

Owens lived in the Lawrence County town of Oakville until the age of 7, when his family moved to Cleveland.

A 17-acre tract along Alabama 157 has been set aside to develop a tribute to the native son.

Pinion said construction is under way on a replica of Owens' childhood home and a statue of the athlete that will be unveiled during the torch visit.

Next month, construction of four picnic pavilions will begin and, in March, the building of the museum will start.

Finishing the museum in time for the torch visit will be a challenge, Pinion said, and the planned development of a regulation track might not be done in time.

Nevertheless, he said, "We're real elated by the whole situation. We're going to invite the world to Alabama."

Plans call for Owens' widow, Ruth, to unveil the statue. Organizers hope Owens' grandson will carry the torch into the park.

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