

Lawrence blacks not included in torch run

Torch

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the torch in their home county.

In a letter to THE DECATUR DAILY, Satchel questioned why no blacks qualified to carry the torch in a county where athletics are dominated by blacks.

"Lawrence County has reached new levels of success with the announcement of the Olympic torch passing through Owens' birthplace," he said.

"(We) should be letting the world know through this historic occasion that all vestiges of racism and bigotry are eliminated and everyone is given equal opportunity. Instead, we are sending the message that nothing has changed racially since the Owens family left Oakville before 1920. In a time when African-American youths need to see positive actions from other African-Americans, this is devastating."

Satchel said he personally nominated black runners.

But the director of communication and marketing of the United Way of Madison County said judges of the essays had no way of knowing who anyone was, they merely looked at the quality of the applicant's community service and their accomplishments. The Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games chose Madison's United Way to oversee the selection process.

"We were looking for Community Heroes," said Donna Rush.

"There is no way to know how many African-Americans were nominated because that type of information wasn't included. I think they were trying to stay away from quotas, because maybe the quota they would come up with in Atlanta wouldn't be the same as in Lawrence County."

Mrs. Rush said she asked United Way directors in each of 10 North Alabama counties to send a certain number of judges to represent the region. A total of 30 judges, all selected in Atlanta, were on the selection committee.

Initially, there were 10 people selected in Lawrence County by 1995 United Way Chairman Fred Gillespie. Two were black. The eventual list of five people included one black, who participated. Mrs. Rush said a total of four blacks from North Alabama participated in the judging.

The judges were divided into 10 panels of three judges and each panelist reviewed the same group of essays.

"They weren't looking at the writing, the information could have been submitted in grocery-list form," said Mrs. Rush.

"And if they knew the person, they had to pass that essay to somebody who didn't know them. I didn't see how (they) could be biased."

Panelists assigned an individual score to each essay and the composite score was used to select the 86 torch heroes, said Mrs. Rush.

Every applicant who scored within a certain range was immediately selected to bear the torch. The remaining slots were filled by a random drawing.

"We were concerned that we wouldn't have representation from every county," she said. "I looked at

all the people who were left and sorted them face-down by county. I let a judge from that county randomly pull out a certain number of essays and that put us up to our full complement of 86 people. We felt that was the fairest way to do that."

Madison County has the most torch bearers with 42.

"I was concerned in my county

when there was only one African-American representative chosen, because I know that we have many more who are Community Heroes," she said.

"The tragedy here may be that the African-American population in North Alabama didn't send in the nominations or didn't know when the deadline was."

By Clyde L. Stancil
DAILY Staff Writer

OAKVILLE — The chairman of the Jesse Owens Memorial Park Committee said he's disappointed no Lawrence County blacks were chosen to carry the Olympic torch as it passes through Oakville and will work to have one appointed.

This came after complaints from Charles Satchel, a member of the Lawrence County Board of Education. Satchel questioned why there were no blacks among the eight from Lawrence County chosen to carry the torch as it passes through North Alabama on its way to Atlanta.

"Oakville is the center of activity for the day (June 29), and since it is in Lawrence County, I think someone in Oakville should carry it here," agreed James Pinion, park committee chairman.

"I'm going to do everything I can to see that there is somebody from Oakville on the relay. I hope they have a built-in system where they can appoint someone."

The Jesse Owens Memorial Park is being built in Oakville, Owens' birthplace. Owens won four gold medals in the 1936 Olympics in Berlin.

Pinion, who was chosen to bear the torch, said he has been in contact with Jeff Cravens, the senior manager for the 1996 Olympic Torch Relay, but so far there has been no decision on the matter. Runners will not necessarily carry

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