

Opinion

Tuesday, February 27, 1996

THE DECATUR DAILY

Olympic hope

Oakville black should carry torch

We hope the chairman of the Jesse Owens Memorial Park Committee is successful in his effort to ensure that a black person from Oakville carries the Olympic Torch as it passes through the home of Olympic track great Jesse Owens.

James Pinion, park committee chairman, has contacted Jeff Cravens, the senior manager for the 1996 Olympic Torch Relay, about putting an Oakville resident on the relay team and he is waiting to hear if the committee will appoint someone. Mr. Pinion said he hopes the committee has a "built-in system" to allow this to occur. He was disappointed when no black was among the eight people chosen from Lawrence County to participate in the Olympic Torch Relay. So were a lot of other people including Charles Satchel, a member of the Lawrence County Board of Education, who asked why.

Mr. Satchel's willingness to raise

the race question is good because he put suspicion into an open forum where it could be dealt with through honest answers. There appears to have been no involvement of race in the selection, which was done at one setting for all of North Alabama. Judges had no way to determine race of nominees. Panelists assigned an individual score to the accomplishments cited in each nomination with composite scores used to select the 86 torch heroes. Every applicant scoring within a certain range was selected and the remainder were selected by random drawing.

But a segregationist past is a constant visitor. That's the reason it is important for a black hand to hold the torch in honor of the black man whose accomplishments led the relay through Oakville in the first place. On relay day there is opportunity to speak symbolically to the nation through the camera lenses. Sometimes perception is everything.