

Grandson gets official word he'll carry torch

Torch

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place. Eight white Lawrence Countians were selected as torchbearers in February.

"My father said he spoke to somebody at the Olympic Committee and that they had made the arrangements to slot me in," Rankin said in a telephone interview from Boston. "They would provide my grandmother and Mr. (James) Pinion with written notification because they were the most concerned."

Pinion, coordinator of the Jesse Owens Memorial Park project, said he already printed Rankin's name on park dedication ceremony programs, but Owens' widow, Ruth, was beginning to wonder if official approval ever would come.

"Ruth is worried about her grandson getting to carry the torch," he said. "I would tell her 'All I can tell you is they verbally told me he would.'"

Pinion said he asked Olympic Torch Relay officials in February if "the 29-year-old Harvard Law School employee could carry the torch through the 175 acre park in rural Lawrence County.

Olympic Torch Relay officials in April told Pinion that Rankin would run, but they were too busy coordinating torch relay events in other states to notify Rankin.

Repeated calls to the Olympic

Torch Relay hot line over several weeks yielded no confirmation of Rankin's run.

But Rankin was never really worried.

"I felt fairly confident that it was going to happen," said Rankin, a clearing house manager with Harvard's conflict-resolution department and elementary and high school teacher. "Of course it would be nice to have it in writing, but I felt all along it was going to happen with all the people pushing for it."

Pinion has pushed to involve Rankin, especially after no blacks were selected as community hero torchbearers.

Rankin is the son of Owens' daughter Marlene O. Rankin, who is executive director of the Jesse Owens Foundation. The Chicago native who graduated from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, was 13 when his grandfather died in 1980.

The torch relay, which began April 27 in Los Angeles and ends July 19 at the Olympics in Atlanta, will mark opening of a \$1.4 million park for Owens.

The son of a black Lawrence County sharecropper won four gold medals in the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, upstaging Adolf Hitler and becoming an international hero. Owens lived in Oakville until the age of 9, when his family moved to Ohio.

The June 29 park dedication celebration will begin at 11 a.m. with

informal activities — including park tours, story telling, choral singing band performances, and entertainment by a variety of area talent.

The formal ceremony at 1 p.m. includes a welcome from Gov. F. James and County Commissioner Jim Corum, whose district includes Oakville.

Owens' cousin, Marvin Fitzgerald of Oakville will introduce the Owens family, and Reggie Anglin, public relations coordinator for Owens' alma mater Ohio State University, will speak.

Rankin will carry the Olympic torch through the park about 1:40 p.m. He will park the flame for 30 minutes opening a lunchtime ceremony where an 88-foot bronze sculpture of Owens will be unveiled. Melvin Walker, a teammate of Owens, will give a tribute to his lifelong friend.

Rankin will carry the flame out of park and the ceremony will culminate with Mrs. Owens lighting a 4-foot stainless steel replica of the 1936 Olympic torch and with the Owens family, the Jesse Owens Park Board and the Lawrence County Commission cutting a ribbon.

The park includes a replica house resembling Owens' childhood home, a welcome house, picnic pavilions, a basketball court, softball field, gold medalion court and eternal flame. A museum and official track are under construction.

By Lesley Farrey Pacey
DAILY Staff Writer

It's no longer a rumor. Jesse Owens' only grandson finally knows he will carry the Olympic torch through his grandfather's memorial park in Oakville.

After waiting about three months for an invitation from the Olympic Torch Relay Committee, Stuart Owen Rankin said Thursday that Olympics officials called his father, Stuart Rankin of Chicago, saying he would carry the torch June 29 as part of a historic park dedication ceremony.

Rankin, who says he resembles his famous grandfather, will be the only black runner in the Lawrence County leg of the torch run that goes through Owens' 1913 birth-

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