FOOT NOTE

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Fleeting Fame
Belatedly Grudgingly,
Two Black Olympians
Are Given Their Due

Decades After Winning Gold,
They Win Recognition
On Tour and Back Home

A Statue for Jesse Owens

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Spotlight on the New South

When the ambitious men and women who brought the Olympics to Atlanta came up with the idea of using the Games to showcase the New South, they also thought of towns like Oakville. The Olympics, they calculated, would highlight the region's dreams, its natural beauty, and the commercial value of the Games. And to make sure the Olympics left a lasting impression on the nation, they engaged the services of Xerox Corp.'s Golden 100 Olympians. She is featured on some calendars and in a few advertisements, speaking in classrooms on behalf of the cosmetics company. She happily accepts.

But where, she wonders, were all these people during the past 45 years? "If the Olympics hadn't come to Georgia, there wouldn't have been any of these pictures with pictures from a magazine, a flagpole and a basketball court. The marker that was placed at the site where Jesse Owens lived now words these words: "Olympian Alice Coackham and Jesse Owens in a Coca-Cola ad, 1936"

The Olympic spotlight that brightly illuminated the lives of this nation's greatest athletes was dimly staid in the small industrial community of Oakville, in the old homeplace of Jesse Owens, the American track star. He was a black man who grew up around here and has lived in Oakville since 1936, in the town where he was born. In 1930, Jesse Owens, the black man who first won an Olympic gold medal, returned to Oakville for the first time in 45 years. "You're wrong," he said firmly. "I've met with many people, and they want to know about him."

In 1936, at the Olympic Games, Coackham was the first black woman to win an Olympic gold medal, in track and field. "I've known him for 45 years. I've been in touch with him ever since," she said. "I've always been interested in him."

In reality, Mr. White confession, "I didn't know anything about the man." Jesse Owens, his first wife, who was killed in a car crash in 1967, wrote a book about their relationship. "He was a great man, a wonderful man, and a great husband," she said. "I miss him every day."