

# Lawrence black to carry torch

## 2 will share for harmony

By Lesley Farrey Pacey  
DAILY Staff Writer

OAKVILLE — Olympic Torch Relay officials are bending the rules to make room for a black man among the nine white Lawrence Countians selected to carry the Olympic Torch.

Therman White, an Oakville resident and chairman of the Jesse Owens Memorial Park Committee, learned Tuesday he will run alongside Owens' park project coordinator James Pinion, who is white, in the June 29 Torch Run that comes through the Owens park.

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The two will take turns carrying the torch in a symbol of racial harmony.

"I think it's the only situation of its kind," said Cindy Bowling, assistant regional advance manager for the Olympic Torch Relay. "But I think it's one which we're so delighted that it could be resolved and we're excited for the community that it's going to work out this way. We think it's a wonderful approach for both of these two gentlemen."

White said he and Pinion have been pushing the idea of running together since they learned in February no blacks were selected to carry the torch. Pinion was one of eight whites selected at that time. Another white was picked later by Coca-Cola officials.



James Pinion

Pinion said he couldn't feel good about his leg of the run until a Torch Relay official told him earlier this week that White will be by his side — as he's been the last five years working on the park project. He said White deserves to carry the torch because he gave time and money to the park.

White added \$2,500 of his own money to \$15,000 in state funds to buy the 17.5-acre tract in 1991 for the park in Owens' 1913 birthplace. Owens, the son of a black Lawrence County sharecropper, won four gold medals in the 1936 Olympics in Germany, shattering Adolf Hitler's dream of Aryan supremacy.

"I told (the Olympic Torch Relay Committee), 'Therman and I worked together for five years. He's out there working with me. He's spending his own money. We've been in the Wall Street Journal together. We've been on a radio show together. We've been through three governors together. I'd feel lost without him.'"

But any symbol of racial harmony may be overshadowed by protesters lining the torch route to the Owens Park.

Charles Satchel, a member of the Lawrence County school board, said unless a local black is selected to carry the torch "on his own" he will continue plans for a protest march the day of the run.

"If (a black isn't selected) I will draw up everyone I can for this march. I don't want to make Lawrence County look bad, but if this is what it takes to show what Lawrence County is all about, I'll do it and I'll have some backers."

"We just weren't saying anything," White said of the plan. "It just doesn't pay to yappity-yap too much."

Owens' grandson, Stuart Owen Rankin of Boston, will carry the torch through the park, but Satchel still wants local blacks involved. Satchel said White's inclusion "means nothing" because each runner automatically gets an escort to run with him or her.

"Pinion is pulling a snow job," he said. "Being honorary, that's a line of bull."

But Pinion said Satchel doesn't understand the rules of the run. He said White is the only person in the United States to be named "honorary special escort runner."

Pinion said other escorts running with torchbearers are assigned by Torch Relay staff and usually aren't locals. He said volunteers selected by torchbearers can stand with torchbearers at exchange points and ride with them in a caravan, but they can't run with torchbearers. Pinion initially selected White as his exchange point volunteer.

"Only designated trained escorts can run with the torchbearers, but they made an exception in this case," he said. "They thought enough of what Therman has done, the impact he's had on the park, that they thought it fitting that he share the torch with me."

Torchbearers do not know yet where they will carry the torch — whether in their home county or elsewhere.

Pinion said Satchel's criticism is unwarranted because torchbearers were selected without regard for race.

Torchbearers were chosen by judges from each county in North Alabama through the Madison County United Way. Judges were

not allowed to vote for candidates from their respective counties and selected torch bearers without knowing their race or sex, only their community service accomplishments.

"I can see his point, but he is singing to the choir," Pinion said. "Why is he doing something like this when no one can do anything about it? I've done all anyone can do about it."

Pinion added that the Owens' park project has been an interracial

effort over the last five years. "It has been a black and white effort all the way in developing the park."

When asked what he thought of Satchel's protest, White said, "You can't please everybody."

"Charles has a right to do anything he wishes. I'm not going to comment one way or the other. Those who want to protest — fine. I'm proud to be a part of it because it does represent Lawrence County."



Therman White