

Medal honors Owens

By George Embrey
Chief, Dispatch Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — President Bush, presenting a special Congressional Gold Medal to the widow of the late Jesse Owens yesterday, compared it to the Nobel Peace Prize given to former President Theodore Roosevelt.

Bush recalled that Owens' track triumph at the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin "was an unrivaled athletic triumph, but more than that, it really was a triumph for all of humanity."

"The Berlin games were to be the showplace of Hitler's theories on the superiority of the (Aryan) master race until this 23-year-old kid named Jesse Owens dashed to victory in the 100, the 200 and the 400-meter relay," Bush said.

Those victories and his win in the broad jump made Owens the first Olympic competitor to win four gold medals. The fact that he was a black shattered Hitler's racial claims.



AP file photo

Jesse Owens

Bush showed Owens' widow, Ruth of Cleveland, the Nobel Peace medal in the White House's Theodore Roosevelt Room given for Roosevelt's contribution to world peace, helping end the Sino-Soviet War.

"This gold medal sends the same kind of a message," Bush said.

Rep. Louis Stokes, D-Ohio (Cleveland), sponsored the legislation to strike a special medal honoring Owens.

It's time to truly honor Jesse Owens

On a recent trip through Lawrence County High School, I discovered something that was shocking, to say the least.

While I was waiting to make a picture of the recent selected LCHS cheerleaders, I picked up an Alabama history book and was flipping through the pages.

After looking through the first couple of chapters, I turned to the index to find out what pages Jesse Owens could be found on.

I was surprised to find no written history of Owens. His name was mentioned in the book's "honor roll of noted 20th century Alabamians."

I was also surprised that the book -- "A History of Alabama" -- by W. Stuart Harris, said Owens was from Morgan County.

Specifically, the book said Owens was from Danville.

With disbelief in my mind, I answered the students probably knew Owens was from Lawrence County.

But, the more I thought about it, the more I needed to know for sure. So last Friday, I conducted my own study.

I randomly selected 10 LCHS students from the top four grades and asked them questions about

Jesse Owens.

Each of these students had taken or were currently enrolled in the required Alabama history course.

Again, I was surprised.

Only four of the 10 students knew Jesse Owens was born in Lawrence County. In fact, only eight of the students knew he was born in Alabama.

Seven of the students referred to Owens as an Olympic marathon runner. Another student said he won "some medals" at the "recent" Olympics in Los Angeles.

"I think he's from Russellville," said one student.

"Yes, I know all about him," another student said. "Isn't he from Florida?"

The one question that every Lawrence Countian must ask is:

Have we failed to honor the greatest Olympic track star in the history of the United States?

This past Saturday marked the 10th anniversary of the death of Owens.

Last week, President George Bush presented the Congressional Gold Medal to Ruth Owens, widow of the 1936 Olympic star, for her husband's "humanitarian

SPORTS TALK

By Deangelo
McDaniel
Sports Editor



contributions in the race of life."

In 1982, Lawrence Countians paid their tribute to Owens with the first annual Jesse Owens Memorial Run.

The run came after months of controversy in which the Lawrence County Commission refused to place a monument on the courthouse lawn to honor Owens.

The decision drew coverage from the national media. A cloud of dust lingered over Moulton and Lawrence County.

A lot of people called the county commission's decision racial. Some called it a clash of personalities.

Whatever the case, the commissioners, who voted not to place Owens' monument on the courthouse lawn, made a terrible decision.

However, it's a decision that can be corrected.

In June of 1987, I became closely associated with the Jesse Owens saga in Lawrence County.

In a 1987 interview with Gina Hemphill, one of Owens' six granddaughters, I was shocked at the feelings that the U.S. Olympic Committee had about Lawrence County.

Miss Hemphill told me the Olympic Committee was appalled when Lawrence County refused to put Owens' monument on the courthouse lawn.

"You know," she continued, "that committee would have done anything for Lawrence County to honor my grandfather."

Hemphill told me Owens was more than just a personality. She said her never talked much about growing up in Alabama.

Hemphill also said she was proud of Owens for winning four gold medals, but the elements he had to overcome and the manner in which he overcame them meant more to her than the medals.

She talked about him being in a country were "being a black man was not a good thing to be."

Hemphill said: "How he

managed to overcome the environment and concentrate on the games I'll never know."

Hemphill said the Owens family was "dejected" about how Lawrence County handled the monument situation.

However, she said the family never said a "bad word" about Lawrence County.

"I guess you can say my opinion is biased," she said sadly. "But now that I'm older, I think my grandfather did more for the human race than any other American to ever participate in the Olympics."

Most Lawrence Countians applauded the fall of Adolf Hitler. But, I'm not sure most Lawrence Countians realize what Owens contributed to his downfall.

Hitler had preached the theme of Aryan supremacy. Owens was the first person to visibly show that the Aryan race was not the supreme race.

Because Owens' four gold medals, many Germans and the world developed doubts about one race being more superior than the other.

Owens' performance in the 1936 Olympics was the first visible proof to most Germans that they were not superior to any other race.

The Jesse Owens Run and Jesse Owens Memorial Park are mere pennies compared to the contributions he made to America and the human race.

The Jesse Owens race committee and attendants of the Jesse Owens Park are proud and work hard to pay tribute to Owens.

However, it's time for Lawrence County to truly pay tribute to the greatest track and Olympic star to ever represent the United States.

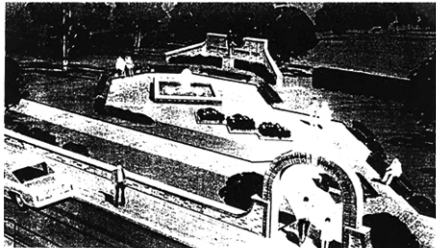
The views and opinions expressed in this column are those of Moulton Advertiser Sports Editor Deangelo McDaniel.



This monument is located at the Jesse Owens Memorial Park in Oakville. Owens was born

in Oakville and later moved to Ohio. (Staff photo by Deangelo McDaniel)

The Moulton Advertiser, 5 April 1990, B-1



Artist's drawing of the Jesse Owens Memorial Park shows a life-size bronze statue, arched entrance and a fountain. The design was intended to utilize the current mini-park on the

corner of County Road 78 (old Hwy. 24) and Ala. 33 in downtown Moulton.

Plans exist for Jesse Owens park

By Steve Oden

of the Advertiser staff

Several people have asked why *The Moulton Advertiser* reprinted articles about the Jesse Owens monument controversy. Some have said rehashing the issue only opens old wounds.

In addition to the reprinted stories, the newspaper has published editorials and columns on the need to further honor the Lawrence County native who won four Olympic gold medals and embarrassed Nazi dictator Adolph Hitler.

It has been 10 years since Owens' death. His widow was honored last month by President George Bush, who presented her a Congressional medal to commemorate her husband's humanitarian deeds.

Here in the county of Owens' birth, we have the annual 10-K Jesse Owens Memorial Run and a memorial park at Oakville, the south Lawrence community where he was born in a sharecropper's family.

Is this enough? We, at *The Advertiser*, don't think so.

It is right and proper that the place of Owens' birth, Oakville, be marked because of its historical significance. Also, the 10-K run is a means of providing a contemporary connection to the athletic events at which Owens excelled.

But, in addition, Lawrence County needs to remember and honor this famous man in a manner that causes people to think about Jesse Owens and the meaning of his life.

The reprinted stories about the monument controversy are intended to provide background information. Contrary to what many believe, not all Lawrence County residents are aware of the "water over the dam." Many recall the events differently than what was actually reported. And, there are sides of the story that were never printed or told.

The Moulton Advertiser does not intend to start another fight. Far from it: We desire to see a Jesse Owens memorial -- a statue, museum, park or combination of

these things -- in Moulton, the county seat.

Although it is not widely known, a plan was commissioned by the City of Moulton to develop the mini-park into a facility honoring Jesse Owens.

The artist's rendering that accompanies this column is a copy of the actual plan, which is on file at Moulton City Hall.

The Jesse Owens Memorial Park plan would have utilized the corner of one of the busiest traffic intersections in Moulton: Ala. 33 and Co. Rd. 78 (old Hwy. 24).

The location has high visibility; it is easy to find; and -- due to the current state of disrepair at the mini-park -- it has the potential to turn an eyesore into something beautiful and noteworthy.

The plan already exists. The mini-park is already there. Why not use this site as a tribute to Jesse Owens' life?

The idea to erect a monument to Jesse Owens did not start back when Roger Dutton and the county commission locked horns over the

issue. Certain individuals -- who have asked to remain unnamed -- hatched the idea before Dutton took it as his crusade.

People were thinking about it and working on it before the Jesse Owens monument controversy became fodder for national publications.

People are still thinking about it. Let's start over. Let's not forget about what happened -- lest we make the same mistakes -- but let's do something for Jesse Owens and ourselves.

The statement Owens made through his athletic performance in the 1936 Olympic games is what all the monuments and memorials should try to preserve.

Owens doesn't belong just to Lawrence County or Ohio State University or the U.S.

The indomitable human spirit, which he symbolized, is the same, regardless of skin color or place of birth. We need to remember this everyday. Owens did.

Editorials

A great day in 1936

When the 1936 Summer Olympic Games began in Berlin, Adolph Hitler's Nazi regime was entrenched in power in Germany. Europe and much of the free world feared the dictator, who in a few years would drive the world into the bloodiest war mankind has ever suffered.

But even as Hitler's shadow was growing across the world, that summer in 1936 brought a glimmer of hope from the United States. The American Olympic team included an Alabama native who would break records and humiliate the arrogant German leader.

Jesse Owens, a young black man born in Lawrence County who had moved with his family to Cleveland, Ohio, at the age of 7, won four gold medals in the '36 Olympics. He set records in the 200-meter race and the broad jump. He won the 100-meter run and was a member of the world record-setting U.S. 400-meter relay team.

The amazing point about Owens' accomplishments is that they all occurred in one day. Hitler was shocked. Historical accounts report that the German leader refused to shake hands with Owens.

It was a great day for Owens. It was a great day for the United States. Nonetheless, Owens returned home to a country that still subscribed to the separate but equal theory in society, which was a sophisticated term for racism.

Despite the prejudices that prevented Owens from receiving the full recognition he deserved, he remained committed to promoting his country and encouraging young people to take advantage of opportunities.

In the small community of Oakville, where Owens was born, there is a monument in a small park recognizing the athlete's heroic day in 1936. In 1983 the Lawrence County Commission refused to put the memorial at the county courthouse, prompting charges of racism. Commissioners denied that charge but Oakville became the site for the monument.

But the Owens story is far from over. A committee of residents, including the late runner's cousin, Marvin Fitzgerald, is looking for grant money and other financial assistance to develop a 17.5-acre park honoring Owens. Plans include more recreational facilities and a small museum depicting the Alabamian's accomplishments.

With the 1996 Summer Olympics scheduled for Atlanta, the park would be an added attraction in the Southeast. Owens remains the most recognized Olympian in American history. State and federal officials, as well as local officials, should join with the community in making the dream of the Owens park come true.

The 60-year anniversary of Owens' magical day in Berlin would be the perfect opportunity to unveil the park and recall his record-setting performance.

Alabama has produced some great citizens throughout its history.

Owens' moment of glory in 1936 and the honor it brought his country should be memorialized in Alabama with more enthusiasm than was shown in the past.

Jesse Owens Park plans depend on timing

By Steve Oden
of the Advertiser staff

Reading the Jesse Owens Park and Museum at Oakville for the 1996 Summer Olympics is the challenge facing a group of Lawrence County officials and volunteers.

Although there won't be a single Olympic athletic event held at the facility, the possibility exists for economic benefits and national media attention by networking with the Olympiad in Atlanta, Ga.

Atlanta is the first U.S. city to host the games since they were held in Los Angeles, Cal., in 1984.

Jesse Owens, the hero of the 1936 Olympics in Germany, was born in a sharecropper's cabin in Oakville.

At present, the Jesse Owens Memorial Park is an open field. Site preparation work was done recently by the Lawrence County Commission, Brown & Root, and Champion International.

Development ideas have come from an Auburn University study coordinated by Dr. Tom Chesnutt. A Birmingham architect, Kenneth Owens, has agreed to lend his help with the project.

What is needed are funds to take the project forward and complete it by 1996, according to members of the Jesse Owens Memorial Park Board.

The board met Monday evening to report progress, develop plans and schedules, and discuss fund raising, grant applications, and public awareness.

Samantha Letson Smith represented her father, state Rep. Sam Letson, at the meeting.

Letson had been called to Montgomery for a special session of the Legislature.

She reported that Rep. Letson had received assurances from 4th District U.S. Rep. Tom Bevill that he supports the development of the park and intends to make a site inspection soon.

A meeting was held last week at the park, she said. Nora Landers, a NARCOG representative, Rep. Letson, Sen. Ray Campbell, and members of the Jesse Owens Park Committee were in attendance.

Mrs. Smith said her father also met with Gene Anderson of the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs about the park project.

James Pinion, county agent-coordinator, said the board agreed that immediate plans for development of the park should include construction of a museum and the commissioning of a statue of the late Jesse Owens.

The board's finance committee will be responsible for raising money for the statue.

County Agent Henry Buchanan said contact with Owens' widow has cleared the way for the board to raise money in the name of Jesse Owens.

County Commissioner Larry LouAllen, in whose district the park is located, said the Lawrence governing board budgeted \$10,000 last year for development of the project, and he expects another \$10,000 to be earmarked. In addition, he said there is a good possibility of obtaining a \$50,000 grant to use for park development.

LouAllen became the first person to contribute to the Jesse Owens statue fund when he pledged \$100.

Pinion said on Tuesday he contacted the Alabama Arts Council about possible sculptors who might be interested in the statue commission.

"They are sending us a list. They also said it might be possible to apply for a grant to help with the statue," he told The Advertiser.

"This whole project is something we need to move fast on... We can't afford to drag our feet," he added.

Jesse Owens museum out of starting blocks

By REGINA WRIGHT
DAILY State Editor

MOULTON — Two corporate giants have changed the park set aside to mark the Oakville birthplace of Jesse Owens.

A new road covers the 17½ acres of farm land where an expansion is taking shape. Scarred earth marks the site where a museum will be built and it is possible to see where a ball field and track will be.

Howard Peek, construction manager for Brown and Root, and Holden Smith, construction manager for Champion Corp., have completed an estimated \$75,000 in donated site preparation that includes engineering.

But can the dream discussed in a small gathering of Lawrence County residents here this week be transformed into mortar and brick? Can this group build a world-class tribute to the black man who raced onto the world stage in the 1936 Olympics and put the lie to Hitler's theory of Aryan superiority? Can they do it by the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta, when visitors could detour through the county to remember a man who raced himself into a legend when the sports world was still black and white?

People like James Pinion, who is extension agent coordinator,

and Therman White, who has worked since 1983 to see the track legend honored at his birthplace, say the museum will be ready.

Their optimism got a boost from Samantha Smith, who represented her father, Rep. Sam Letson, at the planning session in the agriculture center. She told them Letson contacted Gene Anderson, head of the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs, on Thursday. Friday a representative was at the site to look at it before writing a grant application.

Letson will attempt to get \$200,000 in Appalachian Regional Commission money working with Anderson and U.S. Rep. Tom Bevill, D-Jasper.

Bevill, who has a reputation for building in his district, plans to visit the site, Ms. Smith said.

Lawrence County Commissioner Larry LouAllen said he has been told that ARC has money it is interested in spending in the Southeast to boost the Olympics. He said another \$50,000 may be forthcoming in a land and water grant through ADECA, which carries a \$50,000 match commitment from county government.

Although those at the meeting said they were unsure how to find corporate sponsors, some committee members said they know people who can tell them how that is done.

Next on the agenda was commissioning a sculpture of Owens breaking out of the starting blocks. Varying cost estimates begin at \$20,000. Committee members wondered if it can be done for that. Pinion said he believes it is important to raise the money locally for the sculpture.

Henry Buchanan said he has written Owens' widow to tell her of plans and to arrange a meeting with several committee members if possible. The group would like her endorsement and help in securing memorabilia.

Pinion said he believes blueprints can be ready by year's end with the museum and picnic pavilion construction taking a year. The plan

calls for ball fields, a track and a nature trail. In this race against the Atlanta Olympics the "window is small," he said.

But suggestions were made about development beyond the Olympic window. Perhaps a play about Jesse Owens in an outdoor amphitheater. Maybe the museum building could be enlarged to house a national field and track hall of fame similar to the Baseball Hall of Fame at Cooperstown, N.Y.

And why couldn't a planned running track become the premiere site for track meets in the state, certainly in the region?

At this meeting ideas were the collateral of urgency. You have to move fast when you chase Olympic gold.

METRO/STATE



Dana Stover and her nephew, Javaris Stover, sprint by the site of park.

Park honoring Olympian Jesse Owens in plans for his birthplace of Oakville

By Frank Sikora
News staff writer

OAKVILLE — Winding through dun-colored farmland, the blacktop road rolls to a cluster of four monuments sitting at a rural junction.

An American flag pops in the breezy winter sunshine.

This quiet spot in Lawrence County is the salute to one of Alabama's — and America's — greatest sports heroes.

Jesse Owens was born at this humble site in 1914 and went on to become a track legend.

At the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, Owens, who died in 1980, shattered the myth that Hitler's Nazi regime was made up of supermen.

At the same time, he became a source of pride among blacks in the rural South. Now, Lawrence County wants to do more to bring attention to the place where Owens was born.

A group of citizens, white as well as black, has formed a group that plans to build a 17.5-acre park in the track star's honor, and hopes to have it done by the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta.

"When you think of the Olympics, you think of Jesse Owens," said James Pinion, a member of the committee. "We have high hopes that we can get it done and that a lot of tourists going to Atlanta will stop by to see this site."

Residents of Oakville, some of them related to Owens, joined together to buy the 17.5-acre tract, located directly across the road from the present park. They then deeded it to the county.

Pinion said the group hopes to obtain grants from foundations to assist in the \$500,000 project.

In fact, some of the work has been done, donated by a Texas construction firm named Brown and Root. That company has graded the land and constructed a gravel road that circles a small knoll.

Residents of Oakville think a new park will help bring jobs to the area.

Elsie Fitzgerald, 62, a cousin to Owens, lives about 50 yards from the small park and helps take care of it.

"And Thurman White, he lives right near here, he goes and cuts the grass in the summertime," she said.

White is the chairman of the park

committee and took the lead in creating a new park to honor Owens.

Pinion said the park will include a museum, track, softball field, tennis courts and walking trail, and there's talk of an outdoor drama about Owens.

Back in the 1980s there was controversy in this county about Owens. State Rep. Roger Dutton led an effort to honor him, but some county officials refused to have a marker placed at the courthouse in Moulton.

It was finally placed in Oakville, and even then vandals tried to overturn it. Pinion said such feelings seem to have faded.

While the plans unfold, the small corner lot at the edge of a field will remain the state's tribute to Owens. The largest marker was placed there in October 1983. The inscription bears the signatures of Gov. George Wallace, Dutton and state Rep. Gary Aldridge.

The marker reads:

He inspired a world enslaved in tyranny and brought hope to his fellow man ... from the cotton-fields of Oakville to the acclaim of the entire world, he made us all proud to be called Lawrence Countians.

TimesDaily**Folsom to seek funding
for Jesse Owens park**

By Dana Beyerle
Montgomery Bureau

MONTGOMERY — Gov. Jim Folsom said Monday he would try to help Lawrence County officials with their plans to complete a park honoring four-time Olympic gold medalist Jesse Owens in time for the 1996 Atlanta games.

Folsom said he would attend next month's Appalachian Regional Commission meeting in Washington and would try to help the park committee with an ARC grant of \$75,000.

The \$550,000 park is in Owens' home town of Oakville about six miles east of Moulton and is about one-fourth finished. Funding has come from grants and private sources but more is needed.

"We see a good potential for it not only for the area but also the state," said Jesse Owens Memorial Park Board member James Pinion. He said the board has a \$5,000 grant from an Alabama Council for the Arts but needs a lot more money to

commission a statue of Owens, which would cost \$80,000.

The park board has applied to the ARC for the grant.

Pinion, the Lawrence County agent/coordinator for the Alabama Cooperative Extension Service at Auburn University, said the park would like to have the statue, a museum and a replica of Owens' home built before the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta. A major Olympic event, the soccer matches, will be in Birmingham, just 90 miles from Oakville.

"We figure this will bring in tourists," Pinion said.

The statue would contain a "Gold Medallion" court that would explain the four track events Owens won at the 1936 Berlin games.

Owens was a track star at Ohio State University when he made Olympic history.

Later, the park board would like to build a track and hold track events at the 17.5-acre park, Pinion said.

The park contains a basketball court and a tennis court. A softball field is under construction.

Folsom to help with Owens park

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THE BIRMINGHAM NEWS

METRO/STATE

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 21, 1993

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Funds needed to complete statue, museum by 1996

By Deangelo McDaniel
Managing Editor

The Moulton Advertiser -- Thursday, January 13, 1994

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The proposed development to expand the Jesse Owens Memorial Park in Oakville can be a tourist attraction when the 1996 Summer Olympics come to Atlanta, but officials say more money is needed to complete the project.

The Jesse Owens Memorial Park Board recently received a \$75,000 grant from Gov. Jim Folsom to complete the construction of a 10-foot statue.

But, more money will be needed to complete the park, which has an estimated cost of \$550,000.

Board member James Pinion said development plans are structured to complete the statue, a gold medalion court, museum and replica of Owens' birth place before the '96 Olympics.

Other park facilities include a softball field, basketball and tennis courts, picnic pavilions, a track, walking trails and playgrounds.

When board members met with

Donations are tax deductible

Donations to help with the projected \$550,000 cost to construct the Jesse Owens Memorial Park are tax deductible.

Officials with the Jesse Owens Memorial Park Board said the names of all contributors will be posted in the park's museum.

Anyone interested in making contributions may mail them to Jesse Owens Memorial Park Board, Alabama Highway 157, Suite 6, Moulton, AL 35650.

Gov. Folsom, Pinion said he supported the proposed project.

"He told us he could see the benefit of the park when we talked to him," Pinion said. "Gov. Folsom said he wanted to see the project



completed before the 1996 Olympics."

Owens wife, Mrs. Ruth Owens, said she supports the proposed project. The park was also endorsed by the Jesse Owens Foundation, which is based in Chicago.

The statue, which shows Owens running through the Olympic symbol, is being built by Branko Medenica Sculptor in Birmingham. The statue will rest on a solid four-foot granite base.

The Alabama Council of The Arts also granted \$4,200 to help pay for the \$80,000 statue. Pinion said several other people have made donations.

He said contributions to help complete the park are tax deductible.

In 1992, Oakville residents, led by Therman White and Marvin Fitzgerald, got the ball rolling when they purchased 17.5 acres of property adjacent to the Jesse Owens Park.

Dr. Tom Chestnut, an Auburn University tourism specialist, designed the park's development plan.

The museum will have four galleries. The gold medalion court will also be divided into four sections.

Pinion said the galleries and sections will represent the four gold medals Owens won in the

1936 Olympic Games in Berlin, Germany.

Owens, who was the tenth and last child of poor Southern sharecroppers, won gold medals in the broad jump, 100-meter dash, 200-meter dash and 400-meter relay.

His performance, which was the first in Olympic history, delivered a blow to the belly of Adolf Hitler's theory of Aryan supremacy.

Pinion said an economic-impact study is needed to determine how much of a benefit the park will be to Lawrence County.

"We feel like the park will help Lawrence County," he said.

"However, we need some figures to show when we're applying for grants."

Owens was born in the tiny hamlet of Oakville in 1913. In 1950, he was voted the greatest track man of the century.

Owens was inducted into the Alabama Sports Hall of Fame in 1970. He was part of the first class to enter the Lawrence Hall of Fame.

After a bout with cancer, Owens died in 1980. In 1990, former President George Bush bestowed a fifth gold medal on Owens.

His wife, Ruth, was presented with the "Congressional Medal of Honor" for his humanitarian contributions in the race of life.

Olympic torch may light up Owens tribute

BHAM NEWS - Mon. Aug 22, 1994

By Jon Rabinoff
News staff writer

OAKVILLE — Visitors to Jesse Owens Memorial Park must make their way past cows, cornfields and modest homes to get to the site marking the birthplace of the world-famous athlete.

Those turning off Alabama 157 in search of the park are often surprised at what they find in this northwest Alabama hamlet of about 200.

"Most people when they come to see (the memorial park), they're disappointed," said James Pinion, one of those working toward the park's development. "They say, 'Is this all there is to honor him?'"

In a small lot on one side of the road is a display case containing stories and photographs from Owens' career. Two monuments disagree about the year of Owens' birth — one saying "On this site in 1914 was born Jesse Owens, all-time track great," and the other noting his lifespan as 1913-1980, which is correct.

Across the road is a 17-acre tract featuring a basketball court with backboards and rims badly in need of repair.

A variety of people want to turn the park into a more fitting tribute to the hero of the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games. They envision a 10-foot statue of Owens, a museum, a replica of his childhood home, and a track and related facilities for the running of the four events in which he earned gold medals.

If they build it, they hope the Olympic torch will be brought here on its way to the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta in honor of Owens' memory.

Charlie Battle, managing director of sports and international organizations for the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games, said a visit was feasible.

"I think we feel very positive about that as something we would like to do if we can fit it in," Battle said. "In fact, we're talking about ideas of how we can pay tribute to Jesse Owens during the Olympic Games. I think Jesse Owens without question is our most well-known and, to many, our greatest Olympian as far as his achievements in Berlin.

"I think the torch is going through Alabama," he said. "At this point, we're researching and evaluating routes and times and mileage."

Owens was born in Oakville and lived in what Pinion called a "dog-trot house" a few hundred yards from the memorial site. His family moved to Cleveland, Ohio, when he was 9 years old.

Owens' Olympic achievements were even more remarkable in that they were accomplished in Adolf Hitler's Nazi Germany. Owens, a black man, embarrassed Hitler and made a mockery of the dictator's talk of a "master race."

Organizers of the park development effort say they have raised about \$250,000 — in government grants, corporate and private donations — of the more than \$1 million they need.

While fully developing the property in time for the 1996 Olympic Games may be a tall order, they say they will — at the very least — have a bronze statue of Owens, in stride and in front of the Olympic rings, to unveil if the torch does make a stop in Oakville.

The park property has been graded and a road put in. Two sets of Olympic rings decorate the gate leading to the property.

Park architect Kenneth Owens of Birmingham, who never met his famous distant cousin, said no matter what progress is made on the park by the summer of 1996, an Olympic torch visit to Jesse Owens' birthplace would be a fitting tribute.

"I think African-Americans and non-African-Americans who look to freedom, and how evil can be defeated by good, will take pride," he said. "We go to the movies to see the guy in the white hat. Jesse represents that, not only to Americans but to people all over the



NEWS STAFF PHOTO/JEFF ROBERTS

Memorial to Jesse Owens in Oakville.

How to contribute

Those wishing to contribute to the non-profit Jesse Owens Memorial Park Board may do so by mailing their donations to: 13075 Alabama Highway 157, Suite 6, Moulton 35650.

world."

Marlene Rankin, Jesse Owens' daughter and executive director of the Chicago-based Jesse Owens Foundation, said, "That would be very, very significant because the Olympic movement meant so much to him. It would be quite an honor to have it stop there because of what the torch symbolizes."