



Jesse Owens' win in the broad jump at the 1936 Olympics was his third gold medal.

Show celebrates 65th anniversary of Owens' 4 golds

By Bert Rosenthal
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NEW YORK — Sixty-five years ago, Jesse Owens shattered the notion of Aryan superiority and humiliated Adolf Hitler by winning four track and field gold medals in the 1936 Berlin Olympics.

That accomplishment — and many other achievements in Owens' life — will be celebrated Tuesday night at 7 when ESPN Classic shows a one-hour "SportsCentury" special on the man considered by many to be the greatest track and field athlete in history.

Owens' then unprecedented victories in the 100 and 200 meters, long jump and 400 relay, are presented in vivid detail, and his impact on the world stage is lauded by family, friends, coaches, athletes, teammates, writers, sportscasters and even former President Gerald Ford



Jesse Owens
Died in 1980

"He had a sense of how important it was to be Jesse Owens," said Herb Douglas, founder of the International Amateur Athletic Association, which administers the Jesse Owens International Trophy Award. "He was the epitome of how a man should be, on and off the field."

"Jesse and Joe Louis broke down barriers for African-Americans in a way that was acceptable. They were the epitome of gentlemen. They did it the right way."

Owens' way would have been to do it simply and without much fanfare. But Owens, who was born in Lawrence County, was such a magnificent athlete that his exploits were magnified.

At the 1935 Big Ten Conference Championships in Ann Arbor, Mich., Owens broke five world records and tied another in less than an hour. In attendance was Ford, then a senior at Michigan.

A year later, Owens was among 382 U.S. athletes, including 12 blacks, who traveled to Germany for the Summer Games, an event that was supposed to immortalize Hitler's Third Reich.

Instead, the Olympics turned into a historic occasion for Owens.

On Aug. 3, 1936, Owens won the 100, tying the Olympic record of 10.2 seconds. The next day, he won the long jump with an Olympic record 26 feet, 5½ inches. On Aug. 5, he smashed another Olympic record, winning the 200 at 20.7, and on Aug. 9, he capped his awesome performance by running the opening leg on the relay team that won in a world-record 29.8.

Two of those events were tied to racial and political significance. In the long jump, Owens fouled on his first two attempts. Another foul and he would be eliminated from the final. Then, Luz Long, one of Hitler's favorite athletes, suggested that Owens move his approach back 6 inches.

Armed with that advice, Owens qualified for the final, and went on to win. Long finished second.

Owens was not even supposed to run the relay. A day before the qualifying heats, coaches Lawson Robertson and Dean Cromwell met with the relay team of Marty Glickman, Sam Stoller, Foy Draper and Frank Wykoff, plus Owens and Ralph Metcalfe, the 1-2 finishers in the 100.

The coaches decided to take Glickman and Stoller — both of whom were Jewish — off the team and replace them with Owens and Metcalfe, both of whom were black. Glickman called the decision "overt anti-Semitism."

Still, Owens didn't want to run, saying Glickman and Stoller had earned their places on the team and should run. Cromwell ordered Owens to run, and he did, giving the Americans a lead they never relinquished.

The Olympics turned out to be the crowning point of Owens' career.

He was suspended by the U.S. Olympic Committee because he did not stay in Europe and compete there after the games. Instead, the tired sprinter came home to be with his wife, Ruth. He was so discouraged and dismayed that he retired from track and field at 23.

After that, he got offers from Hollywood and went on the road with dancer Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, but that endeavor fizzled. He toured with Negro basketball and baseball teams, but that was short-term.

Eventually, opportunities closed to him, and in order to earn money, he raced against horses. That was embarrassing and humiliating. So was the fact that he couldn't get served at restaurants.

Other low points in his career are exposed in the telecast.

Owens was forced to miss the 1935 indoor season because of academic deficiencies. He was not a good judge of character. He failed to pay his taxes, but was spared a jail term and fined \$3,000.



Jesse Owens, who was born in Oakville, humiliated Adolf Hitler by winning four gold medals in the 1936 Berlin Olympics. AP Photos