

OPINION

Monday, October 31, 2005

THE DECATUR DAILY

Founded February 26, 1912

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Jesse Owens park, museum ought to become landmarks

I always loved running. I wasn't very good at it, but I loved it, because it was something you could do all by yourself, and under your own power. You could go any direction, as fast or as slow as you wanted, fighting the wind if you felt like it, seeking out new sights just on the strength of your feet and the courage of your lungs.

—Jesse Owens

Hampton Hotels delivered \$38,200 to Jesse Owens Memorial Park on Thursday as part of its Save-A-Landmark program, but the park is not as much of a landmark as it needs to be.

If "landmark" means a prominent feature that many people recognize, the problem with the park at Oakville and the Jesse Owens Museum within it is that too many people overlook them.

Mr. Owens was an authentic American hero: a sickly Oakville sharecropper's son who grew into an All-American college track star and then achieved interna-

tional fame in the 1936 Olympics in Berlin.

His performance during those Olympics was a political and moral statement as well as an athletic one. The black man from Oakville won four gold medals, embarrassing Adolf Hitler on his home turf and ridiculing Hitler's doctrines of racial supremacy.

People who live in Berlin and visit there still know about Jesse Owens. A street near the Olympic stadium bears his name, and he's mentioned in museums.

People in Alabama, and tourists traveling through, ought to know more about him. The state should promote the park and museum more prominently and put up more highway signs directing tourists there.

If you have not visited the Owens park and museum, you have missed some education and inspiration. For a preview, visit the museum Web site at www.jesseowensmuseum.org.