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OLYMPIC HISTORY MAKER: JESSE OWENS

As we turn this month from political campaigns to the Olympic games dominating TV, we can find some inspirational heroes and leaders.

Jesse Owens tops our list of heroes for his personal character, perseverance, and commitment to lifelong goals of helping others. As the first American to win four gold medals, Owens did more than set records in the 1936 Olympics in Berlin. He also shattered Adolph Hitler's claims of Aryan racial supremacy.



Owens, the grandson of a slave, was born in 1913, and he grew up in poverty in Cleveland, Ohio. Throughout his youth, he held multiple jobs to support his family, even after he joined the track teams in junior high, high school and college. Despite his long days of work, school, and sports, he began setting records. In junior high, he broke records in high jump and broad jump. As a senior at Cleveland East Technical High School, he tied the high school world record in the 100-

yard dash, and broke world records in the 220-yard dash and broad jump, winning Ohio state championships for three consecutive years.

At Ohio State, which did not offer track scholarships, Owens continued to work multiple jobs to pay for his education. He also faced segregated housing and dining, even when he traveled with the track team. As a college sophomore in 1935, he set three new world records and tied a fourth at a Big Ten meet—all in the span of 45 minutes!

The following year, Owens joined the U.S. Olympics team in Berlin, where he won four gold medals: 100 meter dash (tying the world record); long jump (Olympic record); 200 meter dash (Olympic record); and 400 meter relay, first leg (Olympic and world record).

Despite his international fame, he continued to face racial discrimination (e.g. no endorsement deals) and had to work continuously to support his family.

After I came home from the 1936 Olympics with my four medals, it became increasingly apparent that everyone was going to slap me on the back, want to shake my hand or have me up to their suite. But no one was going to offer me a job.

He became an inspirational speaker, raced at exhibition events (racing against people, horses, and motorcycles), and found his new passion in creating and running youth programs.

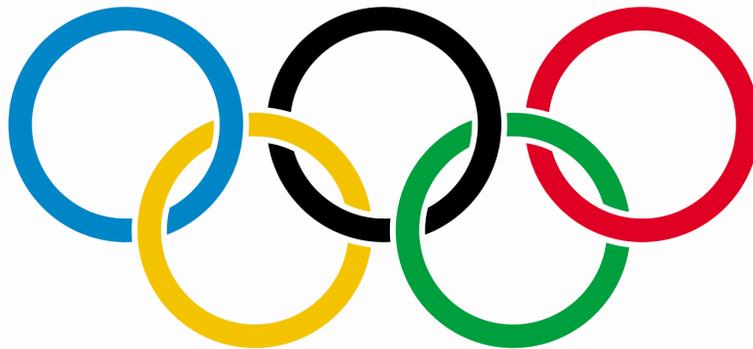
Friendships are born on the field of athletic strife and the real gold of competition. Awards become corroded, friends gather no dust.



In 1976, he was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom for overcoming racism, segregation, and financial hardship while working to encourage underprivileged children to meet their goals.

We all have dreams. In order to make dreams come into reality, it takes an awful lot of determination, dedication, self-discipline and effort.

OLYMPIC FUN FACTS



- Greece won the most medals (47) at the first Olympic Summer Games in 1896.
- The first Winter Olympic Games were held in Chamonix, France in 1924.
- Norway has won the most medals (263) at the Winter Games.
- The United States has won more medals (2,189) at the Summer Games than any other country.
- The five Olympic rings represent the five major regions of the world – Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe and Oceania, and every national flag in the world includes one of the five colors, which are (from left to right) blue, yellow, black, green, and red.
- Up until 1994 the Olympics were held every four years. Since then, the Winter and Summer games have alternated every two years.
- No country in the Southern Hemisphere has ever hosted a Winter Games.
- Three continents – Africa, South America, and Antarctica – have never hosted an Olympics.
- A record 202 countries participated in the 2004 Olympic Summer Games in Athens.

- Only four athletes have ever won medals at both the Winter and Summer Olympic Games: Eddie Eagan (United States), Jacob Tullin Thams (Norway), Christa Luding-Rothenburger (East Germany), and Clara Hughes (Canada).
- Speed skater Bonnie Blair has won six medals at the Olympic Winter Games. That's more than any other American athlete.
- Nobody has won more medals at the Winter Games than cross-country skier Bjorn Dählie of Norway, who has 12.
- Larrisa Latynina, a gymnast from the former Soviet Union, finished her Summer Olympic Games career with 18 total medals—the most in history.



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