

Oakville statue evokes Olympic memory of Jesse Owens

By Lynn Edge
Special to The News

His statue stands — muscles tensed with concentration and effort — and looks out over the land of the county that this man once called home.

Jesse Owens, the Alabama man who stood up to and eventually stood down Adolph Hitler at the 1936 Berlin Olympics, today is captured in a bronze likeness that oversees the fields of the Lawrence County town of Oakville.

Just a few years ago, Owens' cousin stood on this same hill with local officials and talked about their dream of a memorial to Owens. The world speaks in superlatives of Owens, who won four gold medals in track and field events at those long-ago Olympic games.

The youngster set his first track record by running the 100-yard dash in 10 seconds as a junior high school pupil in 1932. In high school, he won three National Interscholastic Championships. He continued his record setting pace as an athlete at Ohio State University. On May 25, 1935, during a Big Ten meet, Owens equaled the world record for the 100-yard dash (9.4 seconds) and set new world records for the 220-yard dash (20.3 seconds), the 220-yard low hurdles (22.6 seconds), and the running broad jump (26 feet 8-1/4 inches).

In Berlin, Owens set a broad jump record that lasted for 25 years. He also tied the Olympic record for the 100-meter run (10.3 seconds) and set a new world record in the 200-meter race (20.7 seconds).



QUICK TRIP

Lawrence County

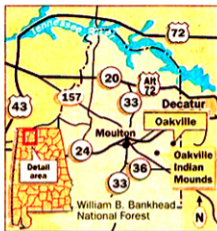
Owens' cousin talked not only of the athlete, but also of the cousin and the friend. It was all those qualities — as well as Owens' humble beginnings — that his cousin and those who shared the dream of the memorial wanted to bring to this spot.

Now they have.

Sculptor Branco Medenica created the 14-foot tall statue of the man as athlete for the park. Owens is captured in bronze, wearing the uniform of the Olympic team and striding toward the five Olympic rings. Complete down to the cleats on Owens' running shoes, the statue freezes the runner in time, lost in the concentration necessary to reach the goal.

Reminding visitors that Owens didn't just materialize as an Olympic athlete, the memorial park that surrounds the statue also has a replica of the modest house where Owens grew up. In time, a museum will tell more of the story of his life. Right now, a welcome center at the entrance to the park gives information about the man who strode out of the Alabama fields and into the history books.

The park is located on Lawrence County 33



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in Oakville. There is no admission charge.

How to get there

To get to Moulton/Oakville, take I-65 North to the Alabama 157 exit. Take Alabama 157 north to Moulton. To reach the Jesse Owens Park, follow the signs off Alabama 157 to the park, which is located southeast of Moulton. It is about 90 miles from Birmingham to Moulton/Oakville.

More to see and do

The Oakville Indian Mounds Park and Museum. A few years ago, this, too, was just a dream. On the site was an Indian mound and a partially completed museum building. Today, it's a reality. The museum, built to resemble a Cherokee Council House, is completed. Its

sweeping windows open to a view of the mound, one of the largest in Alabama. The museum houses thousands of artifacts, some dating back as far as 10,000 B.C. The museum is open from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday and from 1 to 4:30 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday. Admission is free. The park and museum is located off Alabama 157, eight miles southeast of Moulton.

Where to stay

Key West Inn-Shoals, Tuscumbia. Free Continental breakfast. Nonsmoking rooms available.

Wood Avenue Inn, Florence. A bed and breakfast.

Camping is available at Bear Creek Lakes, Russellville.

Where to eat

Classical Fruits and Barbecue, Moulton. The name says it all. You can have barbecue and buy fruit (and even fruit trees) all in this one spot. Serves lunch and dinner Monday through Saturday. Lunch and early dinner on Sunday.

For more information

For more information about Moulton, call 1-205-974-1658.

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