

Sports

B1

The Moulton Advertiser

THURSDAY, January 21, 2010

Owens' record breaker reflects at Museum

By Jonathan Deal
Staff Writer

It's not every day an Olympic gold medalist visits rural Alabama. But that was the case Saturday afternoon in Oakville when Ralph Boston visited the Jesse Owens Museum and Park.

Boston is most famous for breaking Owens' Olympic record in the long jump at the 1960 Games in Rome. Owens' 1936 world record jump of 26 feet 8 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches stood for 24 years before Boston burst onto the scene at the Rome Olympics.

"I thought I was so cool back then," recalled Boston. "I had just broken the world record and they stuck a microphone in front of my face and said, 'So what do you think?' I said, 'Aww, Jesse said it was okay. He said he was tired of having the record.'"

"I lied. I had never met Jesse in my life. So when I met him in Rome, I knew I had to apologize."

Boston had grown up in rural Mississippi hearing about Jesse Owens and what he did at the Berlin Olympics. The three-time Olympic medalist met his hero just a few days after breaking his record.

"He actually said, 'It's ok, I didn't say that, but it was a good idea,'" Boston remembered. "He gave me some advice, complemented me on it and moved on."



Advertiser photo by Jonathan Deal

Ralph Boston (right) with his biographer, Vic Carter, stand in front of a mural depicting Jesse Owens' historic long jump at the 1936 Berlin Olympics. Boston was the first to break Owens record at the 1960 Olympics in Rome.

Owens made history not only by winning four gold medals at the 1936 Berlin Olympics, but also for exposing the fallacies of racial superiority that Hitler and Nazi party were promoting at the time.

"When you think about it, growing up for me, in throws of segregation, there wasn't a whole lot," Boston said. "Jesse, being a person that he was, who had shown up the Fuhrer (Hitler) and all that, people saw him in a very positive light. You heard about

Jesse and read about Jesse. When you heard programs about famous African-Americans, you heard of him."

Nearly 50 years after Boston so famously broke Owens' record, the Olympian decided to pay a visit to the Jesse Owens Museum. Boston is working on a biography of his life and thought the Museum might help him and his biographer, Vic Carter, with the book.

"I had been thinking about it for a long time," Boston said about writing his book. "I wanted to my feelings and experiences on paper and hoped that someone would enjoy it. The book will be a walk through my life and how things happened.



"My biographer was going to be in Birmingham, and I mentioned to him that he might want to see the Jesse Owens Museum," said Boston. "That is something to behold, I told him. So we planned to meet up here today."

Boston and Carter have much to write about. The Peachtree City, Ga., resident has come a long way since meeting his hero at the 1960 Rome Olympics. Boston participated in the next two Summer Olympics, winning Silver at the 1964 Tokyo Olympics and Bronze at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City.

After breaking Owen's 24-year record, Boston held the long jump record just eight years when Bob Beamon leaped 29 ft. 2½

in. during the 1968 Olympic Games. While Mike Powell broke the world record during the 1991 World Championships, it is still one of the longest standing Olympic records.

"When I ended up going 26 ft. 11 1/4 in. past his 26 ft. 8 in., that was a big deal," Boston said. "Three inches is a lot in that competition."

Boston emerged an Olympic legend after breaking Owen's record. He remembers meeting another young American athlete during his first Olympic experience who rose to stardom after the 1960 Olympics.

"I remember getting off the bus in New York to get fitted to fly to Europe," Boston said. "As I stepped

off the bus, a young man stopped me and ask to take a picture with me.

"I said 'ok, who are you?' He said, 'You don't know me now, but you will. My name is Cassius Marcellus Clay.'"

Better known as Muhammad Ali, he was just one of the many famous Olympians Boston became friends with during his experiences at the Olympics. Boston went on to work for ESPN and CBS Sports as a commentator for track and field events. He eventually became co-owner of a television station in Knoxville, Tenn. before retiring to his current home in Georgia.

The book, *The Distance Will Come*, will be available in bookstores later this year.