

# Riverfront



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Moulton Advertiser photo by Jonathan Deal

Ralph Boston, right, with his biographer Vic Carter in front of a mural depicting one of Jesse Owens' record long jumps. Boston broke Owens' Olympic record during the 1960 Rome Games.

## He topped Jesse Owens

Ex-Olympian visits birthplace of man he replaced as world's best long jumper

By Jonathan Deal  
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**I**t's not every day an Olympic gold medalist visits rural Alabama. But that was the case on a recent Saturday afternoon in Oakville when Ralph Boston visited the Jesse Owens Museum and Park. Boston is most famous for breaking Owens' world and Olympic records in the long

**'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 OK. He said he was tired of having the record."'**

**Ralph Boston**  
Former world record holder

jump weeks apart in 1960. Owens' 1935 world record jump of 26 feet, 8 1/4 inches stood for 25 years before Boston broke it shortly before the start of the Rome Games. Owens' Olympic mark of 26-5 1/2 set in Berlin in 1936 fell to Boston in Rome.

"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 OK. 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

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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."

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

"When you think about it, growing up for me, in the throes 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

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**Ralph Boston**

Who broke Jesse Owens' world long jump record

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

## Working on biography

Nearly 50 years after Boston so famously broke Owens' records, 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 put 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," Boston said. "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 Owens' record, Boston held the long-jump record just eight years when Bob Beamon leaped 29 feet, 2 1/2 inches 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. (for the world record), that was a big deal," Boston said. "Three inches is a lot in that competition."

Boston emerged an Olympic legend after breaking Owens' 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.'"

Later 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 home in Georgia.

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