

Jesse Owens

JESSE OWENS is remembered not only for being one of the 20th century's finest track and field athletes but for personifying the Olympic ideal at the very moment when that ideal was most under threat.

Possessing physical genius and modesty in equal measure, the poor African-American made a mockery of **Adolf Hitler's** attempt to turn the **1936**

Berlin Games into a showcase of Aryan superiority by scooping four gold medals and breaking or equalling a dozen Olympic records. After Owens' win in the 200m dash, Hitler left the stadium in disgust.

James Cleveland Owens, the son of sharecroppers and the grandson of a slave, had been a chronically sick child but by the time he graduated from high school in Ohio – where he acquired the name Jesse after a teacher mistook his southern way of saying J.C. – universities were clamouring for this prodigious athletic talent.

Owens preferred the local Ohio State and paid his way with night jobs. He arrived in Berlin having already

Life and times...

1850

1900

1950

2000

1913:

Born
Sep 12,
Oakville,
Alabama

1936: Wins four golds – 100m, 200m, long jump, relay – at controversial **Berlin Olympics**

1955: Named **America's Ambassador of Sports**

1964: Founded **Jesse Owens Games** for young people

1979: Receives America's **Living Legend Award**.
1980: Dies Mar 31, Arizona

accomplished what one chronicler described as **"the greatest single afternoon's work in the history of athletics"** when, at the 1935 Big Ten championships, he broke five world records and equalled a sixth in the space of 45 minutes.

He retired, aged 23, and dedicated the rest of his life to underprivileged children and young athletes.

President Jimmy Carter's suggestion that **"no athlete better symbolized the human struggle against tyranny, poverty and racial bigotry"** was fittingly acknowledged shortly after Owens' death, when the street leading to the Berlin stadium was renamed **Jesse Owens Strasse** in belated honour.

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