



*The 1936 Berlin Olympics were supposed to support Hitler's ideas of Aryan racial superiority. However Jesse Owens' domination of Track and Field with four gold medals exposed the absurdity of the notion. There is probably no other athlete who completely owned an Olympic Games event as much a Jesse Owens did in Berlin.*

## #STAR STYLE

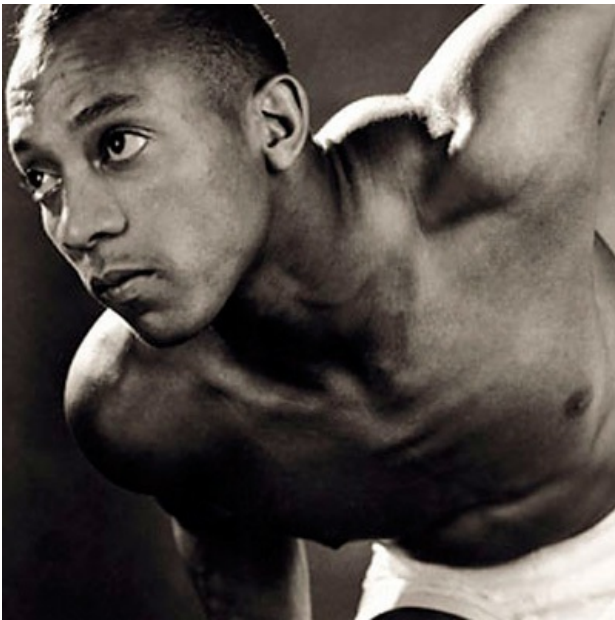
In the middle of the political maelstrom that was Berlin in 1936, the stage had been painstakingly set by Nazi propagandists for a demonstration of German Aryan superiority at the Summer Olympic Games. Things did not go according to plan as a 22-year-old grandson of an African American slave, Jessie Owens, won four golds in the 100m sprint, the 200m sprint, the long jump and the 4 x 100m relay and eclipsed all other athletes in the competition and threw made a mockery of Hitler's ideas of racial superiority.

His athletic achievements are often overlooked because of the socio-political impact of his victories but it would be almost 50 years before any athlete would achieve anything similar when American Carl Lewis matched his feat at the Olympic Games in Los Angeles in 1984. Hitler famously refused to congratulate the American and left the stadium rather than be photographed awarding a medal to a black African-American over a German.



*Owens won gold in the long jump after heeding some useful advice from Luz Long a German and main rival for gold*

At a time when racial segregation was very much in force in the US it was ironic that in Berlin, accompanied by a frenzy of public attention, Owens could share accommodation and facilities with white athletes. He returned home a hero but there were no formal recognition from the White House. Neither Franklin D. Roosevelt nor his successor Harold S. Truman honoured his achievements and after a ticker tape parade for his homecoming he famously had to ride the freight elevator to the top floor reception in his name.



*Owens shot for Vanity Fair*

Owens had come from hard beginnings, the son of a sharecropper in deeply segregated Alabama Owens worked at several jobs through school, loading freight cars, delivering groceries and at a shoe repair shop. It was at school that the track coach Charles Riley spotted and encouraged his great talent as a runner. As he had to work jobs after school, Riley let him practice before school instead.



*Owens did not receive a scholarship while running for Ohio State University and had to work to support himself*

His great talent took him to Ohio Sate University where his ability drew national attention. He did not however, receive a scholarship from the University and he had to work through college to help support his family. When he returned form Berlin he attempted to exploit some of the commercial opportunities that came his way. The American Athletics Association were furious and withdrew his amateur status effectively ending his career.



It wasn't long before, he was faced with the undignified situation of having to scrape by as an entertainer racing against horses he also worked as a gas station attendant to earn a living, but eventually he filed for bankruptcy. It was at this low point that things began to turn around for the champion, his refusal to see himself beaten together with a timely appointment as US Goodwill Ambassador, Owens began to travel the world as an inspirational speaker. He made a name for himself as an articulate, intelligent speaker with a humble charm and an ability to say things as they were. Owen's was quoted on the secret of his success as "I let my feet spend as little time on the ground as possible. From the air, fast down, and from the ground, fast up." He slowly began to amass the wealth that been denied him in the decades following his Olympic triumph. After his retirement he owned racehorses. Owens a thirty-year smoker died of lung cancer at the age of 60 in 1980.



*Jesse Owens' sporting legacy stands up even today, his human legacy is immeasurable*

Probably the most surprising thing about Owens' historical achievement is that it took the world such a long time to wake up to the idea of racial equality. But, as they say, a revolution is not a one-time event and it is the built up of many, many events some global some personal that eventually invoke a tide of change that is too powerful to ignore. And that is a real demonstration of sport's ability to speak the truth regardless of prejudices, or politics. For the case of the African-American and for the benefit of all human kind, Owens' accomplishment at the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin is a landmark event.



*After winning gold in the long jump Owens was congratulated by German Luz Long and the two did a lap of honour in the stadium to a standing ovation, the two remained life-long friends*

What sometimes gets lost in the footnotes of history is the moment when Luz Long, Germany's great white hope for Olympic gold and Owens' nearest rival for the long jump event offered the American helpful advice before his winning jump. When he did claim the medal Long as the first to congratulate him and the two went on a lap of honour as the crowd gave them both a standing ovation. "It took a lot of courage for him to befriend me in front of Hitler," said Owens later. "You can melt down all the medals and cups I have and they wouldn't be a plating on the 24-carat friendship I felt for Luz Long at that moment."

by Hugo Mc Cafferty

Photo credits: AFP/Getty Images, Popperphoto/Getty Images, Vanity Fair

Discover the sporting philosophy behind Dolce&Gabbana The One Sport, click below:



**Tags:** 100m Sprint 1936 200m Sprint 4x100 Relay Berlin Olympics D&g Hitle Iconic Olympic Moments Jesse Owens Long Jump

**Sharing**






*Hugo Mc Cafferty*

[More from this author](#)

[See all team](#)

## POST A COMMENT

To leave a comment use your **Facebook** account:



[Comment using...](#)



**Carolyn Mcmillan** · Works at N/A

An amazing athlete, person. A roadpaver.


[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · [2](#) · September 3, 2014 at 11:22am



**Dennie Foster** · Sheridan College

What a great MAN

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · May 26, 2014 at 7:19pm

 Facebook social plugin

Related Articles...



The luxury yacht, commissioned by Steve Jobs, designed by Philippe Starck and constructed by 130-year-old Dutch Ship builder Feadship was recently launched.



There has been no time to morn the disappearance of the label D&G, as everything it stood for resurfaced within the Dolce&Gabbana main brand. The youthful spirit, irreverent edge and fun elements are alive and well.



Italy has it all for a holiday destination, that's why it's surprising that it's not one of the most popular golf destinations in Europe. Swide reveals some hidden gems.

Tagged with: #STAR STYLE





*Beyoncé and Blue Ivy wear matching oleander print frocks from the Dolce&Gabbana Spring Summer 2014 collection while out in NYC.*



*Forty years after its debut, Blondie remains, to this day, one of the most iconic bands in the history of music. Above all thanks to the inimitable style of Debbie Harry; here are a few lessons on style that we have learned from her.*



*Julia Restoin Roitfeld, daughter of Carine, ex French Vogue Editor and fashion wonder woman and Bee Shaffer, the daughter of Anna Wintour, fashion powerhouse both wear Dolce&Gabbana. In coins we trust.*

- D i s c l a i m e r
- P r i v a c y   P o l i c y
- P o l l s
- S i t e m a p
- F a s h i o n   E d i t o r ' s   P i c k

- C o n t a c t s
- S w i d e   T e a m
- Q u o t e s
- S a i n t   O f   T h e   D a y