



Men like Jesse Owens paved the way for black Olympians to follow, including Wilma Rudolph, the most dominant female Olympian, who displays the three gold medals she won in the 1960 Rome games.

## The Olympic pioneers: Paving the way

By ART CARTER  
Syndicated Columnist

This article is the first in a three-part series.

Few persons are still around who remember the opening ceremony in Los Angeles in 1932, as the great, white-robed chorus sang stirring strains of "The Star-Spangled Banner" and a dazzling stream of Olympic athletes from around the world emerged from a tunnel and spread over the green turf of the big bowl while spectators cheered themselves hoarse. Vice President Charles Curtis read the Olympic oath and cited the spirit of the Olympics. The Big Games were underway.

The 1932 Olympics were staged in the immediate wake of the stock market crash as the nation struggled to recover from the worst economic depression in its history. It, too, was a time when disaster, labor problems, joblessness and irrational behavior patterns among the rich and the poor dominated the news.

It also was a time in U.S. history when segregation reigned in grand style and, in some states, legally. It was in that atmosphere that the first black to win an Olympic championship on American soil broke into history. He was Eddie Tolan, who captured gold medals in both Olympic sprints, the 100 and 200 meters.

Trials and triumphs have marked the remarkable and historic participation of black men and women athletes down through Olympic history since George C. Poage won bronze medals at the 1904 Olympics in the 200- and 400-meter hurdles.

Winning a gold medal in the Olympic Games is the highest award an amateur athlete can obtain. It climaxes years of preparation and preliminary contests prior to the one big event which comes every four years.

Hundreds of gold medals have been won in many different events. To some winners, winning the Olympics marks the start of a new career as a professional where the rewards are riches and more fame.

This has happened to some black athletes who

were gold medal-winners mainly in one athletic event: boxing. Others have returned to their earlier pursuits, seeking degrees in the schools they previously attended or following a previously-sought profession, and still others, applauded by their peers for their accomplishments, have found rich rewards in business.

numerous black winners helped or hurt their endeavors, and whether or not the Olympics helped them down a path of

### The Black Olympians A Special Series

picture when the headlines fade. In this article, we have tried to locate some of the

achievement and success.

What we've found is that to some, it has been a lodestar; to others it has been a series of problems, but generally there have been gains for most in the post-Olympic period.

The incomparable Owens, who shocked Adolph Hitler with his astounding victories, never made the fortune less-famous Olympian winners made, but posthumously gained respect in the Alabama town where he was born when citizens erected a monument honoring Owens as its most prominent citizen.

Yet, even in that instance, Owens had troubles as a political battle developed over where the monument honoring him should be located. Some of the old Southern-spirited

citizens opposed the location of the Owens monument on city hall property in Oakville, Ala.

Ironically, the name of Jesse Owens is hammered deep in the stone Marathon Gate of the Berlin Stadium, and it appears there more often even than that of Hitler. The feats of Owens are almost without parallel in Olympic history.

Certainly no individual ever so completely dominated the scene as did the great sprinter from Ohio State University. He

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Ralph Metcalfe, left, and Jesse Owens

Many blacks have competed in events that have no future professionally, and once the Olympics end, Olympic champions, especially the gold medal-winners, to find out how the Olympic movement

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