

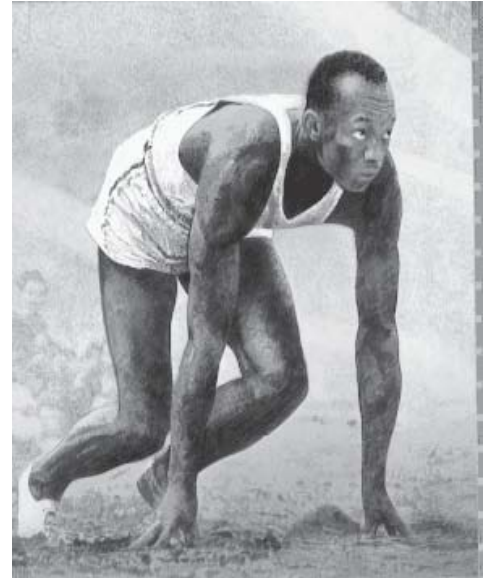
# Handout #1 Track Champions

## Jessie Owens

In track and field events, the name of Jesse Owens, the sharecropper's son from Alabama, always tops the list of favorite Olympians. His four gold medals won at the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games discredited Hitler's notion of German superiority over other races.

Jesse Owens was born in 1913 in Oakville Alabama. In 1920 Jesse and his family moved to Cleveland, Ohio where he enrolled in school. In middle school, he met a father type figure named Charles Riley, who would serve as his motivator and coach.

As a high school student, in 1931, he set a new all-time scholastic broad jump record of 22 feet 3 inches, finished second in the 200 yard dash and fourth in the 100-yard dash. One year later, competing in his second state scholastic meet , Jesse ran 100 yards in 9.9 seconds to tie George Simpon's state record; ran 220 yards in 22.6 seconds, 1.5 seconds better than the previous state record; won the broad jump at 22 feet 11  $\frac{1}{4}$  inches and won the 100 yard dash, and the 220-yard low hurdles.



In 1933 Owens competed in his first national scholastic meet in Chicago where he broke world scholastic records in the 100 at 9.4 seconds; the 220 in 20.7 seconds; and the broad jump at 24 feet 9  $\frac{5}{8}$  inches.

He entered Ohio State University and participated in the Big Ten track and field championships of 1935, there he equaled or set world records in four events: the 100 and 220-yard dashes, 200-yard low hurdles and the long jump. He was also credited with world marks in the 200-meter run and 200-meter hurdles. That's six world records in one afternoon, and he did it all in 45 minutes!

The following year, he swept the 100 and 200 meters and long jump at the Olympic Trials and headed for Germany favored to win all three.



In Berlin, dictator Adolf Hitler and his Nazi followers felt sure that the Olympics would be the ideal venue to demonstrate Germany's oft-stated racial superiority. He directed that \$25 million be spent on the finest facilities, the cleanest streets and the temporary withdrawal of all outward signs of the state-run anti-Jewish campaign. When the time came and over 4,000 athletes from 49 countries arrived for the Games, the stage was set.

Then Jesse Owens, a black sharecropper's son from Alabama, stole the show winning his three individual events and adding a fourth gold medal in the 400-meter relay. The fact that four other American blacks also won did little to please Herr Hitler, but the applause from the German crowds, especially for Owens, was thunderous. As it was for New Zealander Jack Lovelock's thrilling win over Glenn Cunningham and defending champ Luigi Beccali in the 1,500 meters.

Germany won only five combined gold medals in men's and women's track and field, but saved face for the Germans in the overall medal count with an 89-56 margin over the United States.

Some quotes to think about from Jesse Owens:

One chance is all you need.

Life doesn't give you all the practice races you need.

The only bond worth anything between human beings is their humanness.

Find the good. It's all around you. Find it, showcase it, and you'll start believing in it.

The battles that count aren't the ones for gold medals. The struggles within yourself — the invisible, inevitable battles inside all of us — that's where it's at.

An article printed on August 8,  
1936, The Nation

As we go to press two black-skinned Americans have sent Hitler scurrying under his own Olympic propagandstand. It was obviously not Herr Hitler's plans for the Eleventh Modern Olympic Games that athletes with dark skins should win any prizes. And when two American Negroes placed first and second in the 100-meter dash Hitler couldn't take it. Rather than shake hands with Jesse Owens and Ralph Metcalfe, who are the world's fastest runners, the great leader of Berlin was forced to congratulate two white German champion hammer-throwers in his private headquarters under the stadium. Thus is the sportswanship of der schoene adolf set down, so to speak, in black and white so that those who run, leap, and throw may read. We hope we shall not be accused of race preference if we express the wish that every Olympic event could be won by a Negro. It would at least keep Hitler out of the public view.

# Babe Didrikson

Babe Didrikson is generally considered the greatest woman athlete in sports history. She gained her most enduring fame in golf and track and field, but she also competed in basketball, baseball, pocket billiards, tennis, diving, and swimming. In a 1932 track and field meet, she set four world records in three hours. At the 1932 Olympic Games, she set world records in the 80-meter hurdles, the javelin throw, and the high jump.



Mildred Didrikson was born in Texas in 1911. She was nicknamed Babe after baseball slugger Babe Ruth because of the many home runs she hit playing baseball as a child.

Babe Didrikson was the child of Norwegian immigrants. Reared in poverty in South Texas, she began her extraordinarily versatile athletic career in high school basketball. She soon found that few sports opportunities were open to women. In fact, in the 1920s the trend was toward the elimination of interscholastic competition for girls, because of its “undue stress” and “morbid social influences.” In many high schools all but intramural sports disappeared, and not until the 1970s would girls’ high school competition be restored. After Babe switched to track and field and collected gold medals at the 1932 Olympics, her fame enabled her to barnstorm the country with a team called “Babe Didrikson’s All Americans.” She excelled at every sport she tried, but she combined her natural talent with hard work. When she first took up golf she hit over a thousand balls a day, eight to ten hours a day. Drives of two hundred and fifty yards were not unusual for her.

She was diagnosed with cancer in 1953. After long and painful treatments, Babe returned to professional golf, winning the first tournament she entered. Babe eventually succumbed to cancer in 1956.

Some quotes to think about from Babe Didrikson:

Before I was ever in my teens, I knew exactly what I wanted to be when I grew up. My goal was to be the greatest athlete that ever lived.

Luck? Sure. But only after long practice and only with the ability to think under pressure.

Winning has always meant much to me, but winning friends has meant the most.

# Jim Thorpe

Jim Thorpe was born on May 22, 1887 in a one-room cabin in Oklahoma. His very existence was an excellent representation of the melting pot that was America. He had some French and Irish blood but he was of mostly Sac and Fox Indian heritage. His Indian name, Wa-Tho-Huk, translated to “Bright Path,” something that Thorpe definitely had ahead of him.



The career biography of Jim Thorpe read like an encyclopedia of sports, encompassing virtually every major athletic event available. In the 1912 Olympic Games, he won both the pentathlon and decathlon events. In the same year, he led his Carlisle Indian School team to the national collegiate championship, scoring 25 touchdowns and 198 points. Following the college football season, Thorpe went on to play 6 years of Major League Baseball. Meanwhile, he managed to lead the Canton Bulldogs football team to unofficial world championships in 1916, 1917, and 1919. When he eventually finished his playing days in 1928 with the Chicago Cardinals, Jim Thorpe had become an athletic attraction that crowds flocked to see.

His athletic career began in high school when, according to Wilbur Gobrecht’s “Jim Thorpe Carlisle Indian,” the young high school student was assigned cleanup detail around the track. When Jim asked permission to jump the 5-foot-9-inch high-jump bar, the jumpers reportedly snickered since Thorpe was dressed in overalls and hadn’t warmed up at all.

He cleared the bar with room to spare as his coach Warner watched. The rest is, as they say, history.

“He told me that transportation was limited while he attended the school.” Owens says. “So he used to run from the Indian school to track meets on City Island, compete in the day’s events, and then run home.”

Carlisle liked Thorpe, too. Especially after he traveled to the 1912 Olympic Games in Stockholm, Sweden and returned home with two gold medals. He won both the pentathlon and the decathlon.

But Thorpe didn’t just leap over a high-jump bar and land in Sweden.

He went out for football in 1907 and rode the bench. After another track season in 1908, Thorpe went south to play baseball in the Carolina League and ended up staying two years, until his arm gave out from pitching every day.

The small amount of money he made - never more than \$125 in any one month - would come back to haunt him in a few years.

He went back home to Oklahoma, but was soon summoned to Carlisle by Warner to prepare for the 1912 Games.

After winning both the pentathlon and decathlon, a feat no one else has ever accomplished, King Gustav V of Sweden declared Thorpe the “greatest athlete in the world,” and presented him with a bronze bust of himself.

Thorpe, Warner and Louis Tewanima, another Carlisle Indian school athlete who won a silver medal in the 10,000 meter race, returned to the United States to parades and ceremonies. Carlisle held its own welcome for its three heroes on Aug. 16, 1912.

Unfortunately, the rest of Thorpe’s life wasn’t so rosy.

Several months after the Olympics had passed, a reporter from New England discovered Thorpe had played baseball in the Carolina League for pay, and therefore wasn’t an amateur athlete. The Olympic Committee took back his medals because of his honesty.

He refused to follow the example set by many of his Indian teammates in the league, according to Gobrecht. They used aliases, while Thorpe went by his real name.

He sent the Olympic Committee an explanation of what had happened and apologized, but his medals weren’t returned until Jan. 18, 1983, more than 30 years after he died of a heart attack. Losing his medals seemed to set the tone for the rest of his life.



Thorpe signed a contract with the New York Giants to play baseball, but he lasted just seven years, until 1919. His potential was never realized, say sportswriters of the day, because he had a personality conflict with head coach John “Muggsy” McGraw.

“He told me that one way he used to get money, when he was older, was to broad jump for money, Owens says. He used to put a line on the ground and then bet people he could jump past it. Thorpe returned to Carlisle several times after the Olympics. When he was making a country-wide tour speaking about his life in the 1940s he came back often.

He suffered the first of three heart attacks in 1943 while working at the Ford Motor Company as a gate tender. While he was recuperating in Oklahoma, two Indian legislators tried to get his Olympic medals back, to no avail.

In 1950 the Associated Press named him the outstanding male athlete of the half century. Babe Ruth was the runner-up. The following year Thorpe hit rock bottom, according to his biography. He went into the hospital to have a cancerous growth removed from his lip and the story broke in the newspapers that Thorpe was a charity patient. His wife went on record as saying the couple was broke. Money poured in from all directions, along with more accolades.

Thorpe didn't live long enough after that to try to make a fresh start. He had a second heart attack in August 1952 and his final one followed eight months later, when he was 65. Even in death Thorpe wasn't settled. According to Indian leg-

Replicas of Thorpe's medals ends, his soul will not rest until he is buried in the town of his birth. were returned to his seven children and his amateur status reinstated after efforts by the Oklahoma Legislature, Carlisle residents and former New York Yankee pitcher Allie Reynolds.

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Janitor returns Jim Thorpe medals  
- by Michelle Boyd Waters

The Amateur Athletic Union stripped Prague native James "Jim" Francis Thorpe of his 1912 Olympic track and field gold medals in 1913, stating that he had played professional baseball 1909-10 and, therefore, did not qualify to win the amateur sports awards.

Family, friends and sports enthusiasts fought to have Thorpe reinstated as an amateur and have the medals returned to him. They won those battles in 1973 and 1983, respectively. But 15 years later, the medals were stolen again - this time from Oklahoma State Capitol exhibit and allegedly by an 18-year-old janitor. The janitor, Terry D. Anderson, Oklahoma City, turned himself in Sept. 24 to the Oklahoma Highway Patrol and also returned the medals, according to a report by The Associated Press.

# Wilma Rudolph

Wilma Rudolph is the only American woman runner ever to win three gold medals in the Olympic games. Her performance was all the more remarkable in light of the fact that she had double pneumonia and scarlet fever as a young child and could not walk without braces until age 11.

Wilma Rudolph was born into a large family — she was the 20th of 22 children! Her parents, Ed and Blanche Rudolph, were honest, hardworking people, but were very poor. Mr. Rudolph worked as a railroad porter and handyman. Mrs. Rudolph did cooking, laundry and housecleaning for wealthy white families.

Rudolph was diagnosed with polio at birth. She weighed only four-and-a-half pounds. Her first few years were difficult as she suffered from double pneumonia twice and scarlet fever. The polio made it difficult for her to use her left leg, but doctors at Meharry Medical College in Nashville, Tennessee, said Rudolph might regain the use of her leg if she underwent daily therapeutic massages. Her mother took Rudolph to Meharry for heat and water therapy once a week for two years. The rest of the week her mother and three of her older siblings massaged her crippled leg at least four times a day. This treatment had an immediate, beneficial effect.



At five Rudolph was fitted with a steel brace, which she wore for the next six years. The first time she ever attended school was at the age of seven, when she started second grade at Cobb Elementary. Her life took an important turn in the seventh grade when a new high school was constructed for blacks. While attending Burt High School, Rudolph was introduced to organized sports, especially basketball. A year later her basketball coach resurrected the track team and asked her to join. She immediately excelled and ran in the 50 meter, 75 meter, 100 meter, and the relay events. When she was thirteen years old, she ran in twenty different races and won them all. Rudolph's first track coach, Clinton Gray, is credited with nicknaming her "Skeeter," because she was always buzzing around.

During her sophomore year, Rudolph entered her first major track meet at Alabama's Tuskegee Institute. The competition attracted girls from across the South, and Rudolph lost every race. The losses convinced her that if she wanted to be successful in track, she would need proper coaching. Edward Temple, the track coach at Tennessee State University, invited Rudolph to training camp at the university. She ran twenty miles a day at the camp and used cross-country training to build endurance. At the end of the summer Temple took his team to the National Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) contest in Philadelphia, where Rudolph won all nine races she entered, and demonstrated potential as a possible Olympic athlete.

As a high school junior Rudolph participated in the Olympic trials held in Seattle, and she made the team as its youngest member. In 1956 she attended the Olympic Games in Melbourne, Australia, but was eliminated from the 200 meter. She ran the third leg in the relay, and the team

won a bronze medal. At the end of the games, she vowed to return to win more medals.

Rudolph entered Tennessee State University in September 1958, and she and other members of the track team became known as “Tigerbelles.” To stay in school Rudolph worked two hours a day, five days a week, at various jobs around campus. In 1960 she attended Olympic trials at Texas Christian University and set a world record in the 200 meter that would stand for eight years. She qualified for the Olympic team in the 100 meter, 200 meter, and relay events. At the Olympic Games in Rome, she became the first American woman to win three gold medals, and afterwards she and the rest of the American team were invited to meet Pope John XXIII.



Rudolph participated in several other meets, including the British Empire Games in London, where she won all the events she entered. She also attended meets in West Germany, Holland, and elsewhere in Europe. Wherever she went, she was met by hundreds of admirers. When she returned to the States, her hometown greeted her with a parade in her honor. The parade was the first integrated event in that city’s history. Rudolph also received the key to the city of Chicago, and she met with President John F. Kennedy and Vice-President Lyndon B. Johnson. She spoke at numerous banquets, appeared on television, signed autographs, and made countless speeches.

On September 7th, 1960, in Rome, Wilma became the first American woman to win 3 gold medals in the Olympics. She won the 100-meter dash, the 200-meter dash, and ran the anchor on the 400-meter relay team.

This achievement led her to become one of the most celebrated female athletes of all time. In addition, her celebrity caused gender barriers to be broken in previously all-male track and field events.

There were other honors as well. In 1963 she was selected to represent the U. S. State Department as a Goodwill Ambassador at the Games of Friendship in Dakar, Senegal. Later that year she was invited by Dr. Billy Graham to join the Baptist Christian Athletes in Japan.

In 1977 she wrote her autobiography, simply titled, “Wilma.” It was adapted as a television movie; Wilma worked on it as a consultant.

In 1997, Governor Don Sundquist proclaimed June 23 as Wilma Rudolph Day in Tennessee.

She died Saturday, November 12, 1994, at the age of 54. She had been in and out of hospitals for several months after brain cancer was diagnosed. Leroy Walker, president of the U.S. Olympic Committee, said, “All of us recognize that this is obviously a tremendous loss. Wilma was still very much involved with a number of Olympic programs. It’s a tragic loss. She was struck with an illness that, unfortunately, we can’t do very much about.”

## AWARDS

United Press Athlete of the Year 1960  
Associated Press Woman Athlete of the Year 1960  
James E. Sullivan Award for Good Sportsmanship 1961\*  
The Babe Zaharias Award 1962  
European Sportswriters' Sportsman of the Year\*  
The Penn Relays 1961\*  
New York Athletic Club Track Meet\*  
The Millrose Games\*  
Black Sports Hall of Fame 1980  
U.S. Olympic Hall of Fame 1983  
Vitalis Cup for Sports Excellence 1983  
Women's Sports Foundation Award 1984

\* first woman to receive the award/invitation