

JESSE OWENS & LUZ LONG STORY

The Olympic Games of 1936 were held in Hitler's Germany. The American entry in the running broad jump was Jesse Owens, a black man. The German entry was Luz Long, a blond, blue-eyed athlete who had trained all his life for this event. Hitler desperately wanted Long to win to support his propaganda for the "master" race.

In the trials Jesse Owens did badly. He had to jump a qualifying distance of 24 & 1/2 feet, but failed in his first three attempts. Luz Long qualified easily. Then Owens, being extra cautious on his second attempt, fell three inches short of the qualifying distance.

Owens was now extremely nervous. He might not even qualify to compete in the broad jump, let alone beat the Nazi superstar. Before his third and final try, he rested on one knee attempting to pray.

Then someone called his name and put a calm, reassuring hand on his shoulder. It was Luz Long. "I think I know what is wrong with you," said Luz, seconds before Owens was to jump. "You give everything when you jump. I the same. You cannot do halfway, but you are afraid you will foul again."

"That's right," said Jesse.

"I have answer," said Luz. "Same thing happen to me last year in Cologne." Luz said to jump half a foot behind the takeoff board -- with full power. That way it was possible not to foul and yet not hold back. Luz then put his towel down at the exact spot from which Jesse should jump.

It worked. Jesse qualified, setting an unofficial world record. Thanks to Luz, America's black man was still in the running.

The day of the finals, Luz Long jumped first, his first of three tries; Jesse Owens jumped a little farther. Luz's second jump outdid Jesse's first; Jesse then jumped a half inch farther. Luz outdid himself on his third and final try -- a fast, high, long leap far in excess of the existing world record.

Now it was Jesse Owen's final turn. Before he took off, he caught Luz Long's eye. He said later he felt that his opponent was "wordlessly urging me to do my best, to do better than I'd ever done."

And Jesse did. Luz had jumped farther than any man before, and Jesse jumped farther than Luz.

"You did it" said Luz. Then he held Jesse's arm up in the air. "Jazze Owenz! Jazze Owenz!" he shouted to the crowd. Soon everyone - more than 100,000 Germans -- were chanting along with him, "Jazze Owenz! Jazze Owenz!"

Luz Long failed to prove Hitler's theory of the master race. Instead he proved himself one of the finest sportsmen of all time.