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CHAPTER

My Greatest Olympic Prize

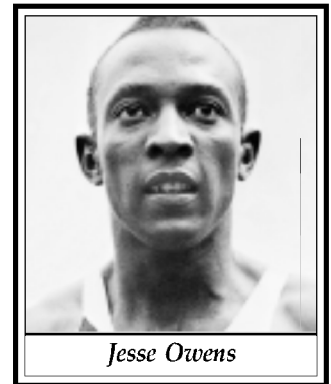
–Jesse Owens

◆ *About the Author*

Jesse Owens was born on September 12, 1913 in Oakville Alabama (United States). He was an American track and field athlete and four time Olympic Gold-medalist. He has described his personal experiences during Olympic Games held in Berlin in 1936.

◆ *About the Lesson*

Jesse Owens, one of the most famous athletes in history, narrates his experiences at the Berlin Olympics. He is of the opinion that sports should be free from any political or religious interference. They should be played with the spirit of a sportsman. Read this story and know how two rivals can be best friends.



It was the summer of 1936. The Olympic Games were being held in Berlin. Because Adolf Hitler childishly insisted that his performers were members of a “master race”, nationalistic feelings were running high.

I wasn’t too worried about all this. I’d trained, sweated and disciplined myself for six years, with the Games in mind. While I was going over on the boat, all I could think about was taking home one or two of those gold medals. I had my eyes especially on the long jump. A year before I’d set the world record of 26 feet 8.5 inches. Everyone expected me to win that Olympic event easily.

I was in for a surprise. When the time came for the long-jump trials, I was startled to see a tall boy hitting the pit as almost 26 feet on his practice leaps. He happened to be a German named Luz Long. I was told that Hitler had kept him hidden away, evidently hoping he would win the jump.

I thought if Long won, it would add some new support to the Nazis’ Aryan superiority theory. After all, I am a Negro. A little angry at Hitler’s ways, I determined to go out there and really show *Der Fuehrer* and his master race who was superior and who wasn’t.

An angry athlete is an athlete who will make mistakes, as any coach will tell you. I was no exception. On the first of my three qualifying jumps, I leaped from several inches beyond the take off board for a no-jump. On the second jump, I was even worse. “Did I come 3,000 miles for this?” I thought bitterly. “To fail in the trials and make a fool of myself?”

Walking a few yards from the pit, I kicked disgustedly at the ground. Suddenly I felt a hand on my shoulder. I turned to look into the friendly blue eyes of the tall German long jumper. He had easily qualified for the finals on his first attempt. He offered me a firm handshake.

“Jesse Owens, I’m, Luz Long. I don’t think we’ve met.” He spoke English well, though with a German twist to it.

“Glad to meet you,” I said, trying to hide my nervousness, I added, “How are you?”

“I’m fine, The question, is : How are you?”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“Something must be troubling you, “he said, “You should be able to qualify with your eyes shut.”

“Believe me, I know it, “ I told him and it felt good to say that to someone.

For the next few minutes we talked together, I didn’t tell Long what was troubling me, but he seemed to understand my anger and he took pains to reassure me. Although he’d been trained in the Nazi youth movement, he didn’t believe in the Aryan-supremacy business any more than I did. We laughed over the fact that he physically looked like belonging to a superior race. An inch taller than I, he had a lean muscular frame, clear blue eyes, fair hair and strikingly handsome face. “Finally seeing, I had *calmed down he pointed to the take-off board*”.

“Look” he said, “why don’t you draw a line a few inches behind the board and aim at making your take-off from there? You’ll be sure not to foul and you certainly ought to jump far enough to qualify. What does it matter if you’re not first in the trials? Tomorrow is what counts.”

Suddenly, all the tension seemed to ebb out of my body as the truth of what he said, hit me. Confidently, I drew a line a full foot behind the board and jumped from there. I qualified with almost a foot to spare.

That night I walked over to Luz Long’s room in the Olympic village to thank him. I know that if it hadn’t been for him, I probably wouldn’t be jumping in the finals the following day. We sat in his quarters and talked for two hours about athletics, ourselves, the world situation, a dozen other things.

When I finally got up to leave, we both knew that a real friendship has been formed. Luz would go out to the stadium the next day trying to beat me if he could. But I knew that he wanted me to do my best—even if that meant my winning.

As it happened, Luz broke his own past record. In doing so, he pushed me on to a peak performance. I remember that at the instant I landed from my final jump the one which set the Olympic record of 26 feet $5\frac{5}{16}$ inches, he was at my side, congratulating me. Despite the fact that Hitler glared at us from the stands not a hundred yards away, Luz shook my hand hard—and it wasn’t a false ‘smile with a broken heart’ sort of grip, either.

You could melt down all the gold 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.

I realized then, too, that Luz was a fine example of what Pierre de Coubertin, founder of the modern Olympic Games, must have had in mind when he said, “The important thing in the Olympic Games is not winning but taking part. The essential thing in life is not conquering but fighting well.”

|| Glossary ||

Jesse Owens

जेसी ओवेन्स

An American Negro, Champion of Berlin Olympics

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| The Olympic Games | द ओलम्पिक गेम्स | The Olympic Games were started in ancient Greece, these were held every four years |
| Adolf Hitler | एडोल्फ हिटलर | Dictator of Germany from 1933 to 1945 |
| Childishly | मूर्खतापूर्ण ढंग से | foolishly |
| Performers | खिलाड़ी | players |
| Master race | विश्व में आर्यों को सबसे अधिक सभ्य एवं संपूर्ण माना जाता था जिसमें हिटलर जर्मन लोगों को उत्तम श्रेणी का मानता था। | Hitler considered Germans as the race of highest rank among Aryans whom he considered to be perfect and most civilized in the world. |
| Nationalistic feelings | राष्ट्रीयता का दृष्टिकोण | Nationalism |
| Sweated | पसीना बहाया | perspired or laboured hard |
| Startled | चौंक गया | greatly surprised |
| Luz Long | एक महान जर्मन खिलाड़ी | A great German player who believed in the equality of man |
| Nazis | हिटलर की जर्मन नेशनल सोशलिस्ट पार्टी के सदस्य नाजी कहलाते थे। | Members of Hitler's German National Socialist party |
| Aryan Superiority theory | आर्यों की श्रेष्ठता का सिद्धान्त | principle of thinking one self superior |
| Negro | अफ्रीकन हब्शी | member of one of the black-skinned races of Africa |
| Der Fuehrer | हिटलर | (Hitler) |
| Athlete | खेलकूद में भाग लेने वाला | person who competes in physical games |
| Exceptions | अपवाद | out of the general rule |
| Disgustedly | तिरस्कारपूर्वक | with a strong dislike |
| Muscular | मांसपेशियों वाला | made of muscles |
| Frame | शरीर का ढांचा | structure of body |
| Strikingly | अत्यधिक | very greatly |
| Tension | तनाव | mental strain |
| Peak performance | उत्कृष्ट कार्य | excellent work |
| Despite | बावजूद | inspite of |
| Glared | क्रोध से घूरा | Gazed with anger |
| Sort of grip | एक प्रकार की पकड़ | a kind of hold |

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| 24 carat friendship | सच्ची और निर्मल मैत्री | The truest and purest friendship |
| Pierre de Coubertin | आधुनिक ओलम्पिक गेम्स के जन्मदाता | founder of Modern Olympic Games |

|| Exercise ||

(A) Short Answer Type Questions:

Answer the following questions in not more than 25 words each :

1. When and where were Olympic Games being held?
2. What was expected of Jesse Owens and why?
3. Why was Jesse Owens angry?
4. Whose hand did Jesse Owens feel on his shoulder? What did it signify?
5. How did Luz Long differ from other members of his race?
6. What did Luz Long do on the success of Jesse Owens in the finals?
7. What happened with Jesse Owens on the first of his three qualifying jumps?
8. Who was the founder of modern Olympic Games?
9. What was Jesse Owens "Greatest Olympic Prize"?
10. What is important thing in the Olympic Games?
11. How did Luz Long help Jesse Owens to correct the error?
12. Why has Luz Long been called a fine example of Coubertin's ideal?
13. Who was Coubertin? What was his ideal?
14. Who was Jesse Owens?
15. What was Hitler's 'Master Race' theory?
16. What did Pierre de Coubertin say about the Olympic Games?
17. Who was Luz Long? How did he differ from the other members of his race?
18. Who was Luz Long?
19. What advice did Luz Long give to Jesse Owens to qualify/for the final jump?
20. What were the feelings of Jesse Owens for Luz Long?
21. Who was Jesse Owens? Why did he visit Berlin in summer of 1936?
22. Why did Jesse Owens go to Luz Long's room in the Olympic Village?

(B) Select the most suitable alternative to complete each of the following statements :

1. **Jesse Owens could not jump properly in the beginning because :**
 - (a) he was in tension
 - (b) he was ill
 - (c) he did not want to jump
 - (d) he did not know how to jump properly
2. **Jesse Owens disliked Adolf Hitler because :**
 - (a) he did not want other athletes to win
 - (b) he had kept Luz Long hidden from other Olympic athletes
 - (c) he advocated the doctrine of the Aryan supremacy
 - (d) he suffered from vanity by organising the Games in Berlin

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3. **The essential thing in Life is :**
 - (a) earning money
 - (b) conquering
 - (c) fighting well
 - (d) winning prize
 4. **Luz Long was a real sportsman because :**
 - (a) he was tall and well built
 - (b) he was German
 - (c) his main object in games was not conquering but fighting well
 5. **Jesse Owens was angry because :**
 - (a) he was not allowed to take part in games
 - (b) he had not qualified himself for the games
 - (c) Negroes were supposed to be inferior to Aryans
 - (d) Germans were not superior to all other races of all the world
 6. **The important thing in Olympic Games is :**
 - (a) playing tricks
 - (b) taking part
 - (c) winning
 7. **Jesse Owens could not clear the first two trial jumps because he was :**
 - (a) not a good athlete
 - (b) disturbed by his rival Luz Long
 - (c) angry at Hitler's Aryan superiority theory
 - (d) discouraged by his coach
 8. **The founder of the Modern Olympic Games was**
 - (a) Adolf Hitler
 - (b) Pierre de Coubertin
 - (c) Jesse Owens
 - (d) Der Fuehrer
 9. **In the beginning Jesse Owens was a little angry at**
 - (a) himself
 - (b) Luz long
 - (c) Hitler's ways
 - (d) his coach
 10. **Olympic Games were held in Berlin in**
 - (a) 1932
 - (b) 1936
 - (c) 1940
 - (d) 1944
 11. **Jesse owens could not clear two of the three long jump trials because he.....**
 - (a) was nervous
 - (b) was over confident
 - (c) was angry over the master-race theory of Adolf Hitler
 - (d) feared that Luz Long, a German athlete might beat him at the finals
 12. **The Olympic Games in 1936, were held in.....**
 - (a) New York
 - (b) Berlin
 - (c) Japan
 - (d) China
 13. **Hitler believed in the.....**
 - (a) superiority of English race
 - (b) superiority of German race
 - (c) equality of all races
 - (d) superiority of all races

(C) Say whether each of the following statements is 'true' or 'false':

1. Luz Long was jealous of Jesse Owens.
2. Jesse Owens was an American Negro.
3. Luz Long did not believe Hitler's master race theory.
4. Jesse Owens was an admirer of Hitler's master race theory.
5. Luz Long defeated Jesse Owens in the final.
6. Jesse Owens was a German.
7. The important thing in the Olympic Games is to win.
8. An angry athlete is an athlete who will make mistakes.
9. Pierre de Coubertin was the founder of the modern Olympic Games.
10. Luz Long was an American.
11. Luz Long spoke English with a German twist.
12. Jesse Owens and Luz Long had been great friends long before the Olympic Games were held in Paris in 1936.
13. Olympic Games were held in Paris in 1936.
14. The 1936 Olympic Games were held in Berlin.
15. Winning is the most important thing in games and sports.
16. Luz Long was a German.
17. Luz Long was proud of his race.
18. Jesse Owens had his eye especially on long jump.
19. Jesse Owens was an American long-jumper.
20. The important thing in the Olympic Games is to take part in games and show true sportsman spirit.
21. Sports should be played with sportsmanship.
22. Jesse Owens helped Luz Long in qualifying for the final jump.
23. Jesse Owens was a German athlete.
24. In 1936 the Olympic Games were held in America.
25. Jesse Owens was an admirer of Adolf Hitler.
26. The essential thing in life is not conquering but fighting well.
27. Hitler was the founder of the modern Olympic Games.

(D) Complete the spellings of the following words :

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| (i) Super- -rity | (ii) Super- -r | (iii) Cert- -nly |
| (iv) Imp—rt—nt | (v) Sit- -tion | |

↪ Project Work

- (a) Compare Luz Long and Jesse Owens on the basis of the lesson in a **table form**.
- (b) Luz Long and Jesse Owens were great athlete who participated the Olympic Games in Berlin in 1936. Make a list of some of the Indian athlete with their pictures who have already taken part in Olympic Games.
- (c) Give a **biographical report** to your mother on the basis of the material given in the text.

