

Pass It On®...

The Friendship Heard Round the World.

Luz Long and Jesse Owens struck up a friendship at the 1936 Olympics that transcended sport, race and history.

Jesse Owens was the grandson of enslaved people and the son of Alabama sharecroppers. Luz Long studied law at the University of Leipzig and was the physical embodiment of Hitler's nationalistic ideal. One would become a national hero. One would die in the upcoming war. Both would call out racism at a time when it could cost them everything.

Owens arrived in Berlin in 1936, torn between boycotting the Olympics on moral principles or competing in hopes the attention would further the cause of Black acceptance. Long arrived at the Olympics disenfranchised by the Nazi regime and desperate to expose the fallacy of the idea of a superior Aryan race.

The two men met at the broad jump, where Owens had inadvertently scratched his first jump, unaware it would be recorded as his first attempt, and not a trial. Unsettled, he scratched the second jump. As the story goes, Long suggested that Owens leap before the mark, ensuring that Owens would qualify to move on. In the spirit of competition, Long wanted the best from his opponent.

Owens did qualify, and the two went on to the finals. Long would beat the European record. But Owens would set a new world record that outdistanced Long. The two would best each other and the record five times before Owens finally won. What happened next is not the stuff of movie scripts but of real life.

Long took hold of Owens, and the two strode arm-in-arm for a victory lap. The crowd roared approval and shouted, "Owens! Owens!" Hitler promptly left the arena.

The friendship between the two broad jumpers would continue for years until Long stopped writing his friend in 1943. He had been conscripted into the German military and mortally wounded in the Battle of St. Pietro. He passed away in a British military hospital, but not before penning a letter to his dear friend.

"Someday, find my son," he wrote Owens. "Tell him what times were like when we were not separated by war. Tell him how things can be between men on this earth."

Owens honored the request and corresponded with the younger Luz for years. After the war, Owens returned to Berlin to walk arm-in-arm with Kai Long, the son of the great peacemaker and forever friend, remembering the moment in the stadium.

"It took a lot of courage for him to befriend me in front of Hitler," Owens recalled. "I would melt down all the medals and cups I have, and they wouldn't be a plating on the twenty-four-carat friendship that I felt for Luz Long."

Friendship is the bond that gets us through the trials of childhood and the loneliness of our adult lives and can remind us of our shared humanity. Friendships forged in the furnace of war and inhumanity lift us all.

The Power of Friendship...[PassItOn.com](https://www.passiton.com)

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