

# THE MAN WHO GOT FREE TRAINERS

*A story to impress brand-conscious teenagers!*

*I object to being a free advertising hoarding for multinational brands, why should I wear their logo for them? But amongst certain areas of society it is de rigueur to have the 'correct' brands. Whether those mentioned here are 'in' or not at the moment I don't know.*

Most people have heard of the black American athlete Jesse Owens who won 4 gold medals at the 1936 Olympic Games. Those games were held in Berlin in Nazi Germany and Hitler had intended them to demonstrate the superiority of his white, Aryan athletes. Jesse Owens spoiled that by winning the sprints which are always the most prestigious events, but Germany won far more medals than any other country so Hitler wasn't too disappointed. Legend has it that Hitler was so angry that he refused to acknowledge or shake hands with Owens. In fact he didn't shake hands with *any* athlete black or white, German or American. When asked if he felt snubbed by Hitler Owens replied that it was the U.S. President, Franklin Roosevelt, who had snubbed him because when they returned to America all the white athletes were invited to meet the president in Washington, but not the blacks. In fact at a reception to celebrate the team's achievements, held at the Waldorf-Astoria hotel, Owens and the other black athletes had to sneak in through the tradesmen's entrance at the back while the whites grandly entered through the front door past adoring crowds!



Owens and the other black Americans enjoyed, and were surprised by, their visit to Germany. It was the first time most of them had been outside the USA. Everyone was friendly; they were allowed to stay in the same hotels as everyone else; they could eat in any restaurant and shop in any shop; they could sit anywhere on the buses and trams. Back home in America they were forced to follow the rules of segregation and use 'blacks only' facilities. If they ventured into a 'white' shop or washroom they could be thrown in jail or even killed!

Owens, as one of the best athletes, was singled out to be the recipient of a special pair of running shoes, or trainers as we'd call them now—the first athlete to be sponsored! These were made for him by Rudolph and Adolf Dassler whose Dassler Shoe Company was one of the most successful in Germany. A few years later, during World War II, the company went on to make all the boots for the German army so became even more successful. After the war, however, Rudolph and Adolph quarrelled, dissolved Dassler Shoes, and went into business individually. Both founded their own separate shoe companies.

Rudolph called his *Puma*—a name that is still well known.

Adolf correctly felt that, in the aftermath of the war, it wouldn't be wise to use his own first name in the name of his firm so he shortened both his first and second names, put the letters together and called his company *Adidas*.

Now impress the kids with that—except that Adidas is probably 'out' now.

This is not to excuse German racism but it does put it into context and remind us just how racist America was until at least the 1960s—the Black Power salutes at the 1968 Games—and we in Britain weren't that different: 'No Blacks' signs in lodging houses, 'Pakis Out' still found on walls, various right-wing groups still winning votes and council seats...

The torch relay which now seems such an integral part of the preliminaries was invented for Hitler's 1936 Games.