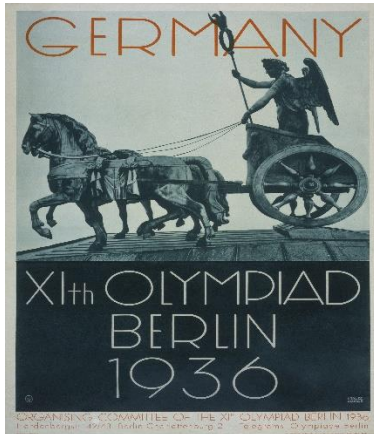


## THREE INSPIRING OLYMPIC STORIES

## 1) Berlin 1936



Jesse Owens was the youngest of ten children. He was the grandson of former slaves and grew up helping his father pick cotton in the fields. He sometimes said later in life that his early childhood in Alabama was quite happy because he had no idea how poor he was. As a child, he was often sick. When he was nine years old, his family moved to Ohio so that they could have better opportunities. Early on Owens realized that he had a passion for running. In Ohio, Owens earned the nickname that would stick with him the rest of his life: his new teacher, unable to understand his strong southern accent, believed the young athlete said his name was 'Jesse', when he, in fact, said 'J.C.' Owens was too shy to correct his new teacher in front of his new classmates, and he was called 'Jesse' for the rest of his life.

In 1936, when Owens competed, the Olympics were hosted in Berlin, Germany, during the regime of Hitler. After considerable boycott debates, the US decided to send their team to the Games, including 10 African-American athletes. Hitler intended to use the Games to demonstrate that the German 'Aryan' people were the superior race, but instead, Owens dominated the Games breaking five world records. Hitler greeted only German athletes. When he was criticized and told to either greet all athletes or none at all – he decided to greet no athletes.

Owens won four gold medals: in 100m sprint, long jump, 200m sprint and 4x100m sprint relay. This level of achievement remained unmatched until 1984. Just before the competitions, Owens was visited by Adi Dassler, the founder of the Adidas athletic shoe company. He persuaded Owens to use Adidas shoes, so Owens became the first sponsored black male athlete.

Although Owens helped the United States triumph at the games, President Franklin D. Roosevelt didn't meet with him and congratulate him, as was typical for champions. There was still racial discrimination in the USA. The athlete wouldn't be properly recognized until 1976 when President Gerald Ford awarded him the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Owens gave hope to Black people around the world.

## 2) Tokyo 1964



At the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, no one knew who Billy Mills was. He was no 'favourite'. Half-Native-American and half-white, Mills grew up in poverty on a reservation in South Dakota. His father was a Sioux Indian and Billy's tribal name was Makata Taka Hela ('Respects the Earth'). His mother died when he was only 8 and his father died when he was 12. He started running to channel his energy into something positive. In high school, his gift for running was recognized and he continued to run during college. At one of the competitions, Billy got ready for the post-race photo with the other athletes. He thought of his parents and how proud they would be. Then one of the photographers said: 'You. Yeah, you – the darker-skinned one. I want you out of the photo.' And that just went to the depths of his soul and broke him. Then he remembered what his dad told him before he died. He said: 'It takes a dream to heal broken souls.' He then stopped crying and wrote down a dream to heal a broken soul: gold medal, Olympic 10,000-metre run.

At the 1964 Olympics in Tokyo, everybody expected Ron Clarke to win as he was the favourite and held the world record in this event. Billy Mills was an unknown long-distance runner. During the race, there was a moment when Billy came close to quitting. Ron Clarke of Australia and Mohammed Gammoudi of Tunisia were leading. Billy was

behind them. Then, seemingly out of nowhere, Billy took the lead and won the race. He is still the only American to ever win a gold medal in the 10,000 m event.

Billy dedicated the rest of his life to empowering American Indians. In 1986, he co-founded a nonprofit organization: Running Strong for American Indian Youth. In 2013, President Barack Obama awarded Billy the Presidential Citizens Medal for his work with Running Strong.

### 3) Rio 2016



The story of Yusra Mardini, a 20-year-old Olympic swimmer, is one of the most extraordinarily inspirational stories that we've ever heard. She had a normal life and a promising swimming career when war broke out in Syria and her family decided to flee their country. While fleeing her native country Syria on a small boat, she realized to her horror that the boat's engine stopped working and the boat started sinking. As the only people who could swim, Yusra and her sister Sarah jumped into the water, risking their lives, and pushed the boat for over three hours in cold water until they finally reached the shore. They saved not just their own lives but those of 20 other refugees. After she arrived in Greece, she worked toward a lifelong goal: to compete in the Olympics. Yusra succeeded and she was selected to compete at Rio 2016 under the Olympic flag as a part of first-ever Refugee Olympic Team (ROT). Since then, she has been appointed a goodwill ambassador for the United Nations refugee agency. She's written a book about her life – 'Butterfly'. She was listed among the 30 Most Influential Teens of 2016 by TIME Magazine. She does all this while still swimming at a competitive level and preparing for the next Olympics. Despite living in Germany now, a country that's free of war, the memories of that fateful day when she saved the lives of 20 people remain with her. Her message of hope, determination and courage reminds us that those who flee their countries are capable of achieving great things. It's no wonder how Hollywood wants to make a film about her life.

**A1 Which athlete(s).... ?**

- 1 won any gold medals at the Olympics
- 2 had problems because of the colour of their skin
- 3 grew up in poverty
- 4 lost both parents at an early age
- 5 saved many people's lives
- 6 wrote a book
- 7 broke the world record at the Olympics
- 8 was sponsored by Adidas

**A2 Match the words in the two lists to make common word partnerships.**

- |             |                   |
|-------------|-------------------|
| 1 world     | a) medal          |
| 2 racial    | b) accent         |
| 3 gold      | c) jump           |
| 4 nonprofit | d) discrimination |
| 5 goodwill  | e) record         |
| 6 strong    | f) organization   |
| 7 long      | g) ambassador     |

**B1 What do you think?**

- 1 Which story do you find most interesting?
- 2 What have the three athletes got in common? What's different about them?

**B2 Test your sports knowledge.**

**Do you know who they are?**

- He is widely considered to be the fastest sprinter of all time, holding records in the 100 metres, 200 metres, and 4X100 metres relay. He was an eight-time Olympic gold medallist and an eleven-time World Champion. He grew up in Jamaica.
- She's been ranked number one for 253 weeks. Of the players who beat her, the only person to beat her twice was her sister, another famous tennis player.
- He is a British Formula One driver and a six-time world champion. He started his career at McLaren where he won his first title in 2008. In 2012 he decided to join the Mercedes F1 team.
- He is a Swedish professional footballer. He has played for Malmö, Arsenal, Ajax, Juventus, Milan, Barcelona, Paris Saint-Germain, Manchester United, LA Galaxy. His father was from Bosnia and his mother from Croatia.

**C Research time Find out about some other inspirational Olympic stories and report about them to your classmates.**