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Owens gets assist from Long, wins gold

By Larry Schwartz

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Jesse Owens is almost out of the long jump at the Olympics in Berlin shortly after qualifying begins. He fouls on his first two jumps, though he is stunned when officials count a practice run down the runway and into the pit as an attempt.

With one jump remaining, Luz Long, a tall, blue-eyed, blond German long jumper who is his stiffest competition, introduces himself. He suggests that Owens make a mark several inches behind the takeoff board and jump from there to play it safe. Owens takes the advice, and qualifies.

In the finals that afternoon, Long's fifth jump matches Owens' 25 feet, 10 inches. But Owens leaps 26-3³/₄ on his next attempt and wins his second of four gold medals with a final jump of 26-5¹/₂. The first to congratulate the Olympic record holder is Long, who looks like the model Nazi but isn't. The two walk arm in arm in front of Adolf Hitler's box.

"It took a lot of courage for him to befriend me in front of Hitler," Owens will say years later. "You can melt down all the medals and cups I have and they wouldn't be a plating on the 24-karat friendship I felt for Luz Long at that moment. Hitler must have gone crazy watching us embrace. The sad part of the story is I never saw Long again. He was killed in World War II."