

Standing Up for What's Right: Seeking Integrity Through Sports

Sports are a large part of both high school and our country today. Fans wear exotic outfits, create amusing chants, and spend all kinds of money just to watch the teams they love. Athletes have the opportunity of not only entertaining the fans but also teaching lessons about life through their actions on the field and off the field. Today, there are many stories about college players accepting money to play, players hurting their girlfriends, and players not respecting officials. Despite this, there are also many positive athletes out there. Integrity is regularly built into athletics. Integrity is associated with honesty, but it's more than being honest and fair. Integrity is who you are; it comes from inside you. It's following your moral intuition no matter what the situation, and doing the right thing whether people are watching or not. Both of these ideas are vital to integrity. These ideas of integrity can be seen in athletes through sports today. One of these athletes was Luz Long. Although the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin were dominated by African-American sprinter Jesse Owens, there was also a lesser-known German sprinter, Luz Long. Before we get to him, I'm going to tell you about Jesse Owens. For most athletes, Jesse Owens' performance would be the accomplishment of a lifetime. In 45 minutes, he established three world records and tied another. That was merely an appetizer for Owens. Owens' story is one of a high-profile sports star making a statement that transcended athletics spilling over into the world of global politics. He gave four magnificent performances, winning gold medals in the 100 and 200 meter dashes, the long jump, and on America's 4x100 relay team. Despite accomplishing all this, he never rubbed it in; he was a man of humility. Just as sure as he knew fascism was evil, he also knew his country had a ways to go too in improving life for African-Americans. In Germany, the Nazis portrayed African-Americans as inferior and ridiculed the United States for relying on "black auxiliaries." Now, here is where Luz Long comes in. Owens was almost out of the long jump shortly after qualifying began. He fouled on his first two jumps. With one jump remaining, Luz Long, a German long-jumper who was his toughest

competition, introduced himself. He suggested that Owens make a mark several inches before the takeoff board and jump from there to play it safe. Owens took the advice, and qualified. Later that day, Owens defeated Long in the finals, but Long was the first to congratulate the decorated Olympian. They then walked around the stadium, arm-in-arm, in front of an astonished crowd, and an even more astonished Adolf Hitler. It took a lot of courage for Long to befriend Owens in front of Hitler. While in an interview Owens explained that "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 seeing that embrace. Through this act of befriending an African-American in a hostile country that looked down upon African-Americans, Luz Long showed great integrity. Long showed that he despised discrimination. Not only did he befriend him, but he helped him. Luz knew this was the right thing to do. He didn't care that Hitler and the entirety of Germany itself was watching; that didn't stop him. Luz showed that he wasn't going to follow the corrupt ideas of his leader but rather follow his heart to do the unthinkable. He was an example of integrity to his country and to the rest of the world on a huge stage. As you can see, integrity is who you are; it comes internally from within you. It's following your moral intuition no matter what the situation, and doing the right thing whether people are watching or not. Integrity today is hard to come by. Athletes are getting more and more arrogant, and they believe the world revolves around themselves. Integrity is a precious thing and we should all try to embrace it. The best sort of integrity goes unnoticed, doing something that is right without anyone knowing. Be on the lookout for integrity today, do what you believe is right, and make a difference in this world to make it a better place.