

JACKIE JOYNER-KERSEE

EAST ST. LOUIS, ILL. / EAST ST. LOUIS, ILL. / EAST ST. LOUIS, ILL. / EAST ST. LOUIS, ILL.

**HONORING
BLACK
EXCELLENCE:
VOL. 1**



THE KINGDOM IS WHERE BLACK EXCELLENCE LIVES

Honoring Black Excellence is an adidas initiative that celebrates the achievements of Black individuals, and Black culture as a whole. There would be no such thing as sport, culture, or adidas without the Black community. So we're highlighting honorees from all across the country, from elite athletes like Jackie, to everyday individuals who are dedicated to service, offering each a platform to give back and share their stories.

We are honored to bring you the story of Jackie Joyner-Kersey's athletics career and love of service.



Welcome to the Kingdom
These are our streets
And here, we ride in chariots
And our horsemen gallop through the road
We make art worthy of renaissance
And our fountains runneth over
Here our hoops are treasures carved from the finest of gold
And our feasts — just as rich as the color of our skin.
Our knights uphold chivalry and honor
And we all sit atop thrones
You see, these streets are no streets at all
They're our Kingdom

And in our kingdom the roads stretch to the mountaintop
And the signage bears great names
Here, our people uphold our legacy
And they, too, are worthy of celebration
Because this is not where the dream ends
Our kingdom is where dreams begin



PhotoRun for adidas by Victor Sailor

THREE STEP THRONE



Photo courtesy of the National Museum of African American History and Culture

7,291 — the most points in an heptathlon event held by a female athlete to this day; four World Championship medals; a five-time top American Athlete of the Year; three-time Track & Field World Athlete of the Year; and two-time Jesse Owens Award winner, all in the span of 16 years. This is Jackie Joyner-Kersey's legacy.

But this isn't just a story of sporting excellence at the highest level. This is a testament to the fact that Black Excellence is the selfless act of giving back after you've made it to the top.

This is how Jackie Joyner-Kersey crystallized two legacies in one lifetime — by returning home to her Kingdom of East St. Louis and teaching kids how to be champions on and off the field, winning at life. This is the story of the Jackie Joyner-Kersey Foundation.



THE COME UP

It was 1968, and seven-year-old Jackie was enamored by the mysterious one-story building being constructed in her East St. Louis, Illinois neighborhood. "In our minds it could have been a skating rink because it had a dome," Jackie recalls.

She had no idea of the incalculable impact the future Mary E. Brown Community Center would have on her life.

By the time Jackie was 14, the future track & field superstar was already a familiar face at the place she called her second home. She got her first job at Mary E. Brown, placing ping pong paddles and balls on the table for \$3. "I also learned how to serve seniors through the Meals on Wheels program," Jackie says, beaming with pride. "I would be the first one there early in the morning before the workers would come in."

Before she became a sports icon, Jackie was just a kid who learned to give back at Mary E. Brown.



Photo courtesy of Jackie Joyner-Kersey

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**IF I CAN IMPROVE
A TENTH OF
A SECOND
OR HALF OF
AN INCH,
THAT MEANS
THE WORK THAT
I'M DOING IS
PAYING OFF.**

00:00.01



PhotoRun for adidas by Victor Sailor

Obsessed with elevating her game, Jackie convinced her sisters to fill empty potato chip bags with sand from the park so that she could practice her long jump landing in the front yard of their home. Yet, there were still stumbles. In her first competition as a child, she finished last in the 400 metres. It was then she conceived the mantra that would set the tone for her storied career.

But unbeknownst to Jackie, this mindset would also set the tone for her philanthropic journey. Founding the Jackie Joyner-Kersey Foundation was no small feat, and she achieved it through continual progress throughout her life, a half inch at a time.



Photo by Robert Carter for Hood Century

At 18 years old Jackie was hit with an unspeakable tragedy. Her mother passed away from a rare form of meningitis.

“I came back home from Los Angeles after my mother’s death and I wanted to go somewhere where people could uplift my spirit and embrace me,” she recalls. “I knew I could go back to the Mary Brown Center and find that kind of environment. [But] when I went over to the center it had padlocks on the door.”

“Where will the young people go?” With the closing of her neighborhood’s safe haven, Jackie wondered how such a mammoth hole could ever be filled. “And that’s when I began to start thinking about maybe one day I can open up a center for the kids.”

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WHERE WILL THE YOUNG PEOPLE GO?



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I FIGURED OUT
I DIDN'T NEED
A BUILDING
TO HELP
PEOPLE.

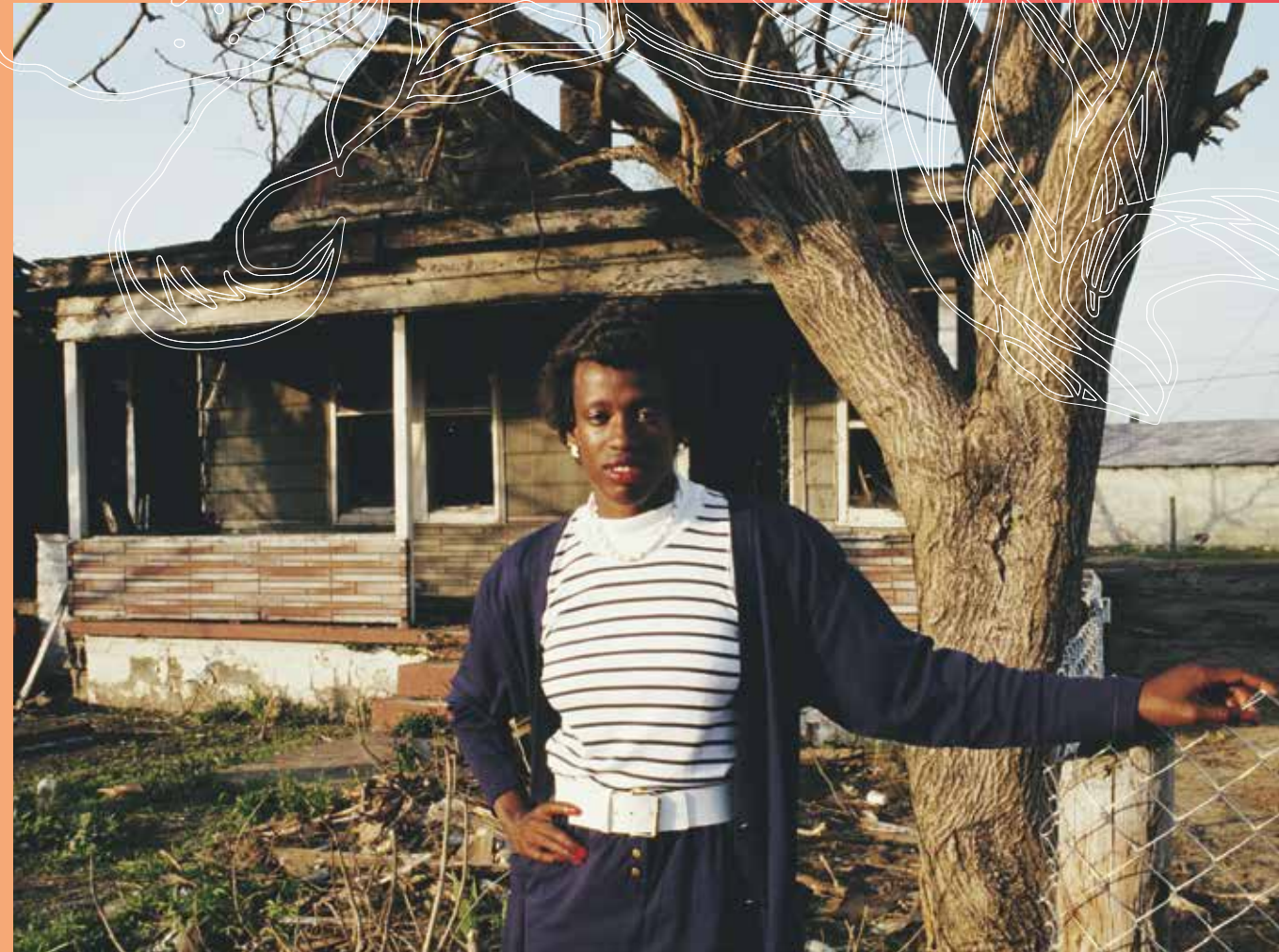


Photo by Allsport/Getty Images

“I’ve dedicated my life to helping others because of my mother,” Jackie says. “My mom always gave back, no matter what she had.” But it wasn’t just her mother. “When I was a volunteer at Mary Brown everyone around me would give. I thought maybe one day I could open up my own center. Later on, I figured out I didn’t need a building to help people. I would just come back to East St. Louis. It’s really about volunteerism and the giving of your time.”

This was the true beginning of the Jackie Joyner-Kersey Foundation. With no full-time staff or massive facility, Jackie planted the seeds of her philanthropic journey with acts of service and mentorship within the East St. Louis community that would one day grow into so much more.



An emotional Jackie Joyner-Kersey was taking it all in. It was 1996, and the track & field champion was standing at the groundbreaking ceremony for a dream that just a few years ago seemed quite unlikely. The 66,000 square ft. Jackie Joyner-Kersey Center in East St. Louis, Illinois, an all-encompassing community and learning facility, was finally becoming a reality.

The massive construction project started in 2000, and today the Jackie Joyner-Kersey Center's building space sits on 44 acres and includes three football fields, three baseball and softball fields, eight classrooms and a greenhouse space. There's a learning center for children two plus years of age. And it's all completely owned by Jackie, an empowering statement in struggling East St. Louis, Illinois.

GROUND- BREAKING

JJK TODAY



PhotoRun for adidas



The Jackie Joyner-Kersey Center is not only a love letter to the beautiful people of East St. Louis, Illinois. It's a fitting tribute to the Mary E. Brown Community Center. While it initially built up its reputation as an acclaimed venue for youth sports, the Jackie Joyner-Kersey Center's main role has long been as an epicenter for free-access, high-quality after-school educational programs in East St. Louis.

"Our goal is to be consistent in the lives of the young people that come through our doors, and not to have that inconsistency that may already exist within their own home life."

Indeed, in addition to its top-tier sports and enrichment programs—including football, basketball, softball, volleyball, soccer, track and field, cheerleading, wrestling and the arts—the Jackie Joyner-Kersey Foundation also fed over 85 families daily during the pandemic. For many in the community, the center has been a lifeline. Kids are provided door-to-door transportation, assistance with homework, snacks upon arrival, weekend meals and a meal to take home.

And Jackie isn't slowing down. She wants to help thousands of more children succeed. She's accomplishing this, in part, through her acclaimed Jackie Joyner-Kersey Winning In Life curriculum®, which teaches young people invaluable skills to develop character and leadership, and the social, emotional and spiritual responsibility they need to win in life. And late last year, Jackie Joyner-Kersey partnered up with the Donald Danforth Plant Science Center and the University of Illinois Extension to provide STEM and agriculture classes to students in everything from genetics to image analytics.

"We are here to change [the] lives of underserved children in East St. Louis, and in communities across the US," Jackie says. It's a call to action. A call to give back to the place that produced not only one of sports' most dominant icons, but an individual who never forgot where she came from. Jackie has more work to do. "Children in low-income areas often lack the resources, safe places to play, help with schoolwork, and mentorship they need to succeed in life," she says. "We want kids to dare to have dreams, and then gain the confidence and drive to achieve them. No matter where kids come from, they can grow up to be productive adults, or even leaders."



JACKIE'S RETURN

This new chapter of Jackie's life is defined by a remarkable decision, the kind that people of her stature rarely make — the decision to go back.

"If you are from this area and you make it, people only see you on television or in news clippings. For me it's always been about hard work and commitment, having a dream, seeing it through, but coming back. Coming back and trying to teach others what I had learned. And not just coming back home, but [showing up] where people can see me, touch me, and talk to me."

But the beautiful part about Jackie's homecoming philosophy is that it isn't motivated by the comfort of returning to the city she calls home, but rather the promise of returning to the community that makes East St. Louis, Illinois so special. The people are the reason for Jackie's return home on her chariot.



PhotoRun for adidas

**IF NOT THE RIVER-MADE CITY LINES
THEN IT'S THE COMFORT OF KNOWING IT
DOESN'T MATTER IF YOU'RE WATER
OR BLOOD BECAUSE HERE,
EVERYONE'S TREATED LIKE FAMILY
IF NOT THE MIDWESTERN RAILROAD TRACKS
THEN IT'S THE RUBBLE RUNNING TRACKS THAT
BRING THE COMMUNITY TOGETHER
THE MIDWESTERN WAY
YOU SEE, AT FIRST LOOK YOU MAY ONLY
SEE ITS TOUGH EXTERIOR
BUT THERE'S WARMTH HERE
THEY SAY A KINGDOM IS ONLY AS GOOD
AS ITS PEOPLE
AND THIS ONE IS FILLED WITH SAINTS
EAST ST. LOUIS IL,
WHERE BLACK EXCELLENCE LIVES**



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**BLACK
EXCELLENCE
IS YOU.**

— JACKIE JOYNER-KERSEE

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Just being a part of adidas’ Honoring Black Excellence campaign gives me goosebumps. We don’t celebrate ourselves enough. Black Excellence is a constant reminder that this has always been going on. When I think about it, Black Excellence has been in line with everything we do at JJK.

— Jackie Joyner-Kersey



Cover art and illustrations by Brandon Breaux | @bbreaux



Honoring Black Excellence

