Red Simmons went to Ann Arbor on May 25, 1935, to help out at the Big Ten track and field championships.

He ended up witnessing history.

Simmons, a former Eastern Michigan track star and 1932 Olympian, took time off as a Detroit police officer to rake the long jump pit at Michigan's Ferry Field.

"We knew Jesse Owens was coming up to Michigan," Simmons said. "So three friends and I went up there."

They saw Owens, then a sophomore at Ohio State, set three world records and tie another in less than an hour and a half.

At 2:45 p.m., Owens tied the 100-yard dash record with a time of 9.4 seconds. At 3:25 he broke the long jump mark (26 feet, 8 1/2 inches), and at 3:34 he set the 220 record (20.3). He finished off his extraordinary afternoon at 4, setting the 220 low hurdles record with a 22.6.

The crowd was astounded, except those who knew Owens, Simmons said.

"Owens was the smoothest," said Simmons, now 86 and living in Ann Arbor. "There was no tension in the cords of his neck, no tension in his arms, shoulders or feet. There was no slap, slap of the feet with Owens. You could hardly hear him run. And if you look at a picture of him running, his fists are never clenched. He was smooth and relaxed."

Simmons, who founded the women's track team at U-M and taught physical education, raced with Owens in AAU events in 1936 and 1937 at the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, where Owens won four gold medals. He has a framed photo of himself and Owens taken in 1937, with an inscription from Owens: "To an old friend and foe."

"Jesse was a great athlete and a great man," Simmons said. "I don't know that anyone else could have done what he did, in running or in standing up for his race. I'm proud that I knew him and raced against him."

Simmons hopes people will remember that day in 1935 at Ferry Field. In 1972, he helped put a plaque there commemorating the occasion. Ohio State paid for none of it, he is quick to add; U-M footed the bill.

"That was a great day, a historic day," Simmons said. "He was from Ohio State, but even the Michigan fans cheered him on that day. He was incredible, but you expected it from Owens. He was so quick."

Red Simmons was instrumental in getting a plaque placed at Ferry Field in Ann Arbor commemorating Jesse Owens' performance at the 1935 Big Ten track and field championships.