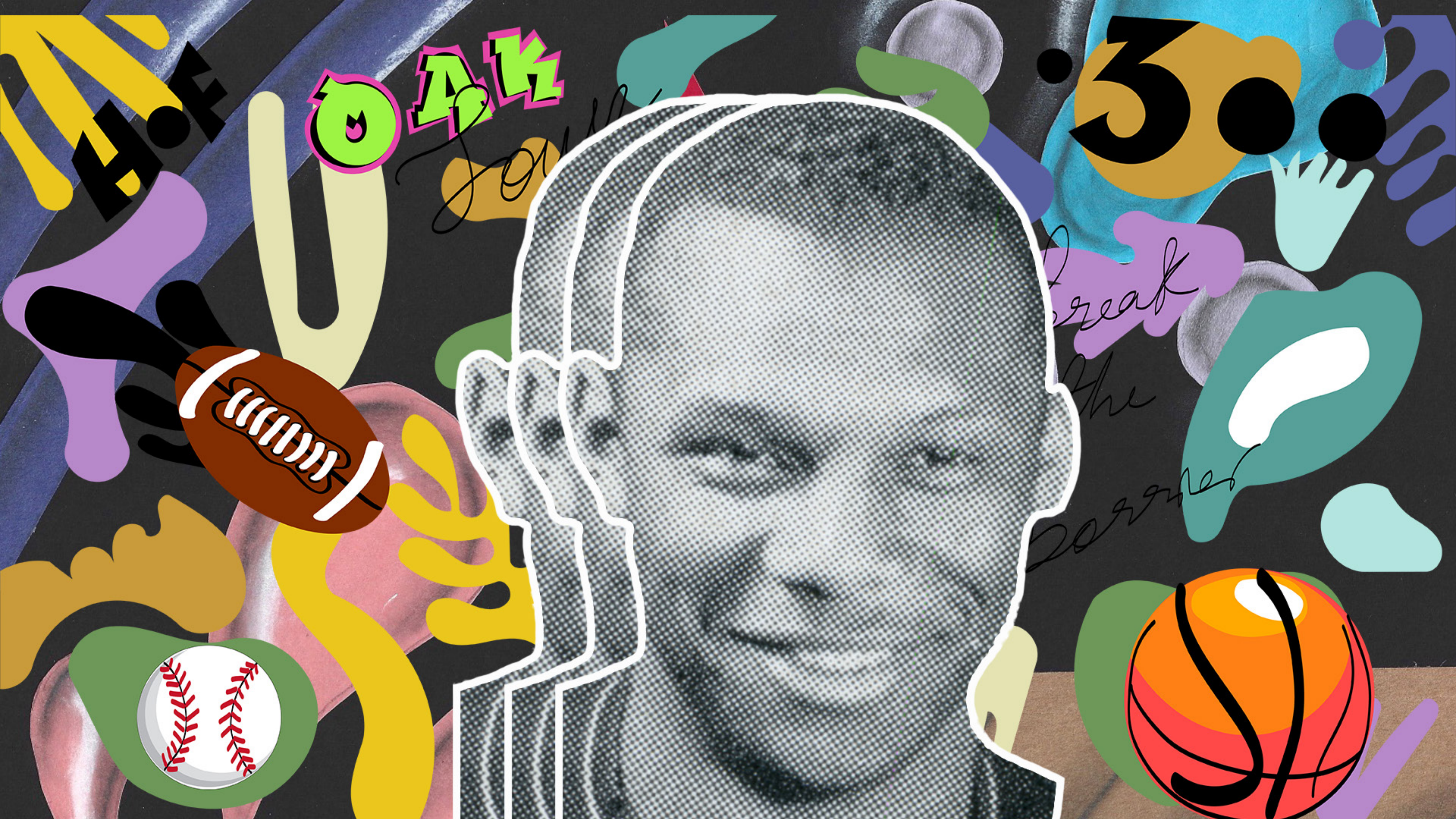




Black Spartans (1907-1948)

Curators

Carli V. Lowe, University Archivist
Kate Steffens, Special Collections Librarian

Artist

Yeab Kebede ('22, Digital Media Arts)

Graphic Designer

En Yu Ma ('22, Graphic Design)

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Exhibit Curators Statement

“Black Spartans (1907-1948)” represents ongoing research in SJSU Special Collections & Archives identifying documentation of Black experiences throughout SJSU history. This exhibit is the first of several installments.

Much of the information we have comes from the Spartan Daily student newspaper and the La Torre yearbooks. With too few exceptions, Black Spartans' stories are not told in their own words but from the perspectives of their majority white classmates. This is reflected in the language and focus of the articles. We invite you to read critically.

The Black Spartans featured in this exhibit pursued their educational goals while contending with institutionalized racism and other major crises of the 20th century: two World Wars, the influenza pandemic of 1918, and polio. Locally, “the deed to virtually every home in San Jose” included restrictions against Black and Asian residents known as “restrictive covenants” (Spartan Daily, February 16, 1948, page 2). On campus, blackface and minstrel shows were a regular part of student events.

“Black Spartans (1907-1948)” is an invitation to the community to join us in surfacing these stories, ensuring these histories are preserved and presented in a way that honors these students' lives. Contact us at special.collections@sjsu.edu to participate.

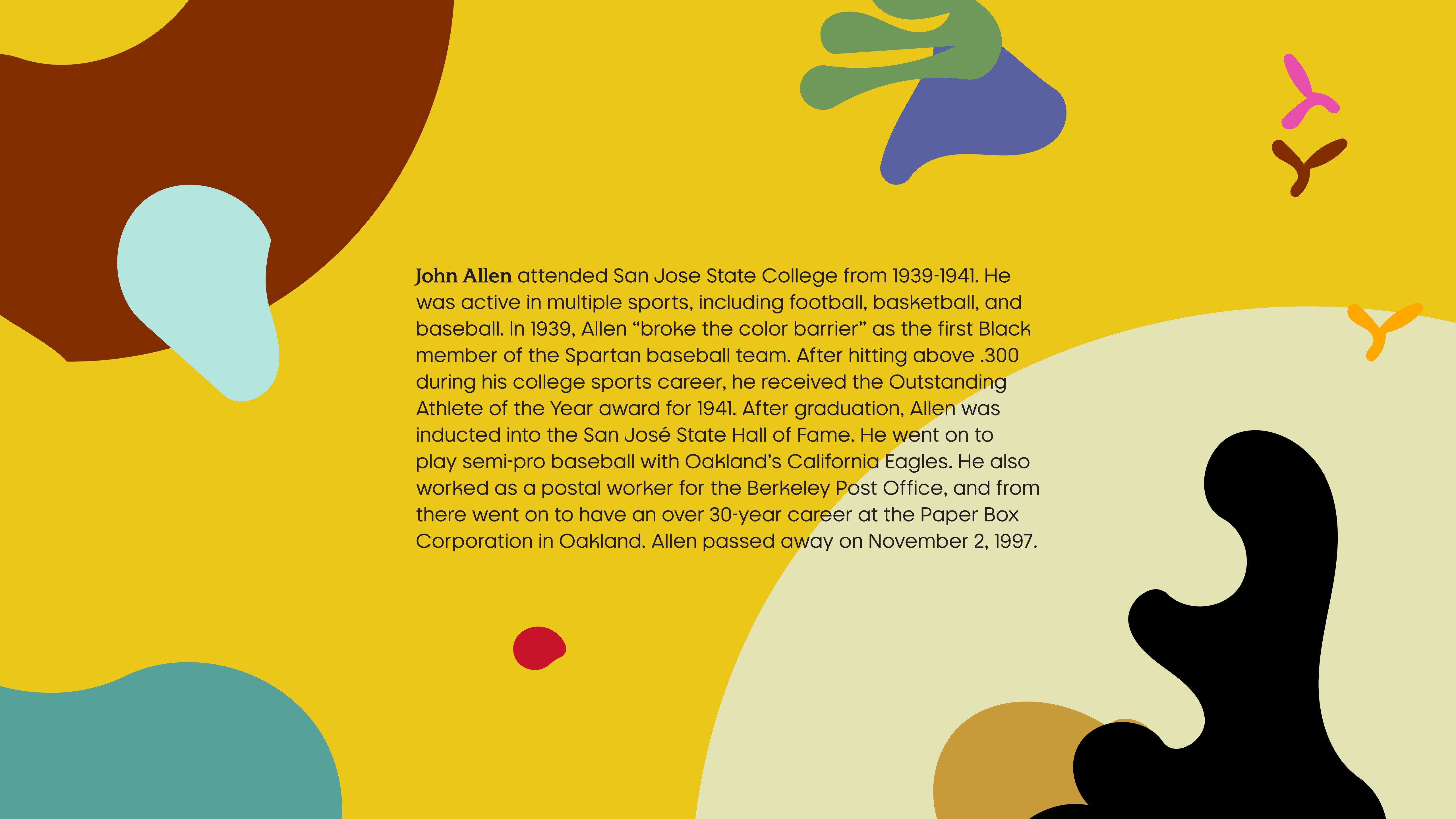
Carli V. Lowe - University Archivist
Kate Steffens - Special Collections Librarian

Artist Statement

The “Black Spartans (1907-1948)” exhibition is a homage to Black culture and history at San José State University and the Bay Area at large. Until recently, the significance of Black bodies in Bay Area history (as well as U.S. history) was overlooked. Unless it was associated with the struggles of civil rights leaders, athletes, or celebrity-personas, the story of a graduate from a state school wasn't valued because we weren't part of the mainstream culture. As a Black Spartan myself, I was deeply connected to these individuals that started out just like me. I saw a reflection of myself and my community throughout the process of making these mixed media portraits and came to realize how important it is to know your history because it becomes a catalyst for knowing who you are.

My work explores the intricacy of identity and the role culture, tradition, and history play. These portraits are embodiments of our Black Spartans, they are visual representations of the colorful and captivating lives they led. Through this work, I hope to influence other artists and individuals to take part in researching and finding out the infinite layers of what it means to be Black. Our history is beyond our struggle. We are the blueprint.

Yeab Kebede
'22 Digital Media Arts



John Allen attended San Jose State College from 1939-1941. He was active in multiple sports, including football, basketball, and baseball. In 1939, Allen “broke the color barrier” as the first Black member of the Spartan baseball team. After hitting above .300 during his college sports career, he received the Outstanding Athlete of the Year award for 1941. After graduation, Allen was inducted into the San José State Hall of Fame. He went on to play semi-pro baseball with Oakland’s California Eagles. He also worked as a postal worker for the Berkeley Post Office, and from there went on to have an over 30-year career at the Paper Box Corporation in Oakland. Allen passed away on November 2, 1997.

GAME NOTES—Lloyd Thomas looked good at his new center berth. Although the Spartan captain confined his type of play to feeding the ball to his teammates, he came through with seven points . . . **Johnny Allen**, the transfer from Marin junior college, appears to be the poverbial answer to Hubbard's prayer for a ballhawking guard who is a dangerous scoring threat. Against Pacific Allen was all over the floor intercepting passes, capturing rebounds, and breaking up C.O.P. plays. His 10 points helped the locals no little

Spartan Daily

January 16, 1939

John Allen is a welcome addition to the San Jose State College basketball team.

**GRID
NOTES**

By Keith Birlem

Johnnie Allen, the ebony Marin junior college transfer has already broken into the first string on the baseball and basketball teams, so far be it from this department to ignore him as far as spring football goes.

Right now, Johnnie is trying to find himself at a new position. Coach Bill Hubbard likes the way he handles himself and is of the opinion that he could more than handle the fullback position on the intricate double wing plays.

We can't say that Allen is right in there because he has only been at this new spot for two days, but by past performances Johnnie can't be a bad bet at any position.

Spartan Daily

May 17, 1939

While already excelling in baseball and basketball, John Allen gains recognition on the football team as well.

ALLEN, NEW BACK MAN,
LEADS OFFENSIVE
ATTACK IN SCRIMMAGE

Picking his holes like a veteran and charging through with the drive of an armored tank, Johnnie Allen, most recent of the changes to the backman position, last night led the scrimmage attack in which four squads of linemen went through a defensive drill.

ALLEN SHOWS WELL

Trying to get a better line on his new forwards, Dud DeGroot

had an offense directing its play in a certain vicinity and watching the defensive work of the respective linemen. Allen, who has already showed his prowess in baseball and basketball and until recently and end, showed yesterday that he could pack the apple like a seasoned fullback.

On defense, Dud seemed pleased with the work of Jack Smith, the big tackle from Glendale, who seemed to snap out of a slump and boomed the ball-packers coming on his side of the line. Smith was flanked by Ed Wenberg, another Glendale boy who makes up for a lack of weight with a lot of light and speed. Wenberg kept turning the plays in and didn't have one run around him all night.

WARNER PLEASED

"Pop" Warner drilled the first outfit for an hour and a half and was more pleased with their showing than any time up to date. "Pop" said that he was giving the first team plays that he has never used before and said that he had more faith in the way the boys ran them last night than he had in his Temple Owls of last year.

Dick Hubbell had his last spring practice workout last night, but by his performance it looked as though the Spartans will again be strong at the backman post with four better than average ball-toters, kickers, and passers.

Spartan Daily

May 26, 1939

John Allen leads “the scrimmage attack” as a fullback.



Coach Walt McPherson
Captain Jack Riordan

Nasimento, Dunne, Allen, Zetterquist, Rhodes
Peavey, Smith, Sanchoz, Fancher, Benovento
Garcia, Alos, Frizzi

Baseball

Completing his first season as baseball coach of San Jose State, Walt McPherson, former three star man and football captain of the Spartans, brought his horsehiders through a long season in fine style. Standout victories of the diamonders were the 1-0 defeat over Santa Clara, and the victory with the same score over the San Diego Staters. The pitching mainstays of this year's varsity were again Carpenter and Zimmerman with Zetterquist and Nasimento providing the rest periods. Captain Jack Riordan, Johnny Allen, Harvey Rhodes, and Manny Sanchez made up an infield that rated with the best in the state. Rhodes led in batting and fielding.

La Torre Yearbook

1939

John Allen is pictured as member of the baseball team.

KNIGHTS HOLD FORMAL DINNER

Eight "Squire" neophytes will be formally initiated into the Spartan Knights, honorary service fraternity, Thursday night at Tiny's. A dinner will be served at 6 o'clock, according to "Duke" Mannie Silva.

"Squires" who will formally become Knights are Johnny Allen, Usher Tucker, Gus Covello, Mert Crockett, Bill Johnston, Jus Lundquist, Walt Mazzone, and Don True.

Gus Covello is in charge of the entertainment program provided by Squires.

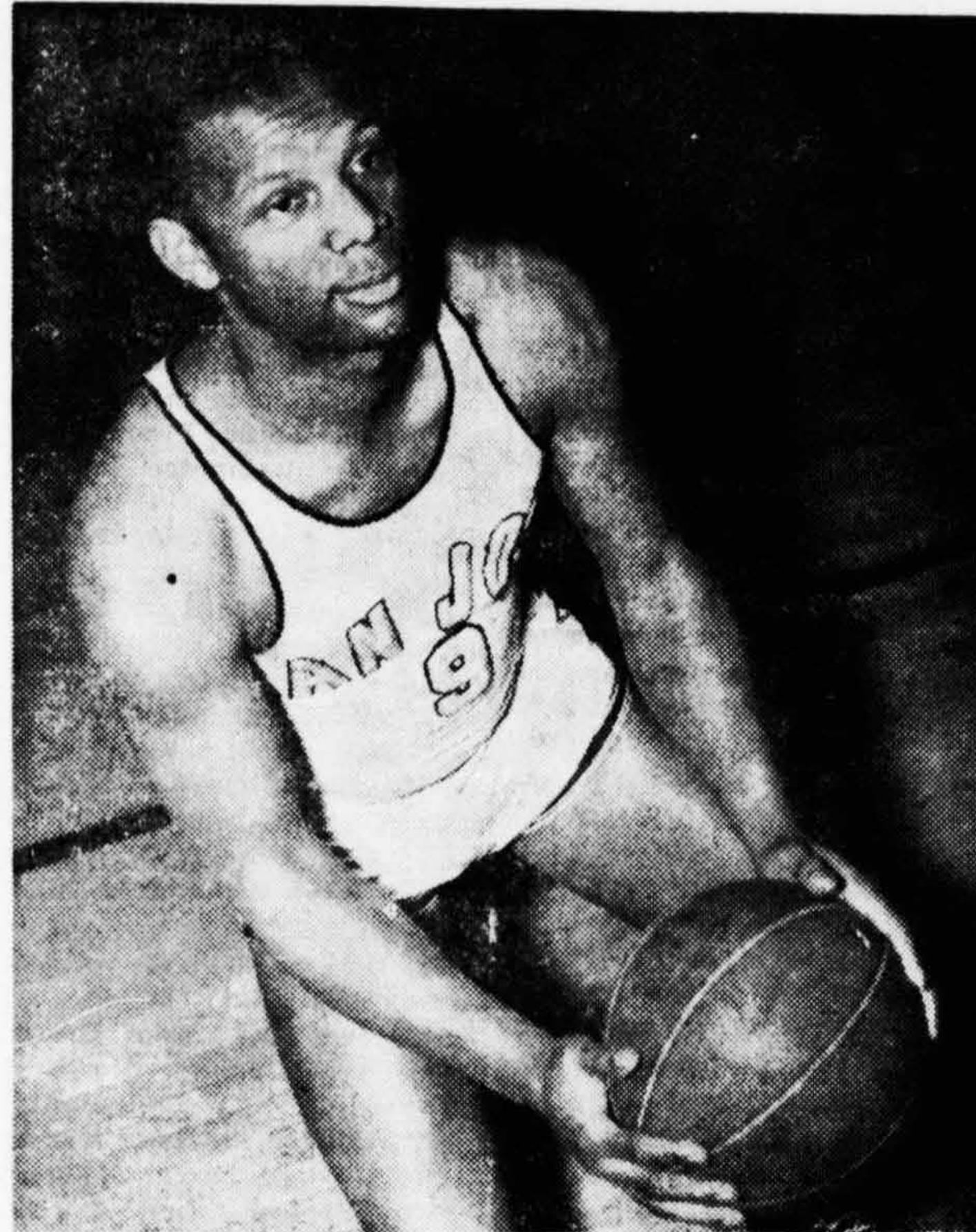
Date for the Knight snow party has been set for March 1 and 2, tentative site of which is Badger Pass in Yosemite.

Spartan Daily

February 7, 1940

John Allen is initiated into the Spartan Knights honorary service fraternity.

SPARTAN GUARD IN ACTION



Johnny Allen has been one reason for the little success San Jose State's basketball team has enjoyed. Allen, considered by many to be the equal of Lloyd Thomas, former Spartan cage captain, will be seen in action tonight against the Athens Club.

Spartan Daily

February 7, 1940

John Allen is pictured in action playing basketball with a description of his contributions to the team.

TWO SPARTANS NAMED ON CAGE TEAM

The official All-C.C.A.A. basketball squad released last week by Secretary Don Follet lists two Spartans on the first team.

Captain Gus Kotta, midget forward, and Johnny Allen, whose stellar work at the guard position pulled San Jose through many tough games, are the two Spartans honored.

The championship Santa Barbara Gaucho team also placed two men on the mythical squad. Larry Brewster at forward, and Tom Guerro, guard, were the Santa Barbara men named.

All-American Milton (Milky) Phelps of San Diego State college received first team rating at the center position.

Spartan Daily

April 16, 1940

John Allen is one of two Spartans named to the All C.C.A.A. basketball team.

Alumni Drops Game To Varsity Grid Team, 7-0

PASS FROM MINTER TO ALLEN SCORES TOUCHDOWN

By JOHN HEALEY
Coach Winkelman's and Warner's varsity spring practice squad proved in too good condition for the alumni team yesterday afternoon winning a dull but humorous pre-season game, 7-0.

The varsity score came early in the first quarter, when an alumni pass from their own 15-yard line was intercepted by varsity safety man, Aubrey Minter. On the first play, a reverse from Tornell to Purcell totaled 20-yards to the alumni 20-yard line. Fullback Tornell cracked off left tackle for another 4 yards. Minter next on an end run to the right side of the line lost a yard. With third down and three yards to go, Minter dropped back to shoot a pass to Left End Johnny Allen to score. Captain Kenny Cook, still showing his last year's form in place kicking, dropped back to convert for the extra point.

Bob Titchenal, center and captain of last year's varsity, proved the outstanding man on defense for the alumni, showing his old form of backing up the line that made him one of the leading centers on the coast last year. Morris Manoogian and Carlton Peregoy, although lacking their old drive in carrying the ball, led the alumni in the backfield.

The alumni team, under the management of Bull Lewis, former Spartan fullback, was the fiercest team of the two. But even with the help of All-Coast Bill Anahu, Santa Clara end, and varsity players Hearn, Riddle and Smith, the alumni failed to have the punch to drive across a score.

Alumni	Pos.	Varsity
Thomas.....	LE.....	Allen
Hearn.....	LT.....	Belnap
Smith.....	LG.....	Wilson
Titchenal.....	C.....	Buckingham
Riddle.....	RG.....	Cook
Ucovitch.....	RT.....	McCoy
Wattenberger.....	RE.....	Wenberg
Birlem.....	Q.....	Rishwain
Manoogian.....	RH.....	Pursell
Rocchi.....	LH.....	Minter
Peregoy.....	F.....	Tornell

Spartan Daily

May 10, 1940

John Allen scores for the Varsity team off of a pass from fellow Black Spartan Aubrey Minter in a football game against Spartan Alumni.

LETTER WINNERS ANNOUNCED

ALLEN, PRESLEY

Johnny Allen and Don Presley, San Jose's outstanding negro athletes, were the only ones to be given letters in three sports. Allen played end on the football team, guard in basketball and performed as first baseman on the baseball nine.

Presley was running guard in football, heavyweight in boxing and weightman on the track and field squad.



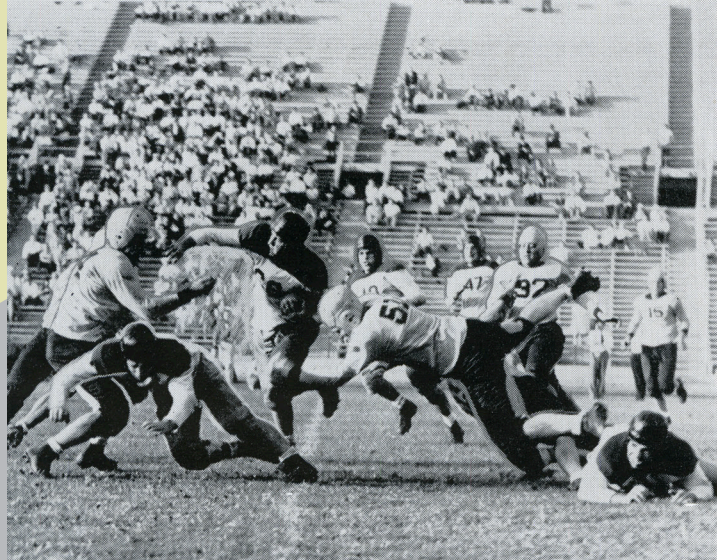
Spartan Daily

May 29, 1940

John Allen is listed with fellow Black Spartan Don Presley as the only student athletes to letter in three sports.



Half Bill Clark (8) runs into a wave of Montana tacklers after a short gain. Guard Hal Buffa (23) watches from the ground.



Spartan guard Doan Carmody (51) dives at a University of San Francisco back running into several waiting Spartans. Rugged play by linemen played a big part in the 16-6 victory over U. S. F.



Right half Morris Manoogian looks up after a touchdown against the Cal Ramblers. The undefeated Spartans won this contest by a score of 27-0.

J. Allen
H. Rosensweig
E. Wenberg

F. Butero
J. Marelich
A. Vedovelli

J. Smith
L. Antognani
R. Jett

B. Riddle
F. Bonnano
J. Wilson

C. Lavagnino
K. Stanger
G. Kasparovich

B. Bramble
B. Boucke
L. McConachy

COLLEGE OF
PACIFIC

Football

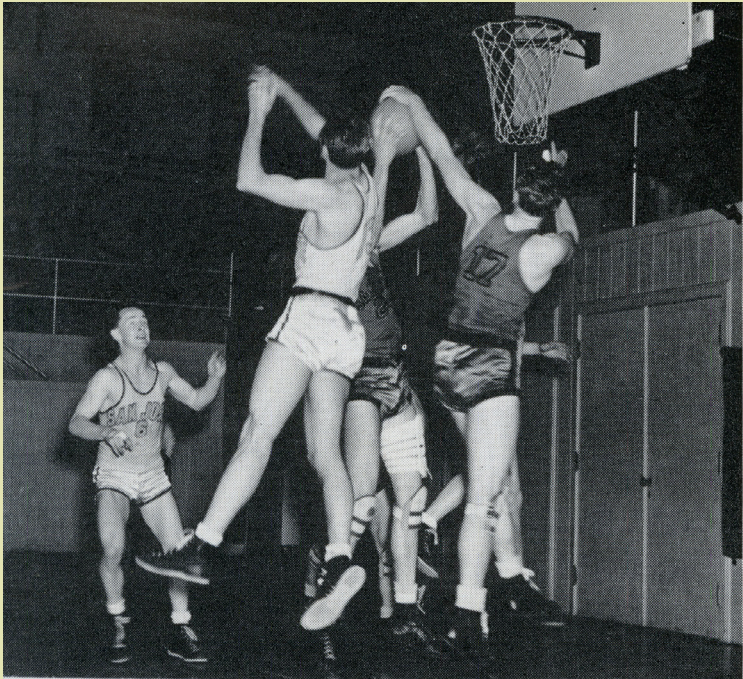
The 1939 season marked San Jose's debut into "big time" football As a team the Spartans gained widespread recognition by defeating U.S.F. and a strong intersectional opponent, Drake University An official intercollegiate football statistical summary released by the American Football Statistical Bureau ranked the Spartans as the leading defensive team and the third highest in the nation on the basis of total team performances. Another national gridiron publication called San Jose the "team of the year." Individual stars on the Spartan eleven also came in for their share of the glory. Fullback Leroy Zimmerman was accorded all-coast and "Little All-American" honors and was selected to play in the East-West Shrine game. His showing in this contest was heralded as the outstanding performance of the day Tackles Bob Bronzan and Duke Tornell, Halfbacks Morris Manoogian and Aubrey Minter, Center Bob Titchenal, Ends Chuck Johnson and Johnny Allen, and Guard Ken Cook were other Spartans honored on mythical elevens For the first time in San Jose football history San Jose was given serious consideration to play in one of the nation's post-season "bowl" games.



La Torre Yearbook

1940

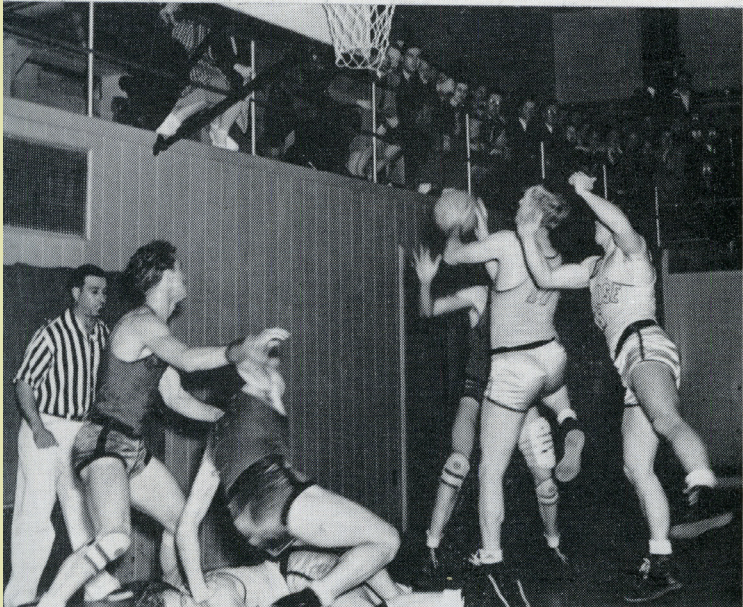
John Allen is pictured as a member of the football team.



Spartan Center George Ford (13) loses possession of the ball to San Diego's Hodgetts (17) and Echle (24) in the second game of the series which San Jose won 39-28. Forward Hal Carruth (6) watches the scramble.



Stu Carter, fiery little Spartan forward, is smothered beneath a pile of San Diego men in one of the many spills that marked the Aztec series. Teammates Dick Uhrhammer and John Allen look on.

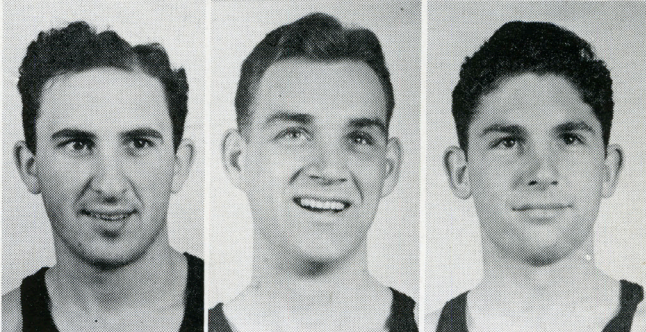


Spartan Center Dick Uhrhammer (17) shoots over the head of a San Diego man as teammate Stu Carter peers out from under a falling opponent. Captain Gus Kotta does a ballet step in the foreground.

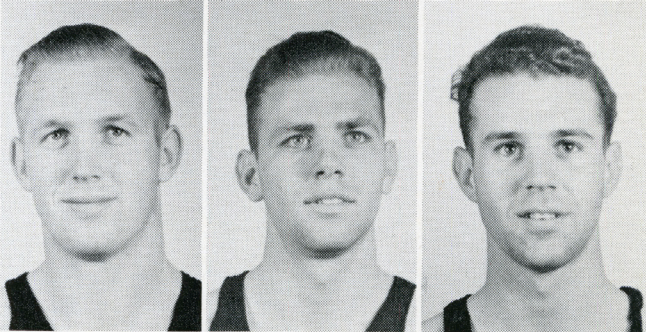
J. Moore
D. Tornell
H. Carruth



E. Figone
J. Lundquist
C. Sturz



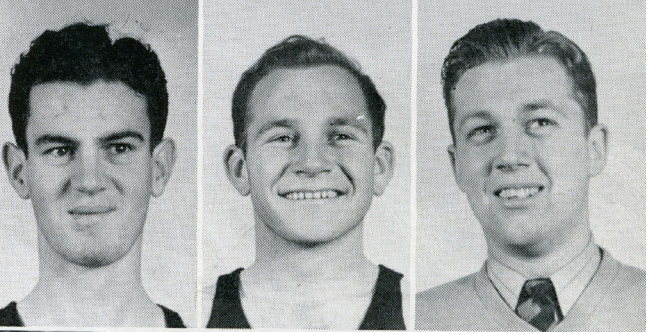
R. Uhrhammer
G. Ford
M. Bachman



G. Kotta
J. Allen
H. Smersfelt



F. Maestri
S. Carter
W. Lukenbill



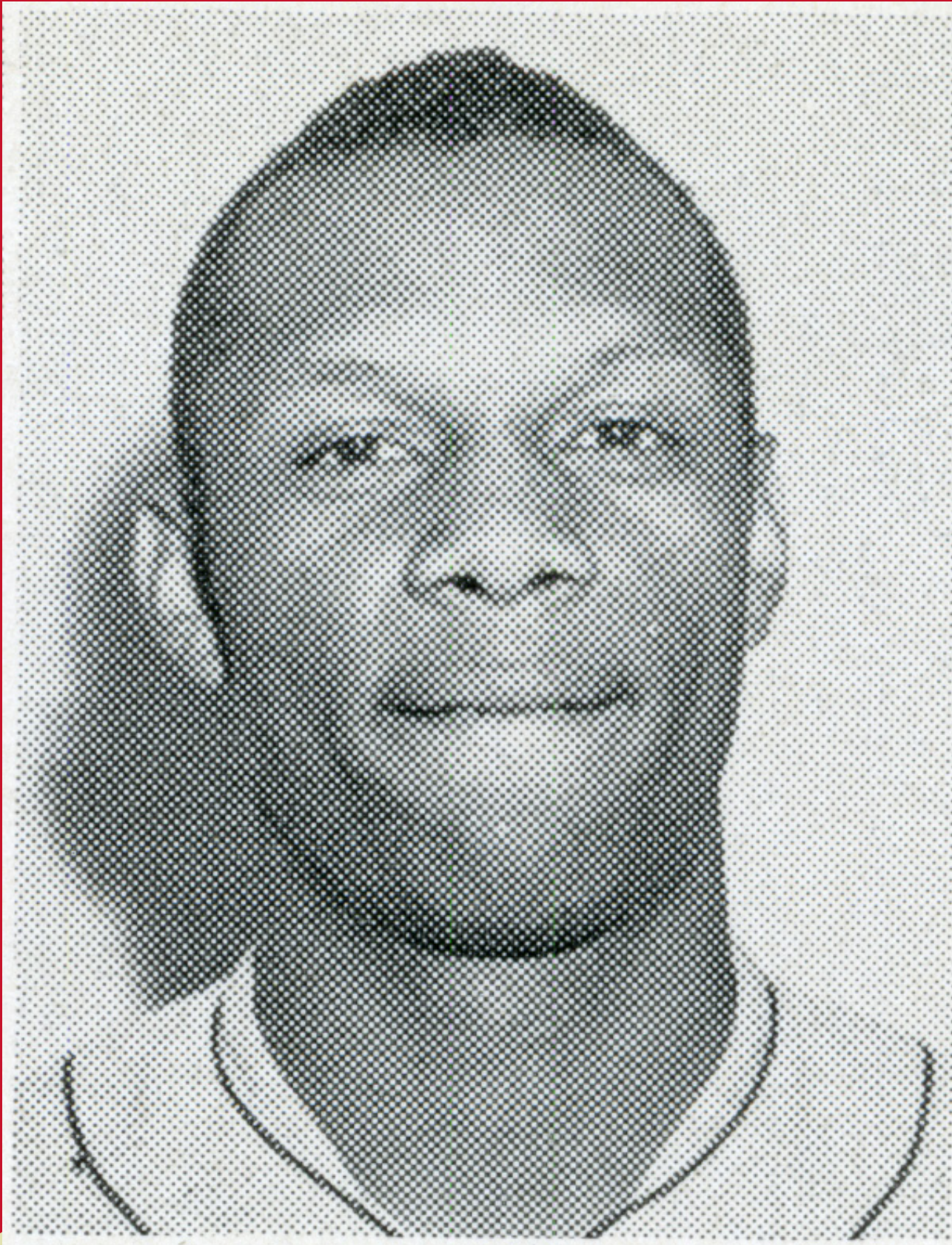
Basketball

A sensational whirlwind finish by the Spartans salvaged an otherwise dismal basketball season for Coach Bill Hubbard's team the late spurt by the San Joseans landed them in the runner-up position in the California Athletic Association pennant race. The team that "arrived," but too late, vindicated itself with two rousing victories over San Diego State college, rated as one of the strongest teams on the coast and runners-up in the National Collegiate basketball tournament in Kansas City In conference play the Spartans won three and lost three and had a total season's record of nine wins and ten losses Most consistent of the San Jose quintet was ballhawking Johnny Allen, whose brilliant play at guard earned him an all-conference position along with Captain Gus Kotta, forward. Other Spartans who contributed noteworthy performances were Duke Tornell, guard; Dick Uhrhammer, center; Captain-elect Hal Carruth, forward; and Stu Carter, forward. The only first string man playing his last year for the Spartans was Gus Kotta, giving newly-appointed Coach Walt McPherson veteran material to work with in 1941. "Swede" Smersfelt, a three-year veteran, was the only other senior completing his career.

La Torre Yearbook

1940

John Allen is pictured as a member of the basketball team.



Baseball

San Jose State's varsity baseball nine completed their schedule for the year by winning six of their twenty-one games and finished in last place in the California Collegiate Athletic Association. The Spartans, under their new mentor Walt McPherson, defeated San Diego State 8-2 and won a close 6 to 5 tilt from Fresno State for the only two conference wins of the season. They won four of their nine practice games, losing to USF, California, and Saint Mary's during the season Depending on Pitcher Tony Nasimento, veteran of three years, the Spartans looked impressive in early season games. Nasimento was forced out for the season when he dislocated his shoulder while umpiring a frosh game. With him went all hopes of a CCAA title, for the Spartans sadly needed a chucker who could go the entire nine innings Veterans Captain Harvey Rhodes, John Allen, Ben Frizzi, and Jack Fancher carried the Spartan's chances for a successful season. The rest of the team was comprised of sophomores and junior college transfers. Newly elected baseball captain Ben Frizzi and John Allen, along with Rhodes, were the batting and fielding power for San Jose. Frizzi led his teammates at the plate with a .520 average, followed by Rhodes with .510 and Allen with a .512 average Nasimento, when not pitching, was used as a pinch hitter and finished the season with a .565 average, but he only competed in half the games played. San Jose loses only one man from this year's team.

La Torre Yearbook

1940

John Allen is pictured as a member of the baseball team.

Baseball Statistics

Johnny Allen, Bill Donnelly, Cyril Taylor Lead Spartan Nine In Batting Average

Johnnie Allen, third baseman, led San Jose State college's varsity baseballers in batting for the season just completed, according to official statistics.

Allen massaged the ball for a .451 in 14 games in which he participated. The Spartans played an 18-game season, but Allen did not take part in the first four games, two practice tilts with Fresno and San Francisco State, and two CCAA games with Fresno State, being busy with basketball at the time.

Allen's mark was compiled in banging out 23 hits in 51 trips to the plate. John scored 13 runs, led the team in two-base hits with seven, smacked one home run, and stole four bases.

MAY LEAD CCAA

Although reports on other CCAA batting averages are not available, Allen stands a good chance of ending the season as the leading league slugger. In conference competition, Allen has an even better batting average, slamming out 12 hits in 23 times at bat for a .522 average in seven games.

Right behind Allen in seasonal batting is Bill Donnelly, catcher. Donnelly banged out 17 hits in 42 attempts for a mark of .405. Bill has scored 13 runs, is right behind Allen in doubles with six, has slammed out one triple, and has stolen four bases in 14 games.

Among the regulars, Cyril Taylor, second sacker, is right up there with the leaders. Taylor

has played every inning in 18 games and hit the ball at a fat .329 clip. He has made the most hits on the team, 26 in 79 tries, has scored 13 runs, and leads the team in stolen bases with five.

TERRY GOOD

George Terry, who lately shared the first base job, has the fattest Spartan batting average of the season, but has only taken part in seven games. George has blasted out 8 for 17, has scored four runs, banged out a double and home run for a .471 average.

Ray Cressio rates the distinction of being a hitting pitcher, possessing a .462 average in five games. Cressio has hit safely six times in 14 tries, has scored four runs.

All of Sparta's hurling staff hit the ball hard this year. Tony Nasimento has a .333 average in six games, Pete Filice a fair .267 in nine games, Jack Raine a good .400 in four games, and "Lefty" Stubenrauch a far from mediocre .222 in four games.

Other Spartans to end the year with fair batting averages were Fred Lindsey and Jack Fancher, outfielders. Lindsey was the long-distance hitter of the team, leading in triples and home runs. Lindsey banged out three triples and three home runs, bagging a couple of round-trippers in the first CCAA game with Fresno.

Lindsey's average amounted to .278 for 16 games, Fancher's .267

in 16 games.

TEAM BATS .256

As a team, the Spartans hit for an average of .256, blasting out 173 hits. The Spartans clearly outscored their rivals despite losing 10 and winning only eight games. San Jose banged 112 runs across home plate, compared to their opponents' 76.

In CCAA batting, Allen far outdistanced his mates. Terry batted .500 for one game, but that's the closest anyone came to Allen. No other Spartan batter hit the .300 class in conference competition. Nearest men among the regulars to the .300 circle were Donnelly and Taylor. Donnelly hit .286 for seven games, Taylor .279 for nine contests.

San Jose may still have to play three CCAA games that were postponed due to rain, two with Fresno State and one with San Diego.

The games will be played only if their results have any direct bearing on the final outcome of the closely contested CCAA race in the midst of which Santa Barbara, Fresno, and San Diego are now hotly engaged.

We Feature Fresh
"SUNKIST" ORANGE JUICE
on our
CLUB BREAKFAST
20¢ 25¢ 30¢
SPARTAN DONUT SHOP

Spartan Daily

April 25, 1941

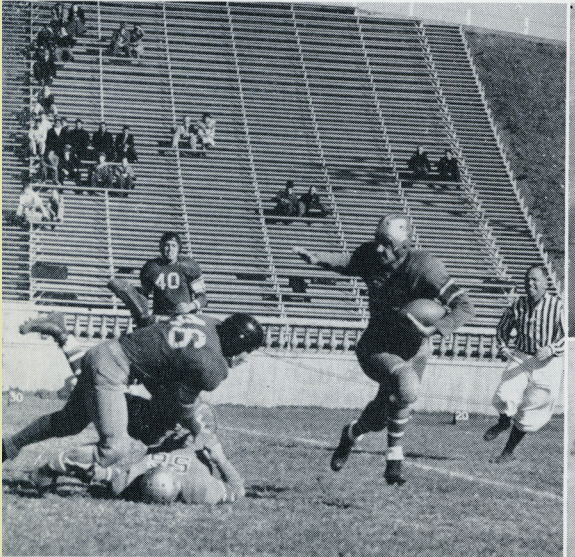
John Allen attains the baseball team's best batting average.



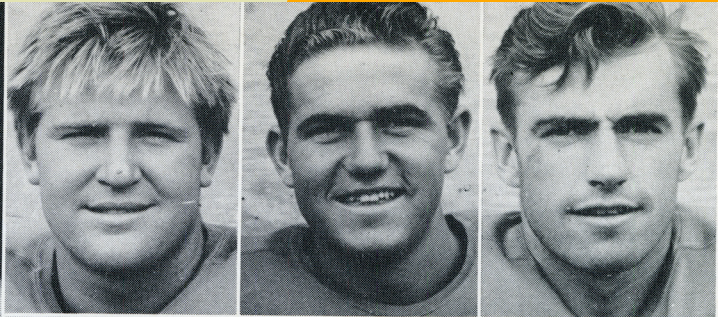
It's over the line and directly into the waiting arms of a USF tackler as Dick Hubbell (69) tries to roll for yardage in the USF game.



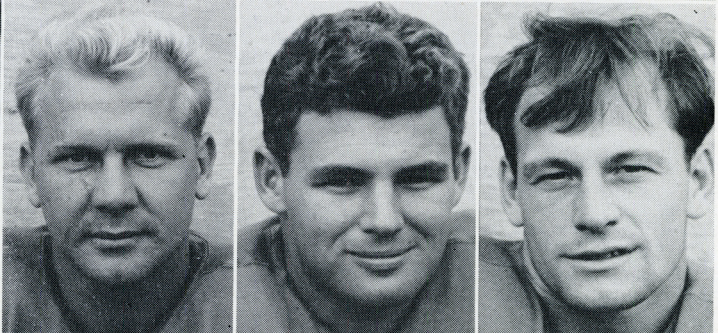
There's no charge for it so John Woffington carries a would-be-tackler for 10 yards on his back before he is brought down to the turf.



Jack Sarkisian (56) prostrate on the turf gives Cowboy Rex Pursell perfect blocking as he rambles for yardage in the Elks Boystown game against South Dakota State.



McConnell
Hamill
Herrick



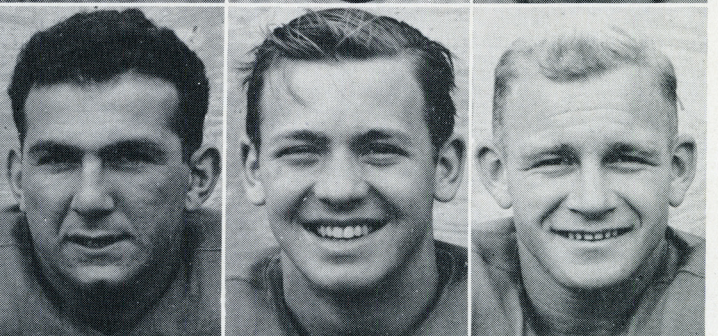
Kasparovitch
Buckingham
Nygren



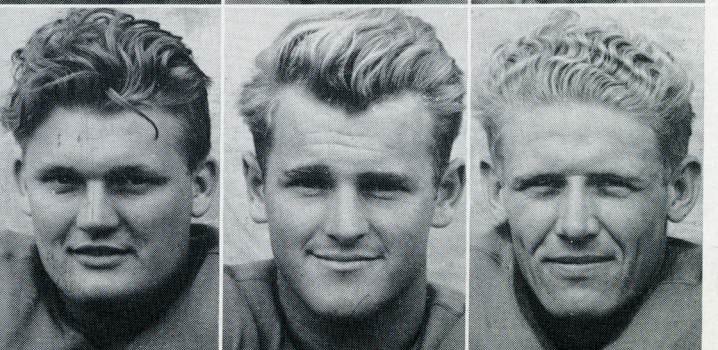
Hubbell
Stanger
Bailey



Riddle
Allen
Wilson



Sarkisian
Hansen
Carter



McCoy
Andrews
Clement

La Torre Yearbook

1941

John Allen is pictured as a member of the football team.



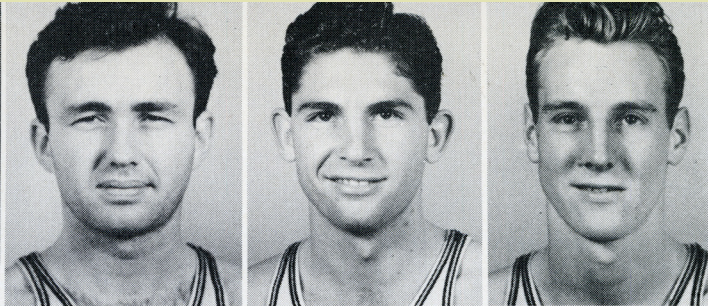
Ernie Allen (28) grabs a ball from midair as John Allen and Duke Tornell look on. The lone enemy player is lost in a maze of Spartans.



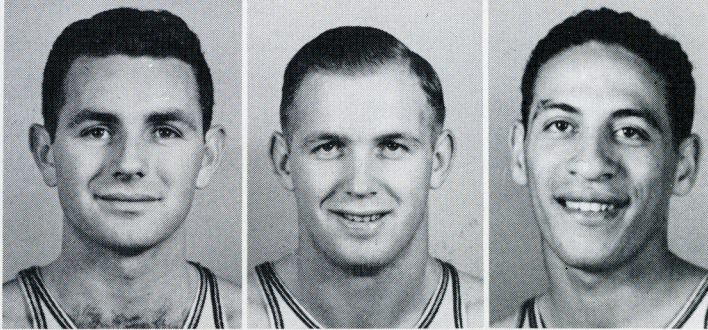
To the victors belong the spoils and the milling crowd of San Jose players are all smiles because they have just defeated San Diego State for the title.



The elongated, animated skyscraper, Spartan Menno Siebert, goes high into the ozone attempting to capture a rebound after a USF shot at basket has failed.



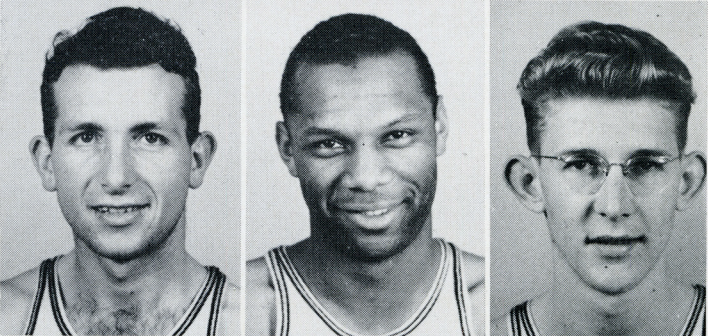
Crowley
Sturz
Robinson



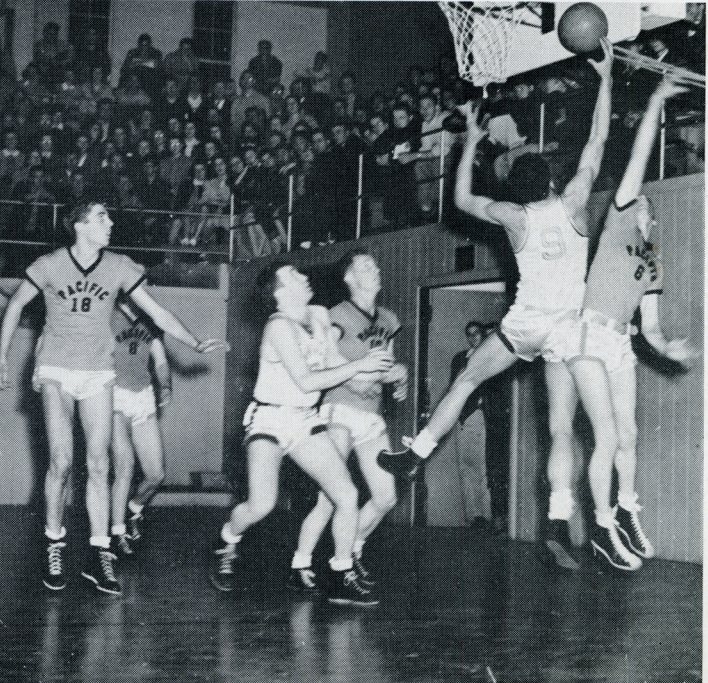
Diedericksen
Uhrhammer
E. Allen



Helbush
Boysen
Carter



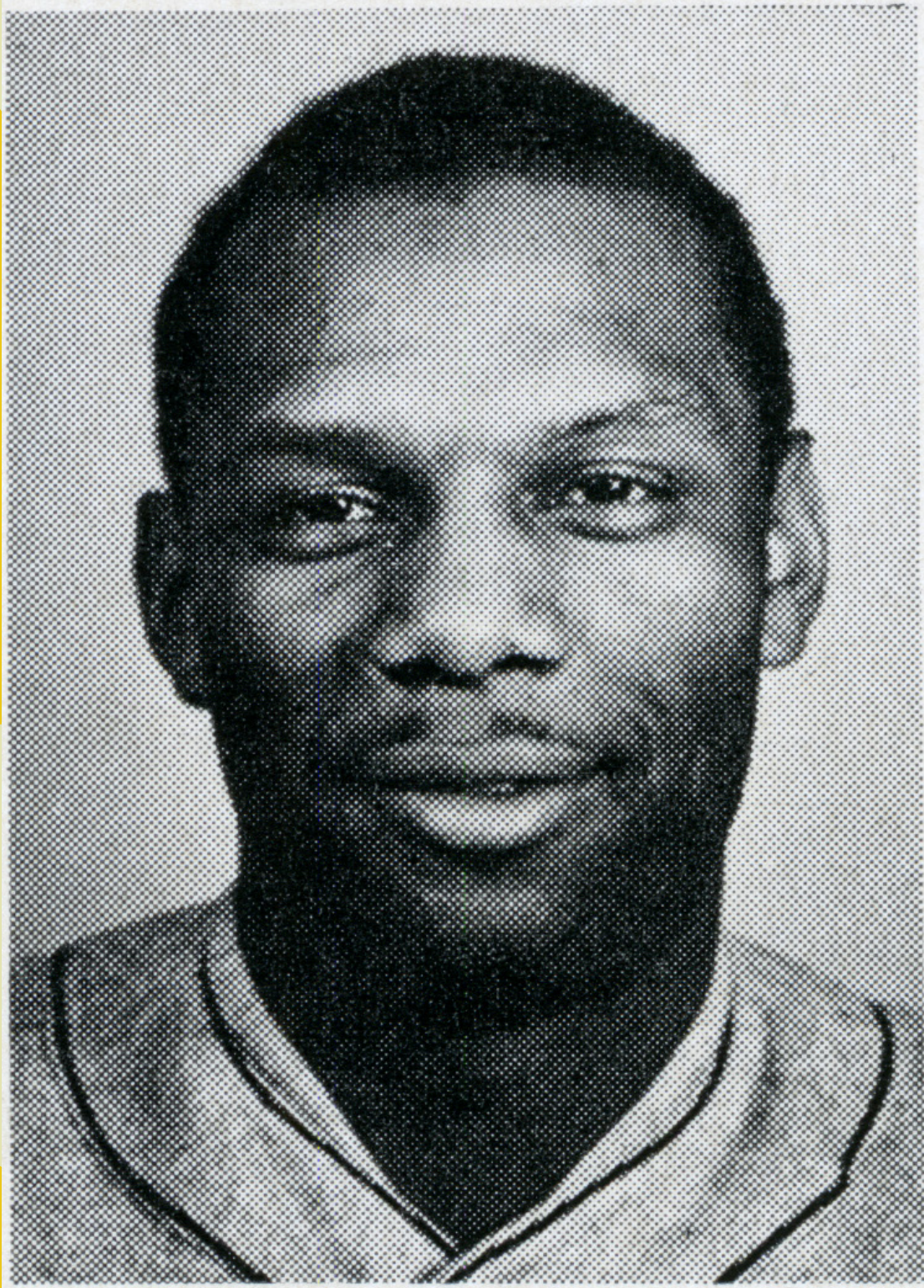
Paulus
J. Allen
Siebert



La Torre Yearbook

1941

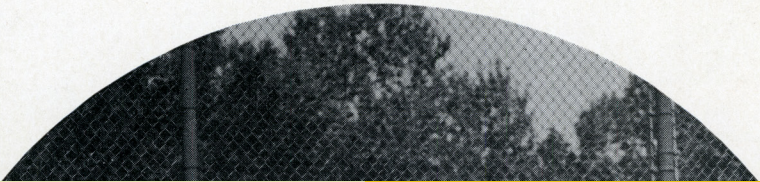
John Allen is pictured as a member of the basketball team.



As far as the record books are concerned, it doesn't look like the Spartan baseball season can be called a standout one. In the CCAA conference race, San Jose State wound up as the rear guard of the pack. Despite the fact that they finished so low, three Spartans were selected on the all-conference teams picked by the four coaches. Ben Frizzi, Captain, was given an

outfield berth and Bill Donnelly was selected as catcher. John Allen was chosen second string.

The case of why the Spartans failed to click in the early part of the season may be attributed to the fact that they played minus the services of Carl Stubenrauch, John Allen, Ed Hunt, Ray Cressio and Bill Donnelly. Highlight of the season was the twin victory turned in over the St. Mary's ball club.



Baseball

La Torre Yearbook

1941

John Allen is pictured as a member of the baseball team.



Bill Regan Photograph Collection

John Allen (seated at the left end of row 3)
is pictured as a member of the basketball
team.

SPARTANS IN THE SERVICE

By ED WAITE

Tom heard about these:

"JAY PARKER—Lt. in the Navy with a few Zeros to his credit. Was home and out again. **JOHNNY ALLEN**—test pilot stationed here, married and a proud papa. **HAL ELLIS**—just heard he came in and then out again. **FRANCIA PABST**—here with her older sister doing government work. **JACK GALVIN**—now a corporal in the Marines. **BUD COWAN**—now a radio man on a carrier."

Spartan Daily

April 21, 1944

An update on alumni who are serving in World War II includes information on John Allen, stationed locally as a test pilot and starting a family.

SJS’ own ‘Jackie Robinson’

Johnny Allen broke the color barrier on the Spartan baseball team in 1939

By Jeff Niese
Special to the Spartan Daily

When Jackie Robinson suited up and took the field for the Brooklyn Dodgers 50 years ago today, Johnny Allen was delivering mail for the Berkeley post office, having already broken the color barrier at San Jose State College eight years earlier.

The first African American to play on the baseball team, Allen was a three-sport athlete at SJS, playing baseball, football and basketball. He was a co-captain for the baseball team; made the all-conference team; hit above .300 for his college career; received the Graham Peake Award in 1941 which went to the school’s Outstanding Athlete of the Year; and was inducted into the San Jose State Hall

of Fame shortly after he graduated in 1941. But like many black players of his time: he never got the chance to play in the “whites only” Major League Baseball.

“He was born a little before his time,” said Leila Allen, Johnny’s wife of 56 years. Johnny Allen died from a heart attack on Nov. 2, 1997. He was 78.

Allen was born in San Antonio in 1918 and moved with his family to Berkeley by the early ‘20s.

At Berkeley High School, Allen lettered in track, football, baseball and basketball. He participated in pick-up games at San Pablo

park in Berkeley, where the best baseball players in the city would go and play. That’s where Allen met and played against players like Billy Martin.

From Berkeley, Allen went to play football and baseball at Marin Junior College. After turning down a scholarship from the University of California, Berkeley, Allen opted to attend San Jose State College.

Moving away from home for the first time, Allen lived in a school afforded house over on North Ninth Street.

At SJS, Allen was one of a half a dozen blacks on the campus at that time.

Bill “Bull” Lewis, Lloyd Thomas, William Moulden and Aubrey Minter, along with Allen, formed a tight group which hung out and lived together while at San Jose State from the late ‘30s to the early ‘40s.

“As far as we were concerned, school was a great place to be when not at home,” Thomas said in a phone interview from his Los Angeles home.

See **Allen**, page 7



Honoring SJS trailblazer

continued from page 1

Thomas, who played football and basketball at SJS from ‘35 to ‘40, said they were used to experiencing some form of racism but among their teammates, relations were good.

The players also understood that their right to attend SJS was only made available to them because of their athletic talent. But they knew that was the reality of the time, and it was one instance which afforded them an advantage.

“It was a minor irritation,” said Thomas, 81. “College policy promoted segregation in social activities after games and opportunities to dance were restricted.”

While playing baseball, the hate Allen experienced came when the team traveled.

Walter McPherson, Spartan baseball coach from 1939-43 and ‘47, said, “In Kansas City, Missouri we stayed at a hotel. ... They said, ‘We can’t put Negroes in our hotel.’”

McPherson said 32 coaches around the country signed a petition in protest, and a year later the hotel changed its policy.

In addition to the hotel, the team would have a tough time finding a place to eat in St. Louis and ran into other problems in Missouri.

According to his family, Allen never got discouraged when he ran into ignorance.

“He was very well liked,” Mrs. Allen said. “Only times he experienced discrimination was when they traveled. No problems at school; he excelled and was a good person.”

Mrs. Allen said her husband knew the importance of what he was doing on the baseball team, but he never dwelled on it.

With his .312 batting average, Allen hit third on the team with Manny Sanchez leading off and Leroy Zimmerman

batting clean up. Allen was a versatile fielder spending most of his time at third base, but played first for a couple of games during the ‘39 season when Ed Dunn was injured.

The ‘39 team went 6-21, last in the California Collegiate Athletic Association. The 1940 team went 4-14 while Allen was the veterans co-captain both years with Harvey Rhodes and Ben Frizzi.

After college, Allen went back to the East Bay and played ball for the California Eagles, a semi-pro team sponsored by the Oakland Tribune.

With the Eagles, Allen played with Lionel Wilson, who went on to become mayor of Oakland in 1982. In one game at Oaks Field in Oakland, Allen hit a 430-foot shot to center field which ended up breaking a clock attached to the scoreboard.

The semi-pro league dried up after a year from a lack of revenue and Allen, then in his late 20s, took a job working in maintenance for Letterman Hospital in San Francisco. From that job, he went to work for the Berkeley post office in ‘47 when Jackie Robinson made history and played second base for the Dodgers.

Then, late in 1947, a West Coast black baseball league started up and Allen was offered \$490 a month to play third base for the Oakland Larks.

While other teams in the league were strapped for cash, the Larks had professional-style home and away uniforms, complete with pinstripes. They also had a team bus which carried them across the country while they barnstormed and played against

the Kansas City Monarchs and the Homestead Grays of the Midwest and East Coast Negro Leagues.

Allen’s son, John Jr., said his father told him that Satchel Paige once owed him \$10, but never paid the debt.

While barnstorming, Allen and the other members of the team encountered the same problems as when he traveled with SJS: not welcomed in restaurants, and had to sleep in a gym or in a bus.

“When they went East, all kinds of people would go to the games to watch,” John Allen Jr. said. “But they weren’t welcomed in the city after the game.”

John Jr. said even whites would watch the games because it was “good

“When they went East, all kinds of people would go to the games to watch, but they weren’t welcomed in the city after the game.”

— John Allen Jr., eldest son

baseball” but after the games, the ball players were told to go somewhere else.

After two seasons with the Larks, Allen was nearing his 30s with two children at home. The West Coast Negro League soon folded from a lack of funding, and Robinson opening the door to the “show.” So Allen took a job at the Paper Box Corp. in Oakland where he worked for the next 30 years until 1967.

Living in Berkeley, Allen passed baseball on to his children.

While his two daughters, Claudia and Rebecca, were allowed to attend a private school, his three sons had to go to Berkeley High like their father, because the private school didn’t support a baseball team.

“This was a baseball family,” Mrs. Allen said. “When money was tight the girls would complain because daddy would take the money and spend it on sanitary socks for the boys.”

Johnny Allen’s youngest son, Steve, remembered when he turned 13, he got out of going to church on Sundays.

“I’d tell Dad I gotta play today and he’d say, ‘Mom, Steve’s got to play today,’” Steve Allen said.

Last year, using a cane and suffering from arthritis in his knee, Allen was among some of the players who were recognized by the Oakland A’s and San Francisco Giants for their accomplishments. After a league they knew they were good enough to play in turned them away, they went and started their own leagues to play a game they loved.

Today, Allen will not see President Bill Clinton throw out the first pitch at Shea Stadium to commemorate Robinson’s achievement, but Allen’s friends and family will look back and remember the 6-foot-2-inch man who played third base for the Spartans in 1939-41.

John Allen

Spartan Daily

April 15, 1997

John Allen is featured as the student who “broke the color barrier” on the San Jose State baseball team.

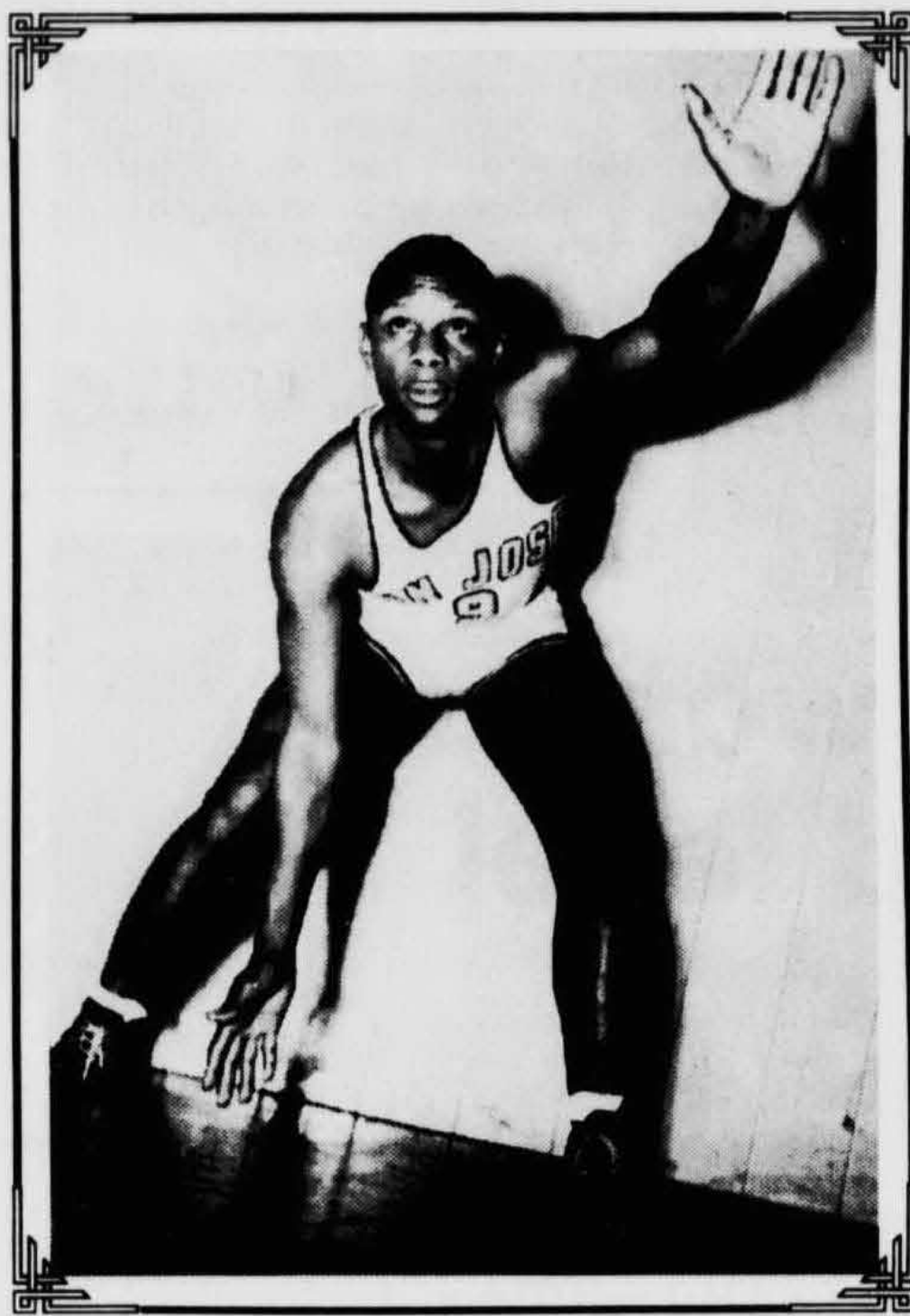


PHOTO COURTESY OF SJSU SPORTS INFO

Above: Johnny Allen poses for a basketball photo. Allen played guard for the basketball team from 1939-41. Classmate William Moulden said Allen was a strong basketball player. "He was a very good basketball player. He played guard for the team and was one of their top players."

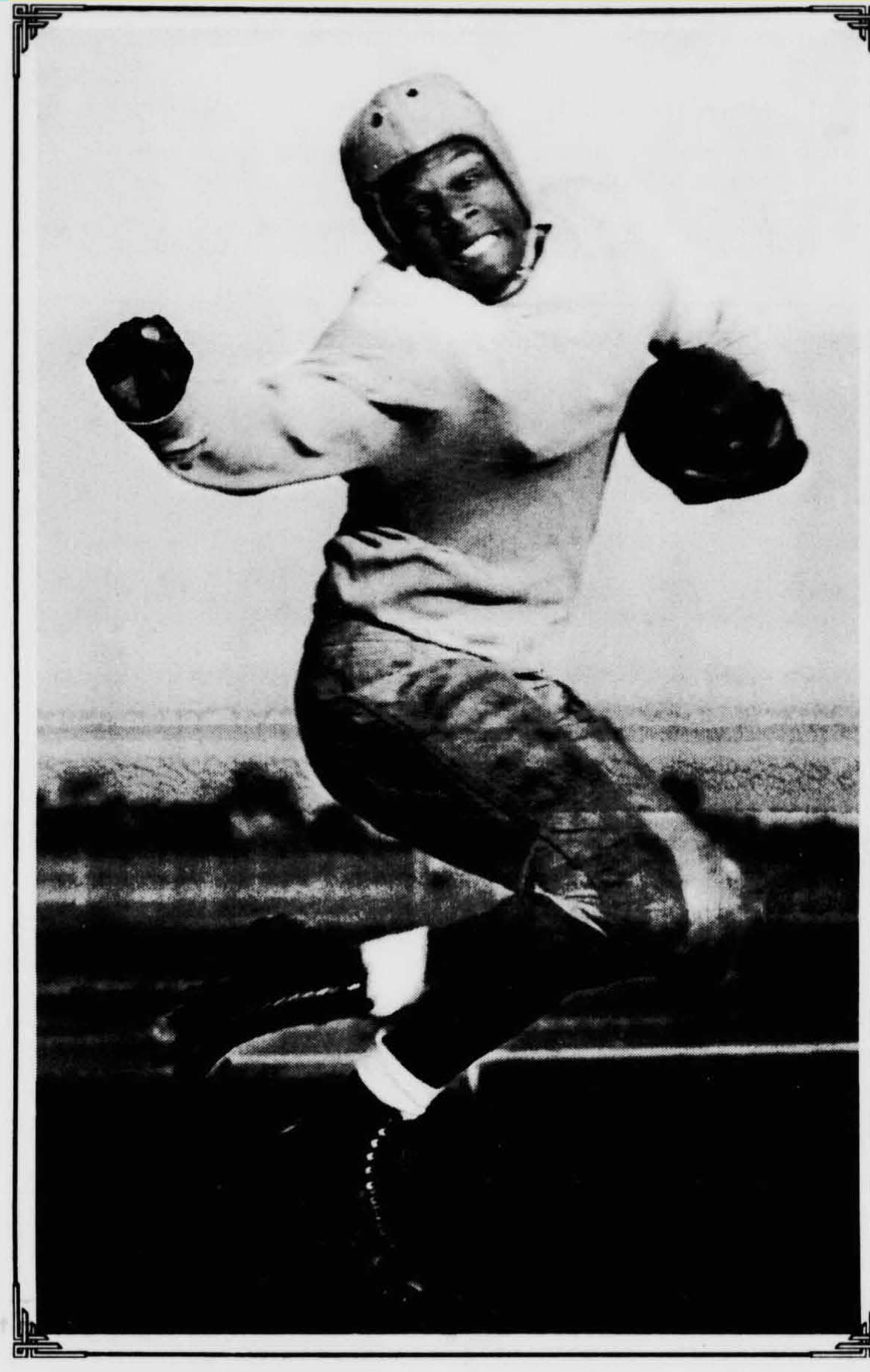


PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ALLEN FAMILY

Left: Allen played end for the San Jose State football team from 1939-41. In 1939, the team went undefeated with a perfect 13-0 record. While playing football at SJS, Allen injured his knee which later required a full knee replacement.

