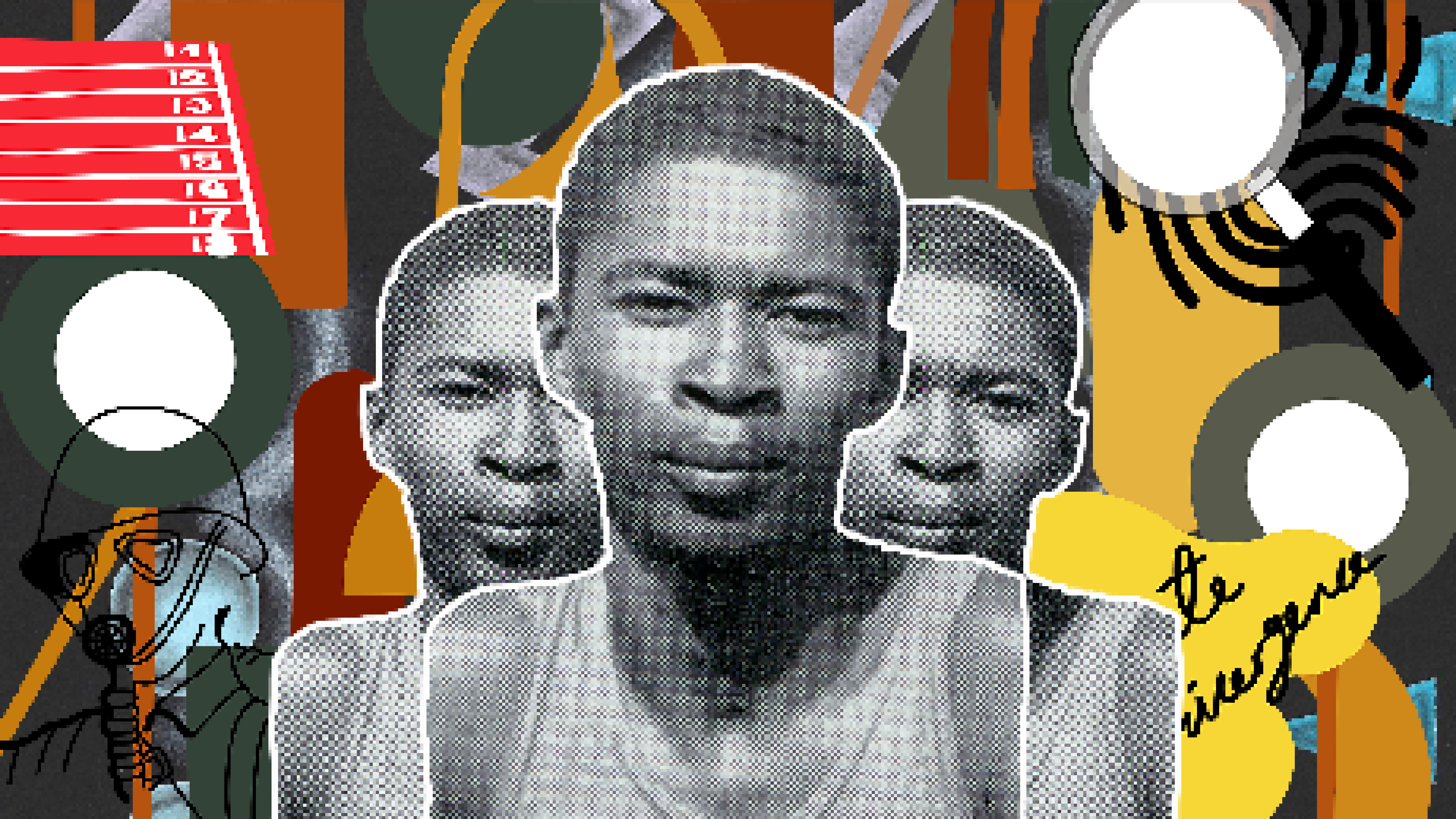




Black Spartans (1907-1948)

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.

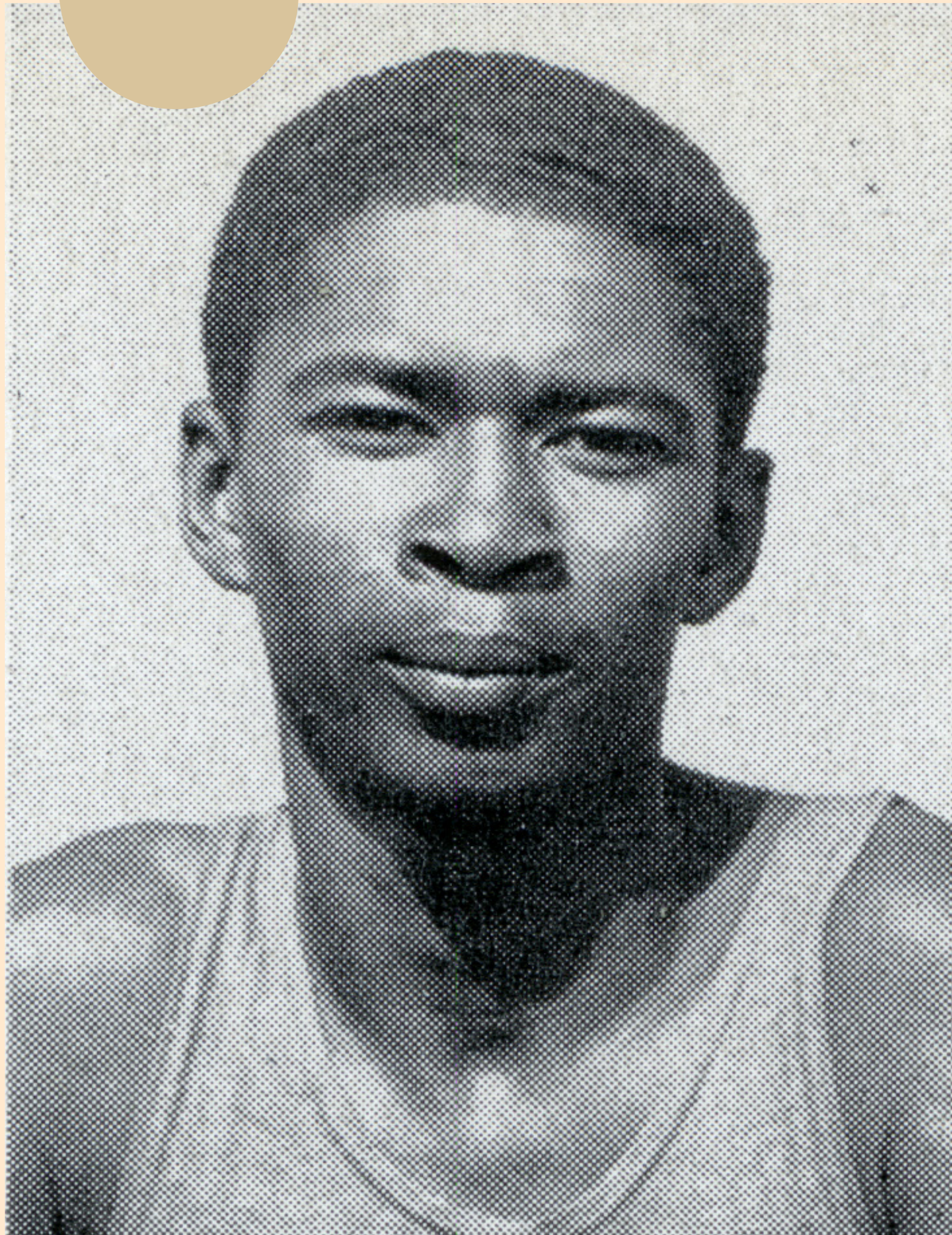
Carli V. Lowe - University Archivist
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Artist Statement

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



The University Archives has records of a student named **Irving Smith** on the track team in 1942. We also have records of a track athlete named Bill Smith, sometimes called Billy Smith. SJSU Athletics has records of a student named Bill I. Smith on the Track Team in 1942. If we are correct to assume that Bill I. Smith and Irving Smith are the same person, then it appears that he attended San Jose State College in 1942. He was a member of the track team and received a Service Award for Track in May of 1942. Smith may have also been a member of the campus Forensic Squad and participated in debates and speeches as part of that club. He was called into service with the Army Reserves during World War II. In 1946 the Spartan Daily reported that Bill Smith was married and working in Southern California.

From
the
Sidelines

By WILBUR AGEE

Track Chatter

San Jose State college track records are still not definite this year as the three leading record-breakers on this year's varsity track team will make one more attempt to better the old marks now on the records tomorrow afternoon in the interfraternity track meet.

The three who will attempt these new records are Thelno Knowles, Willie Steele and Bill Smith.

Knowles, already holder of the 880 mark at 1:53.9, will attempt to make it three when he runs the 440 yard sprint and the mile run. As anchor man on the relay team, Knowles turned in an unofficial time of 48.9 in the quarter mile but has yet to run the mile this year.

Smith, currently the possessor of the 100 yard dash, high jump and broad jump records, will attempt his fourth mark when he enters the 220 yard dash.

Steele, who set a new record at 24 feet 8¼ inches just one jump before Smith established the new record, will try to better it tomorrow. On a foul jump, Steele also has hit the 25 foot mark.

Omar Cowles, Spartan hurdler, will also be among those seeking records tomorrow although he is competing for the Delta Theta Omega fraternity. Cowles unofficially established a new high hurdle record when he turned in a 14.6 mark in the Fresno Relays. However, because he placed only third, the mark did not count.

Cowles will also attempt the 220 yard low hurdles tomorrow. He has not as yet attempted the low barriers to any extent this year because of his bad leg early in the season.

Smith, Knowles And Steele Will
Attempt To Break School Records
In Annual Meet; DTO's Are Favored

Willie Steele, Bill Smith and Thelno Knowles, record breaking colored track men this year, will attempt to better their marks tomorrow afternoon on the local cinderpath at 3:45 o'clock in the annual inter-fraternity track meet.

All three will compete unattached. Steele and Smith will make one more try at the broadjump mark, which is now at the

25 foot mark. Smith will also enter the 220 to try and better the school mark. He will not attempt the century as no one would be capable of pushing him to any fast time. Knowles will attempt to set new records in the 440 and mile, thus passing up his favorite event, the half mile.

Smith is exceedingly fast in the 220, but has not been timed since in high school as he has been concentrating on the 100, broad jump and high jump.

Knowles, although never officially timed in a 440 this year, posted better times than any other quarter milers while anchoring the relay team this year. He has not been timed in the mile this year either.

Smith has the best broad jump mark in the nation this year at 25 feet, and Steele has a mark of 24 feet 8¼ inches.

Delta Theta Omega, already possessor of the trophy for two straight years, will be attempting to win it for the third straight year so as to keep it permanently. From all reports they should have little difficulty in retaining their crown.

Their main hope lies with Omar Cowles, ace hurdler, who should have no trouble in taking both the 120 yard high hurdles and the 220 yard low hurdles.

Delta Sigma Gamma, runners-up last year, rest their hopes on Dick Knox, who last year took the mile and should be favored to repeat.

The remaining four teams have no outstanding contestants and can only hope for the unexpected to bring up their point total. All contestants have had little workouts and are not expected to post fast times.

The P. E. majors will be in charge of the meet and will handle the officiating duties.

All entries must be turned in to Douglas Bacon or Ivan Olsen some time early today.

Spartan Daily

June 3, 1942

Bill Smith prepares to break a record in the 220 yard dash.



Three San Jose Track Stars Go East This Week

San Jose State's great trio of track stars — Bill Smith, Thelno Knowles and Willie Steele — will leave late this week for the National AAU meet in New York, where they will compete for the Southern California Athletic association team.

All of these men will be eligible to enter the junior and senior championships as none of them have ever won an AAU title.

Collectively they are capable of scoring about 20 points. Smith and Steele both have marks better than anyone else in the broad-jump and stand a good chance of finishing one-two. Steele is Pacific Coast champion in the hop, step and jump and should finish high in that event.

Smith has two 9.5's in the 100 yard dash, and Knowles has the coast's best time of 1:53.9 for the half mile, which makes him a pre-meet favorite.

Spartan Daily

June 11, 1942

Bill Smith travels to New York for the National AAU meet.



LLOYD (BUD) WINTER
Coach



HANK RUIZ
Captain



FRANK THOMAS
Manager



Irving Smith
Ben Bramble
Charles Townsend
Eustace Rojas
Dick Knox

Omar Cowles
Theino Knowles
Jim Schraub
Vern Cooley
Stan Bowen

Elwood Clarke
Guido Teresi
Larry O'Connor
Ralph Kaufman
Frank Thomas

Karl Hummel
Frank Minini
Bud Veregee
Dick Campion
Don Ashby

TRACK

The 1942 edition of the San Jose State College track team under the guidance of Lloyd C. "Bud" Winter, in his first year of coaching at San Jose, gained the reputation of being the greatest track and field squad ever assembled at Sparta. Undefeated in a full season of dual meets, San Jose went

La Torre Yearbook

1942

Irving Smith is pictured as a member of the track team.



Spartan track star Billy Smith breaks the tape in the 100-yard dash in the Big Meet with Fresno State.



Ambidextrous Billy Smith goes over the high jump bar at 6 feet, 4 inches. Smith was the top broad jumper on the coast.



Jim Schraub leads the field in the 440, followed by Shropshire of Fresno. In third spot is Spartan Billy Rhyne.



Vern Cooley, State pole vaulter, goes over the bar. Cooley was a consistent 13½-foot vaulter.

on to win the C. C. A. A. title in San Diego and in doing so scored more points than the rest of the conference teams combined.

The Spartans gained recognition as one of the most powerful track teams on the coast by never finishing worse than third in such large meets as the San Francisco Olympic Club Indoor Championships, The Pacific Athletic Association senior championships, the West Coast Relays, the Southern Pacific A. A. U. meet and the Northern California Relays.

The greatest exhibition of San Jose's strength was in placing second in three meets, the Southern Pacific A. A. U. and

both the open and freshmen divisions of the Northern California Relays.

Five school records were shattered, three of them by Bill Smith who was the largest point gainer on the squad. Smith lifted the broadjump mark to 25 feet and soared to 6 feet 5 inches in the high jump. He lowered the 100-yard dash mark to 9.5 seconds and finished less than a foot behind Hal Davis in a 9.4 century.

The other marks were broken by Frank Minini who tossed the 16 pound shot 50 feet 8¾ inches and Thelno Knowles who ran the half mile in 1:53.9.

La Torre Yearbook

1942

Billy Smith is pictured in action competing in the high jump.

BUD WINTER GIVES DOPE ON OUTLOOK FOR TRACK TEAM - - "WE WILL TAKE U.S.C. BY 1945" - - NATIONAL A.A.U. CHAMPS SMITH, KNOWLES, AND STEELE RETURN

By DICK FRY

"We will take USC by 1945."

Those were the words of track coach Bud Winter as he discussed the cinder outlook for the coming season.

Certainly not the most pessimistic coach in the game, Winter said he expected the Spartans to enjoy one of the most successful seasons of their history in the coming year. "Unless something goes wrong in the reserve program and all the boys are pulled before the end of the year, we expect to give the best teams in the nation a run.

Winter has three national junior AAU champs returning to backbone his squad this year and with their help he expects to build an outfit superior to last year's team. Bill Smith, Thelno Knowles, and possibly Willie Steele are the boys that the red-head is depending upon.

"I have set up three marks to

strive for this year - 9.4 in the 100, 25 ft. 10 inches in the broad jump, and 6 ft. 7 inches in the high jump," Bill Smith quoted Winter as saying.

FOUR-MINUTE MILER

"In my opinion," Winter said, "there is no man in the nation with a better chance to run a four-minute mile than our own Thelno Knowles. Last year Knowles ran the distance in 4:23 without training for the distance." Primarily a half-miler, the San Jose State edition of long John Woodruff, set this mark at the inter-fraternity meet last spring quarter.

At present Winter is having more difficulty arranging meets for his boys than he is trying to hold his squad together. "Although as yet neither the AAU nor the NCAA meets have been cancelled, it begins to look as though transportation difficulties may prevent us from entering," he said.

HINDRANCE AN ADVANTAGE

"However, this same hindrance may give us an advantage in scheduling some of the larger schools in the district who have been forced to give up their extensive road trips and who must look for local talent to provide competition," he added.

Meets with Stanford, California, Fresno, S. F. State, the indoor PAA, the outdoor PAA, St. Mary's Pre-Flight, California Aggies, and the Olympic Club are now on the fire, and more are expected to come up before the season really gets under way.

Practice will open in three weeks at Spartan stadium. This late start will enable the cinder-men to miss the majority of the late rains and to continue their practice sessions without interference to the opening of the active season.

Spartan Daily

January 5, 1943

Bill Smith listed as one of three AAU champions coach Bud Winter is depending on for the success of his track team.

Billy Smith, “the greatest loss” to the track team, is called into service by the Army Reserves during World War II.

TRACK SQUAD WILL LOSE SMITH, KNOWLES, BLACKWELL, COOLEY IF ARMY RESERVE IS CALLED

By BILL MITCHELL

Billy Smith and three other track stars will be unable to compete with the cinder squad next quarter if the ERC is called as expected. The four include Charles Blackwell, Vernon Cooley, Thelno Knowles, and Smith.

The loss of the four will mean a lessening in the track power of San Jose for the next season.

Smith, known all over the country as a great 50-yard and 100-yard dash man, will be the greatest loss to the team. Last year Smith gained points in the high jump and broad jump, besides those garnered in the sprints.

Thelno Knowles, recognized as one of the top 880 men last year, continued the good work in the first meet of the season where he came through with a win in the Olympic Club Indoor 1000 - yard run.

Charles Blackwell, a newcomer this year, runs the 440, and was entered in the Olympic Club meet. Blackwell's times have always been in the vicinity of 49 flat.

A pole-vaulter of some renown, Vernon Cooley was entered also in the Olympic meet. His usual mark is around 13 feet.

Spartan Daily

March 18, 1943

THIRTY-SEVEN SPORT STARS DEPART

Both Major And Minor Athletics Dealt Blows By Army Reserve Call; Fate Of Track Team Decided Today

By SEBASTIAN SQUATRITO

From the minor sports of swimming and golf to the major sports of football and basketball, Spartan athletes numbering 37 will be doing their sports cavorting under the auspices of Uncle Sam for the duration.

Leaving, having left, or will leave within the next few weeks are such headline performers as Bill Smith of the track team, Bert Robinson of football and basketball fame, Dave Mines, wrestler, Hal Sonntag, soccer, and so on down the list.

Hardest hit team on the campus at the present time is the track team which, besides losing Smith, has to do without the services of Thelno Knowles, top middle distance man, Vernon Cooley, top pole vaulter; Charles Blackwell, ace 440 man and others.

Spartan Daily

March 29, 1943

