

# GLENN DICKEY

## 'Hitler's Games' A High Time for Gold Medalist

**WHAT WAS** it really like at the 1936 Olympics in Nazi Germany?

"It was like a movie set," says Archie Williams, winner of the 400-meter run in the '36 Games. "Everything was so clean. The streets were freshly paved. The stadium was new. You could see they were really trying to make a good impression on the rest of the world.

"The hotel where we (athletes) were staying had just been built. We had everything we wanted — a rec room, bowling alley, barber shop. I even got a tooth filled while I was there.

"Needless to say, it was quite a heady experience for somebody who hadn't been farther from home (Oakland) than the Fresno Relays."

Williams, who will be honored at the Kinney Meet at Cal on July 14, was overwhelmed by the atmosphere surrounding his race, which he won by a split-second over Godfrey Brown of Great



Archie Williams in 1937

Britain.

"It was by far the most important race of my life, and I remember how much noise there was in the stadium. It just seemed to blot out everything.

"It was all a blur, except for one thing. I was running in the next-to-the-outside lane, and when we rounded the last turn into the straightaway I had to cross over the lane markings. I remember being scared to death that I would step on a line outside my lane and be disqualified. But I guess I didn't."

Britain and his fellow black athletes were a novelty to the Germans.

"Little kids would come up to us in the street and want to touch our skin," he recalls. "They had probably never seen a black before."

But there were no untoward incidents. Even the supposed snubbing of Jesse Owens by Adolf Hitler is suspect in Williams' mind.

"Hitler didn't present medals to anybody but the few Germans who won," he says. "And he wasn't there all the time every day. He was coming and going. I remember later that when Jesse was asked about Hitler not recognizing him, he said that President Roosevelt didn't, either, when he came home.

"None of us knew much about the politics of it," he says, "and we didn't care. We were just interested in our races.

"When I came home, somebody asked me, 'How did those dirty Nazis treat you?' I replied that I didn't see any dirty Nazis, just a lot of nice German people. And I didn't have to ride in the back of the bus over there."

**AH, YES**, the back of the bus. Williams comes from an era that was considerably less enlightened than this one, and he remembers vividly how it was, though he speaks only with frankness, not bitterness.

"When I was at Berkeley High," he says, "I ran track instead of playing baseball because they didn't give baseball uniforms to blacks.

"You know how many black players there were on the basketball team at Cal when I was

there? One. And that was only because he was so fair-skinned he could pass (for white) — and he had red hair. We (blacks) knew about him, but we didn't say anything.

"Even when we went to the Olympics, they put all the black athletes together. They just assumed we would want to be with 'our kind.'

"I'm not complaining. That's just the way it was then. Some of us had to be trailblazers, I guess. But you know the guy who really changed it? Jackie Robinson. He broke the color line in baseball later, but he was responsible for a change in college first.

"He was such a great athlete. He could do anything he wanted to. He was a four-sport letter winner at UCLA. But the most impressive thing was what he did in track. When UCLA would meet USC, the score would be something like USC 53, Jackie Robinson 39. That started to give people the idea that black athletes could help them."

**WILLIAMS'** CAREER ended abruptly in 1937, when he tore a hamstring muscle.

An engineering major at Cal, he went on to become an Army test pilot. After retirement from the Army, he went to work as a teacher at Sir Francis Drake High School in San Anselmo in 1964, and he's been there ever since, now teaching computer science.

He's a celebrity again. "Because of the Olympics, the kids are all asking me what it was like," he says. "They ask me if my medal is all gold — which it is. But it's so long ago, the whole thing is like a dream."