July 15, 2013

Countdown to Riverside City College's 100th Anniversary

In 1970 Jess Hill became the 13th RCCD Alumnus of the Year. Hill attended what was then known as Riverside Junior College from 1925 to 1926 and was an RJC faculty member from 1930 to 1934. Hill graduated from Corona High School in 1925 and immediately enrolled at RJC. He was a member of the RJC’s Football, Basketball, Track & Field and Baseball teams that all won conference titles in the 1925-1926 school year. Below are photos of the four championship teams published in the 1926 “Tequesquite” yearbook.
After one year at RJC, Hill transferred to USC where he excelled in Football, Track and Baseball. He graduated from USC cum laude in 1930. Immediately upon his graduation from USC, he began a 10-year professional baseball career. Hill signed a baseball contract with the Hollywood Stars of the Pacific Coast League. His contract was sold to the New York Yankees in January 1932, and he reached the major leagues as a left fielder in 1935, batting .293 in 107 games. In January 1936 he was traded to the Washington Senators, and he hit .305 in a reserve role. After beginning 1937 with a .217 average in 33 games, and switching to centerfield, he was sent to the Philadelphia Athletics, and hit .293 over the rest of the year. Afterwards he was sent to the Oakland Oaks of the PCL, where he played two more years. During the off-seasons he coached at Corona High School before returning to RJC as an assistant Football coach teaming with another ex-Trojan Jess Mortensen. He also coached the Baseball team. Below left is a photo of Hill as a member of the Football team from the 1926 “Tequesquite” yearbook. The photo on the right is from the January 21, 1930 “Tiger Times” student newspaper right after Hill and Mortensen were hired by RJC.
Below are photos of Hill during his coaching days at RJC from the 1932 and 1933 “Tequesquite” yearbooks.

In a September 2, 1993 Press-Enterprise article, former Tigers football coach Tony Steponovich (RCC Assistant Professor, Physical Education 1946-1972), who played with Hill at RCC and USC, remembered his former teammate as "A very honorable and moral gentleman who was a darn good back. He wasn't very big, but he was one of the toughest guys around. He would bounce through the line as well as anyone." Al Fages (RCC Associate Professor, Physical Education 1961-1984) said in that same article, "I don't think there was anyone more respected in Southern California athletics than Jess Hill. He was a tremendous athlete and administrator, but he was a fine gentleman as well." Fages was inducted into the University of Redlands Athletic Hall of Fame in 2003 and into the Riverside Sport Hall of Fame in 2007. Below are photos of Steponovich (left) and Fages (right) from the 1965 “Tequesquite” yearbook.
After leaving RJC, Hill coached at Long Beach City College until he joined the Navy in 1942. He served until 1946 leaving the service as a lieutenant-commander. After the war, he coached the USC freshman football teams and was the assistant track coach becoming the head track coach in 1949. During his two years as track coach his teams won two consecutive NCAA track championships. In 1951 he became USC’s head football coach. In his six years as coach, his teams posted a record of 45 wins, 17 losses and 1 tie. In 1957 he began a 15-year run as the Trojans' athletic director. He was named Athletic Director of the Decade by the Columbus Touchdown Club in 1969. Hill finished his athletic career by serving as the first full-time commissioner of the Pacific Coast Athletic Association from 1972-78. The photo below left is from the 1933 “Tequesquite” yearbook. The photo below right is from the 1967 “RCC Reports” district publication.

It is 2 years and 34 weeks until RCC’s 100th Anniversary on March 13, 2016.

The Riverside City College Instructional Media Center is bringing you this five year countdown to RCC’s 100th Anniversary. Our intention is to give everyone a weekly glance at the many people and events that have been a part of the college.
Our thanks go to the RCC Digital Library Archives and the District’s Office of Strategic Communications and Relations for allowing us to use their photo and newspaper collections. Thanks as well to all of the RCC students and Faculty Advisors that were a part of the yearbook and newspaper staffs. Thanks also to Tom Johnson and Gilbert Jimenez who wrote “the book” about RCC’s history. “Riverside City College 1916-1981- A 65 Year History” is available in the RCC Digital Library.

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