

The struggle for Negro rights has swept into the locker room. Personally frustrated, stirred by real and imagined grievances, black athletes in growing numbers are trying to make the white world listen by withholding their athletic prowess. The Olympics, by Negro boycott, may be affected; U.S. college sports are vulnerable too, because the heart of the revolt is on the campus.

The men at right—agitator and athlete—are symbols of this revolt. Sprinter Tommie Smith is the prototype superstar: holder of 11 world records, potential hero of the 1968 Olympics. He is a student at San Jose State College in California where Harry Edwards—the man with the microphone—is a sociology professor. Edwards, an amiable man despite his firebrand look, is the prime organizer of the Olympic boycott, and Smith was one of his first adherents. The idea of the boycott, which Edwards proposed in November at a Black Youth Conference, was part of a proposition put forth at a meeting of Black Power leaders in Newark just after the riots last summer. Few took Edwards seriously, and even black athletes never thought it would work. But last month the International Olympic Committee announced that *apartheid*-bound South Africa, which had made some gesture toward integrating its team, was readmitted to the Games. Suddenly Edwards' movement became a fiery cause as black athletes rallied round.

The Olympic flap is also an indication of the bitterness among black athletes about the way things are in many colleges. LIFE reporters visited seven campuses in various parts of the country and found that at every one black athletes considered themselves in a second-class position compared to whites. They also found that, despite doubts and misgivings, a majority of the black stars were prepared to forfeit the chance for Olympic fame to better conditions for their race. The word being passed: "Hell no, don't go."

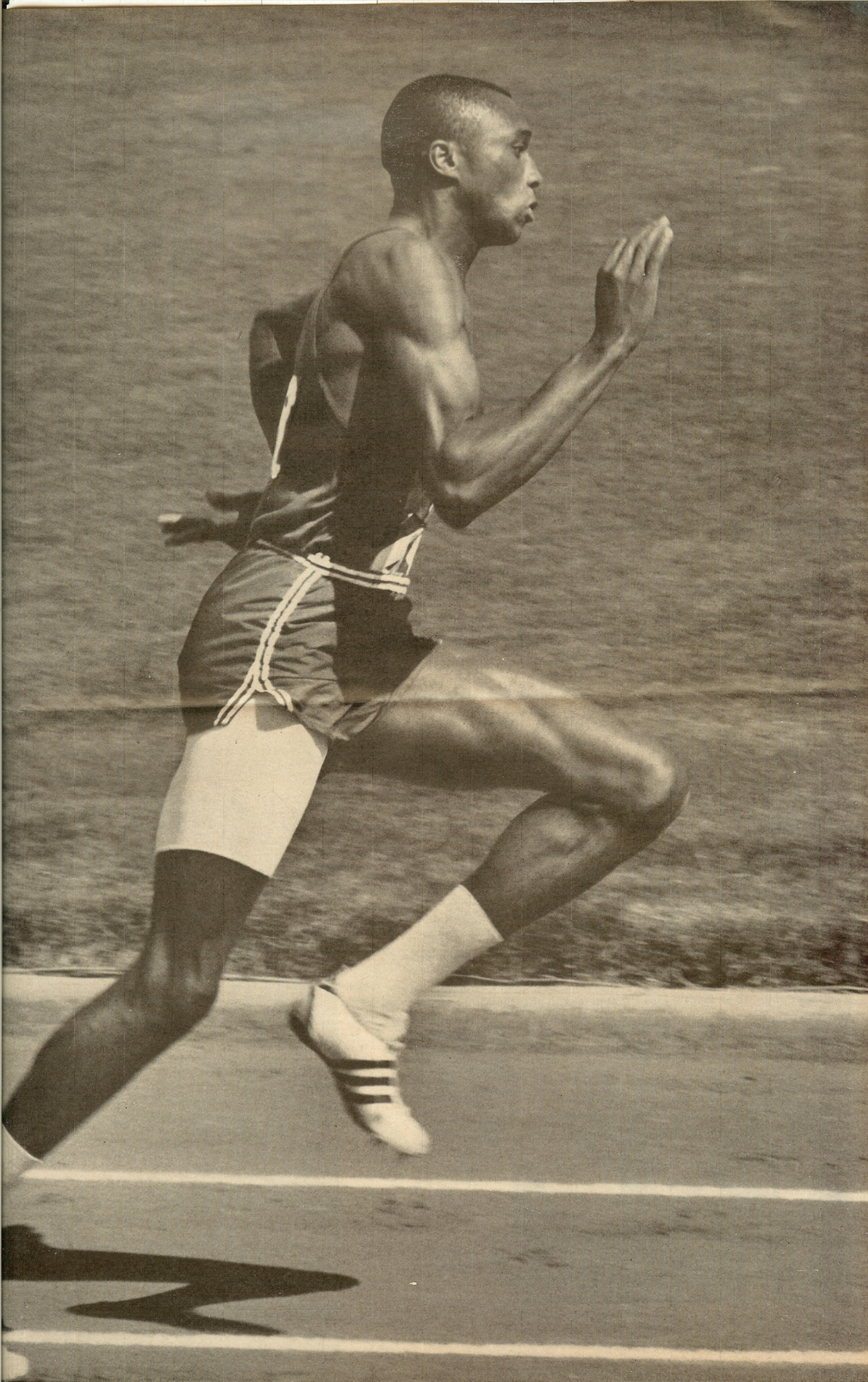


Harry Edwards, haranguing a crowd, is the main organizer of the Olympic boycott by Negro athletes.

Displaying the superb form of a great runner, Tommie Smith is holder of 11 world records.

The Olympic jolt

'Hell no, don't go!'



It was almost inevitable that the two young athletes shown here—Lee Evans (*below*) and Tommie Smith (*right*)—would be among the first black stars to break ranks publicly and declare their intention of boycotting the Olympics. Both are students and outstanding sprinters at San Jose State College in California where Harry Edwards teaches. The second-class treatment they got at San Jose was typical of conditions at many colleges, and their complaints are echoed, with local modifications, in every section of the country.

For a moment, black hero before a white crowd

Housing was promised for black athletes, they claimed, but they got no help from the athletic department when they ran into widespread discrimination by local landlords; there were no blacks in San Jose's fraternities, although the athletic department entertained recruited white athletes in the toniest ones; coaches (there are only seven black coaches in the over 150 major colleges) grouped the blacks together on road trips and in locker rooms; counselors advised them to take "gut" or "Mickey Mouse" courses like football appreciation, so that easy grades would keep them eligible for sports. Above all, they resented what they felt were the constant, uncomfortable stares of their white classmates. To its credit, San Jose did what it could to correct these inequities. Unfortunately, it could do nothing about some of the bitterness left.

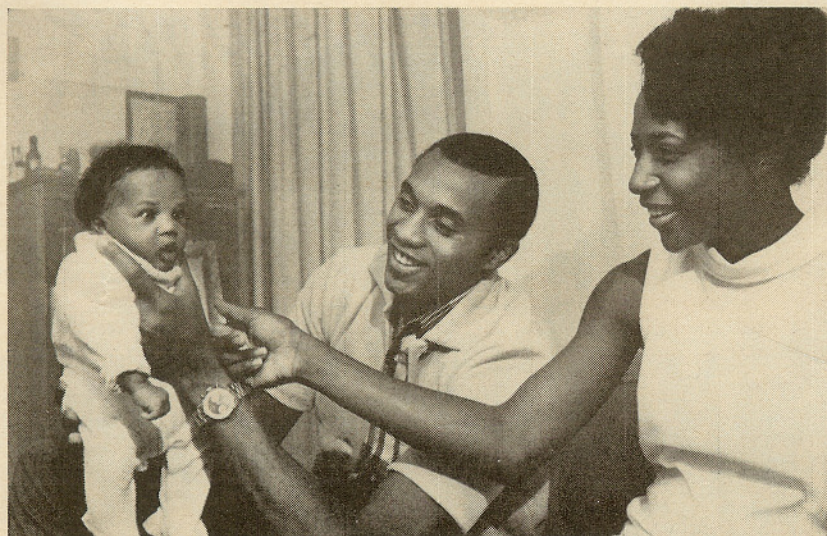
"You leave high school, you come to college and you're on your own," Smith told LIFE Reporter David Wolf last week. "But you can't understand this new pressure. What is it? I'm here in college and I'm a great athlete. What's wrong with me? Just walk outside and you feel it. Shine your shoes and you feel it. Sit next to a girl with long blond hair and you feel her tense up and try to move over. Talk to a couple of white girls in the cafeteria and see what happens. People are reading papers, and first thing you see the papers drop and eyes peering over. For quite a while Lee and I were so naive we thought, 'Man, we're just great athletes, that's why they're staring at us.'"

As with many black athletes, it was exposure to books and education that helped them understand what they really were. "You start reading and then you start



In their off-campus apartments in San Jose, Lee Evans (above), also a champion sprinter, and Smith play with their sons Keith Evans

(14 months), Kevin Smith (8 weeks). Smith's wife Denise, a broad-jumper, is an Olympic-class athlete who also supports boycott.



tying it into your life," says Smith. "Once your eyes are opened you can go out and see the problems of the black man all around you."

Traveling through the country to competition made Smith and Evans acutely aware that to many whites they were heroes for one hour after winning on race day—and human beings *non grata* for the other 23. "I began to notice a lot of little discriminatory things," says Evans, "that I had simply accepted. I finally began to realize what was being done to me, how I had been stereotyped as a black athlete."

The stereotype was confirmed in their minds, says Smith, "when all a professor would ask you about is, 'What do you run?' Eighty percent of the white conversations I have on this campus are about athletics. You get the feeling that you are being exploited for your talent. You worry that after your eligibility is up the coaches might forget you because you can't do them any good anymore."

This malaise of spirit made Evans and Smith ready listeners to Harry Edwards' impassioned reasoning. Last summer, both men heard other black athletes talking the same way as they did. In Tokyo at the University Games, Smith casually told a reporter that an Olympic boycott was a possibility. Within hours he was the center of an international storm. Some sportswriters viciously branded them unpatriotic militants.

"Tom and I receive tons of hate letters calling us black bastards," says Evans. "One professor gave Tom a D in a course when he was doing real good work. I talked to one television cat, and two hours later I hear him saying that Tom and I are against each other and we're both against Professor Edwards. They write what they think, not what we say. And the average honky goes for that. He likes to see them ripping up the bloods."

Tolerance. A decent place to live. An honest evaluation of a student as a student. And black identity. This is what got the revolt started and keeps it going. But below the surface remains a real hope that something will happen to give everybody an honorable chance to go to Mexico City. Lee Evans, in unguarded moments, still slips into the phrase "when I get back from the Olympics."

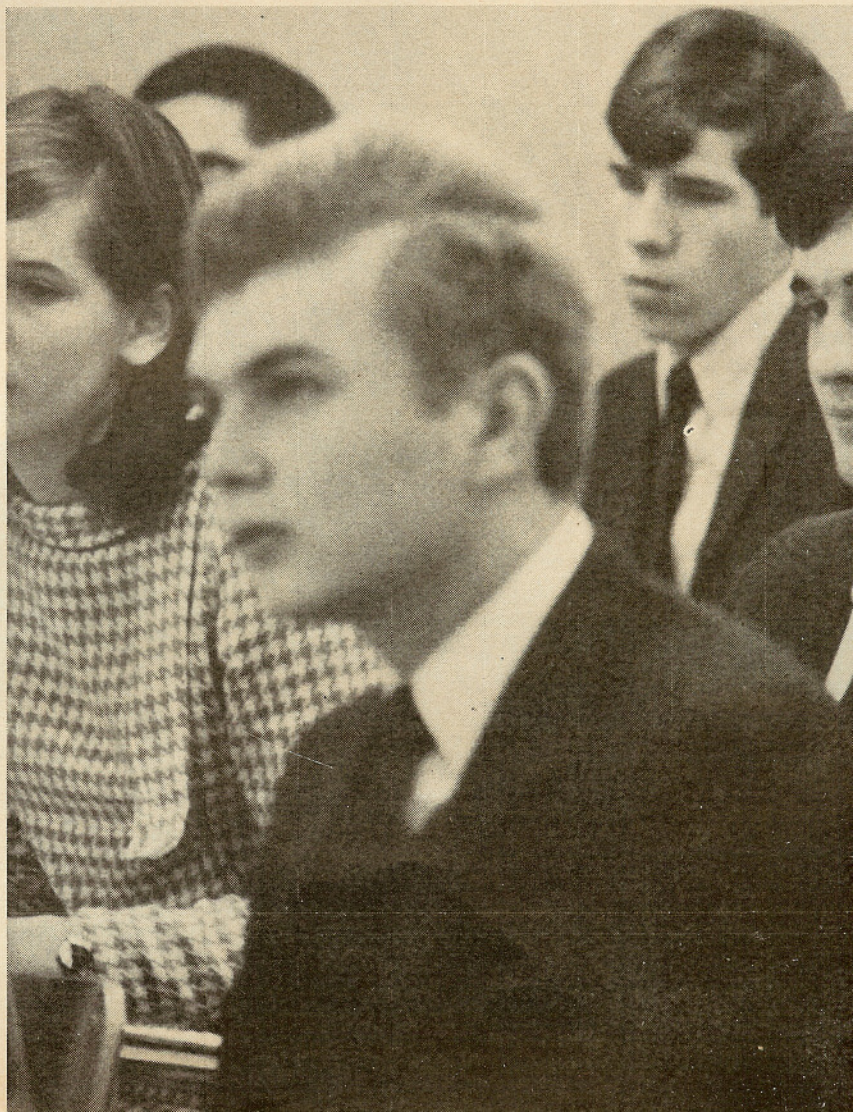
In his hour of being a hero, Smith accepts cheers of all-white crowd after setting world record of 44.8 seconds in the 440 last summer.





On the campus, protest at Washington, a loner at Niagara

Three thousand miles removed from the West Coast hotbed—but in a lonely predicament of his own—is a sophomore basketball star named Calvin Murphy (*above and right*), the nation's second highest scorer. The problems of West Coast blacks seemed like really small potatoes next to Murphy's needs. The most basic one seems to be a single honest friendship. He was recruited by Niagara University in upstate New York and five other schools willing to overlook his dismal high school grades. They promised him the moon and neglected to deliver it. At Niagara, Murphy lives in near isolation—partially created by his own distrust. There are only six other Negroes in the student body of 2,500, a result, he believes, of Niagara's quota system. His scoring on court (38.5 points per game average) has brought him to celebrity status. But he still hears whispers—"There goes the dumb black jock." Three coaches have left in disgust and Murphy himself is considering a transfer. "I keep a smile on my face," he says, "so no one around here will know how I feel."



From the look of it, the conclave would have passed for any ordinary college bull session, but it wasn't. A young man named Harvey Blanks (*right*) held the floor. Secretly 13 black athletes at the University of Washington were meeting to organize a series of demands, some frivolous. One demand—defeated—would have forced football coach Jim Owens to endorse Muhammad Ali publicly. But they finally settled on four: 1) Neutralization of "Jim Owens' power" through the formation of a four-man black athletic committee which would review any team management decisions that seemed to involve racial bias; 2) a survey of all coaches to bring to light examples of prejudice and discriminatory practices; 3) immediate dismissal of Washington trainer Bob Peterson because of alleged inferior, perfunctory treatment of injuries and his reported use of the word "nigger"; 4) permanent appointment of a black coach or administrator "to bridge the gap in communications between the black athlete and the administration." The administration then promised to let the group meet with the athletic staff—a cautious first step in bridge-building.





Grievance supported at Berkeley

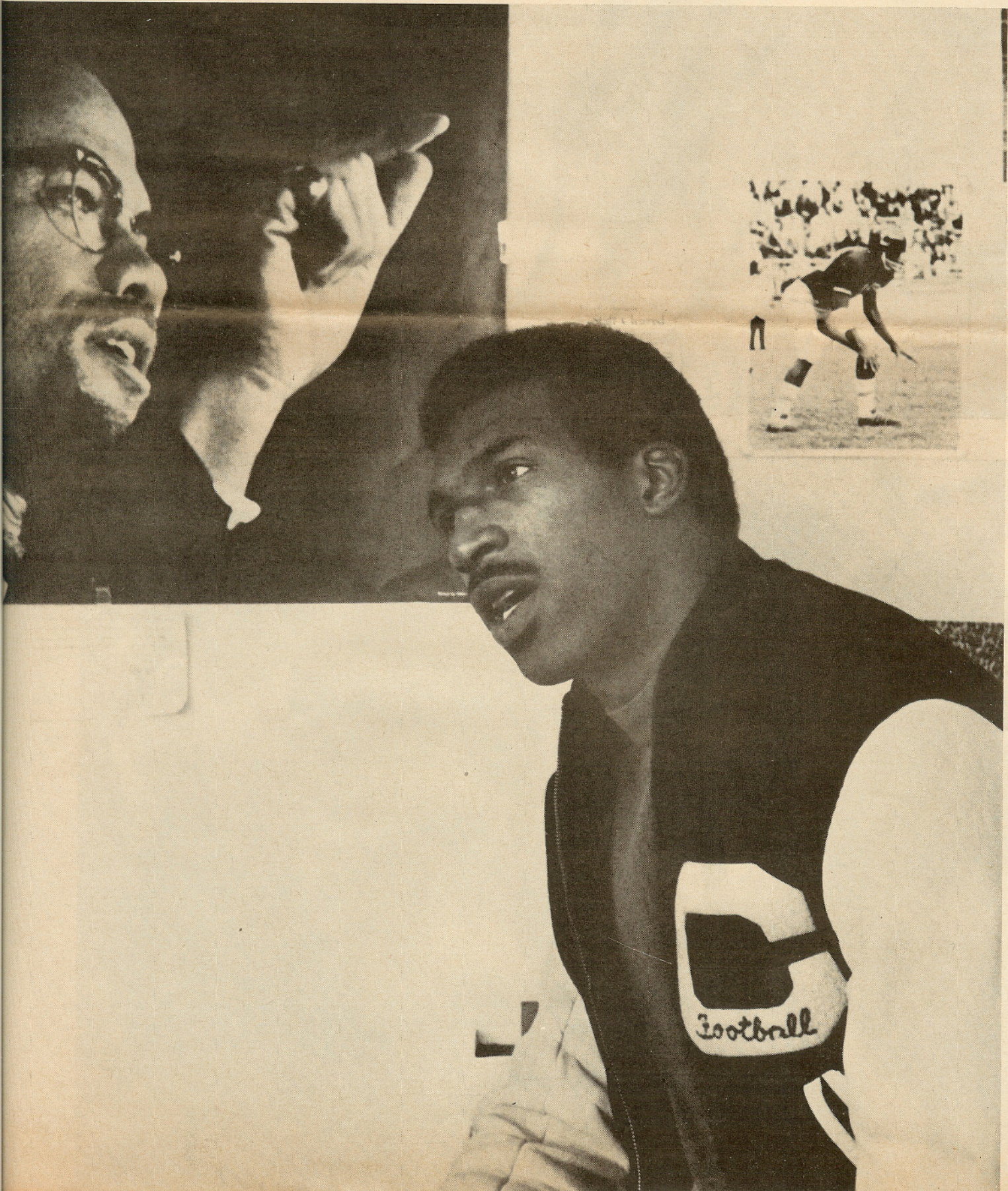
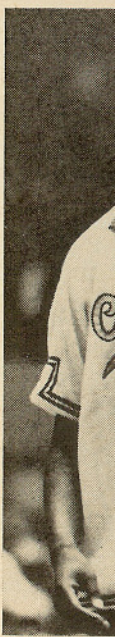
A basketball player who lied to his coach and a football player who was lied to by recruiters are elements in the athletic revolt at the University of California in Berkeley. Bob Presley (*right*) had a running battle with his basketball coach over the minor issue—to the coach—of getting his “natural” haircut cropped. Then when he skipped practice one day and was caught lying for an alibi, he was suspended. The administration made the coach take him back—whereupon all white players walked out. They returned, but

the team today plays together under a testy truce.

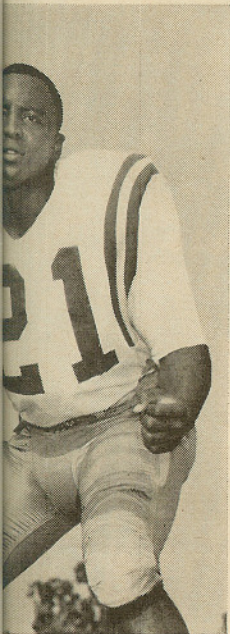
Bobby Smith (*below*, with picture of Malcolm X behind him), a defensive halfback, organized 38 black athletes on campus when the white players quit, and for the first time black grievances were aired publicly. The complaints were similar to those at San Jose. In addition, at Berkeley some black athletes found themselves getting deeper and deeper into debt. “Come to Cal, they tell you, and you won’t have to worry about a thing financially; it’ll all be taken

care of,” says Smith. “But it most certainly wasn’t.”

The athletic department scoffed at all the fuss, but a committee including U. Cal’s assistant to the vice chancellor, Donald Hopkins, is now preparing a report that will show many of the complaints have basis in fact. “They promised these kids the world. Then they bring them to Berkeley, give them \$50 and tell them to get a room. It’s the worst thing they can do—the way landlords discriminate,” says Hopkins. “The coaches are a bunch of intellectual dinosaurs.”



Rebuttal by Coach Prothro at UCLA



UCLA has come to mean the very best in U.S. collegiate sports. Its basketball team is the NCAA champion; its quarterback, Gary Beban, was this year's Heisman Trophy winner. The university has even been described as "the Athens of Athletics." Eight of UCLA's black football players, however, look on it as far less than that. Among their charges: Coach Tommy Prothro (*below*) distinctly prefers to win with white players; the athletic department does not help to secure housing; summer school tuition was given to whites

but only loaned to Negroes; whites get more free tickets to games; the team trainer is reluctant to believe that a Negro can be seriously injured.

Most of the group's invective is directed against Prothro, a tough, hard-to-like man—when he is coaching. Confronted with the charges, he told LIFE's Ron de Paolo: "You tend to find more colored players unhappy about their coaches. Where a white might say it was a personal matter that a coach didn't play him, a Negro would say that it was racial.

"I want to win with the rules. I don't have a preference for who I win with. Neither race has a monopoly on hustle, you know. I'll bet I've played more Negroes than 98% of the head coaches in the country and had a lot of colored All-Conference, All-Americans and starters as a result. And you can find plenty of white boys who feel I've discriminated against them.

"Use' the Negro athlete? Sure that's right, there's truth in that. But we use the white athlete too, and UCLA uses me and I use UCLA and so on.

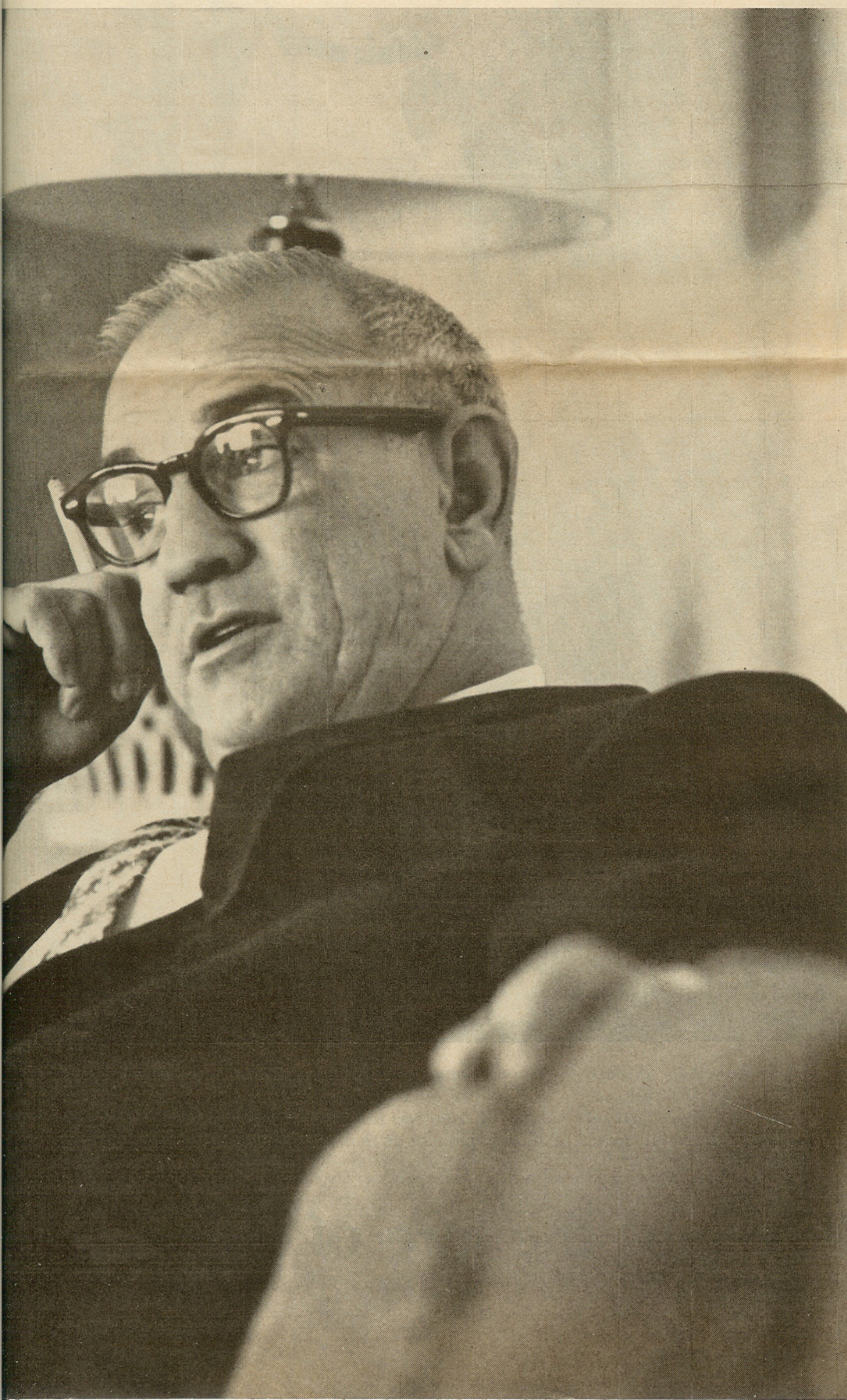
"All of our players and students can live in campus dorms. We find that most freshman do and most upperclassmen do not. But the athletic department has never secured off-campus housing for anybody.

"I personally don't know of any players that had to go to summer school which the athletic department did not pay for, provided the recipient was a full-time student previously.

"All players get four complimentary tickets and the privilege of buying four. On the road they are given two free tickets—and more if they have immediate family planning to come.

"I don't know what goes on in the training room. I don't go in there 10 minutes a year. Most boys—white and Negro—like to play but hate to practice.

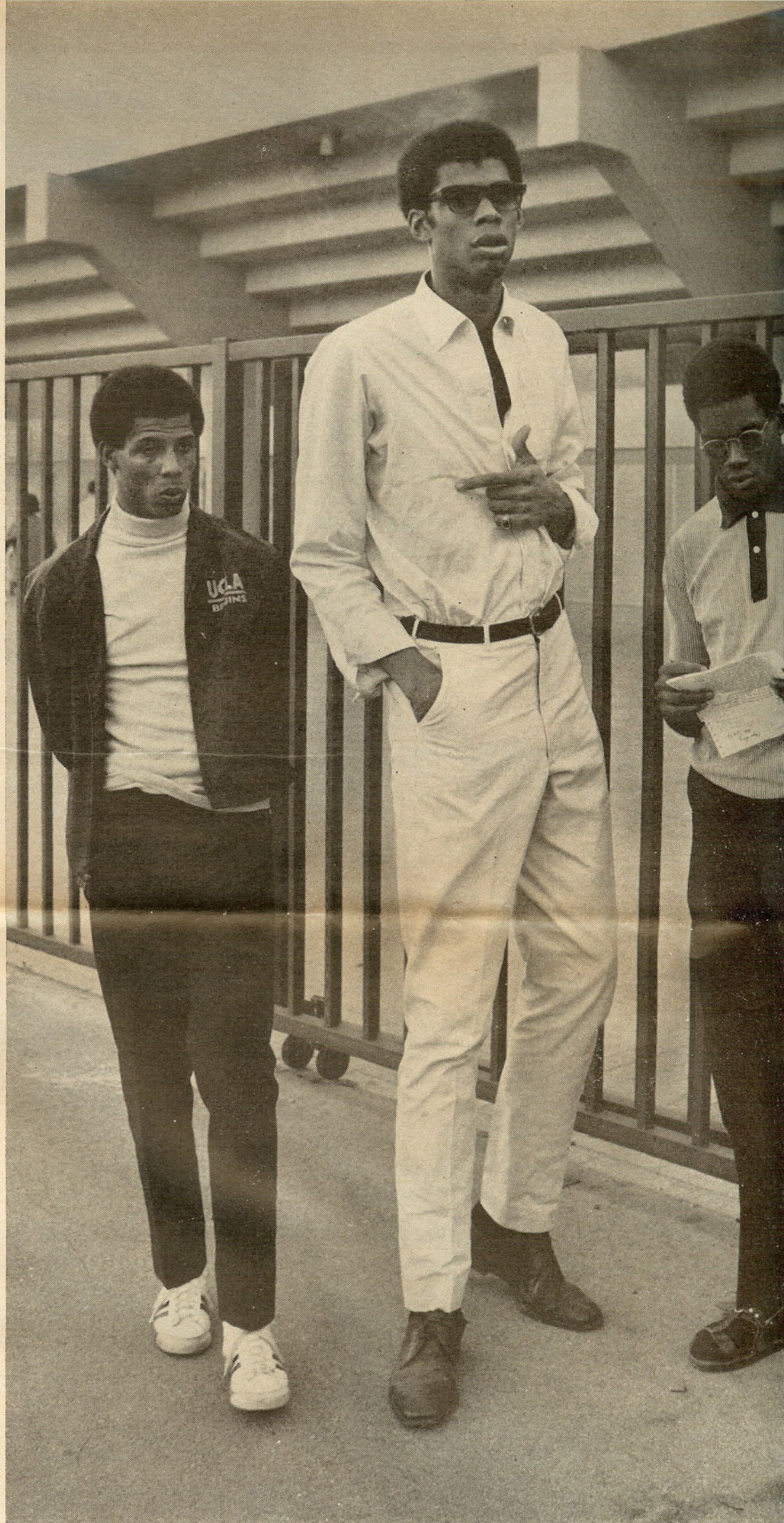
"About the Negroes' situation, well, I don't pretend I know all about it or even much about it. It seems to me that the three basketball players we have here who are not going to the Olympic trials [p. 28] would get a heck of a lot more mileage for the boycott cause if they said they were boycotting, but they've never said that. I know they want pro contracts as soon after finishing school as they can, so they don't want to stay at UCLA any longer than they have to. Mike Warren, we know, has a testimonial day in his home town at the same time he was supposed to compete in the trials. These boys might be in sympathy with the boycott, but they're not really boycotting themselves."



We don't want to get caught in the middle of anything," says UCLA's star basketball center Lew Alcindor (right). And so—for the record, at least—Lew and teammates Mike Warren and Lucius Allen have declined to enter the Olympic basketball team trials three weeks hence on the grounds that it would interfere with their studies. The dilemma is not that simple for broad jump star Ralph Boston (far right), who has already been to two Olympics and has won a gold medal. Boston, who spent all of his campus life at a Negro college, never faced white campus discrimination—so he has to agonize over what bucking the boycott would mean to his race. "I guess you can say I'm somewhere between neutral and in favor—and right now, that's purgatory," he says. Alcindor and his mates, closer to the problems of the white campus, admit that their refusal to enter the trials is an implicit approval of the boycott.

What would a successful boycott mean to the U.S. Olympic effort? Based on 1964 records and their performance at Tokyo, Negroes would comprise about 50 of the 350 athletes we would send to Mexico City. If all of them boycotted the Games, the U.S. would lose 20 track-and-field men, 11 track-and-field women, eight boxers, five basketball players, four wrestlers and one pentathlete: about 15% of our team. In Tokyo, that group accounted for 16 medals, 9 of them gold, of the U.S. total of 90.

The International Olympic Committee group is a 72-member "self-recruited" committee from 48 countries. A slight majority favored readmitting South Africa, banned since 1963, after it agreed to integrate its team—though members would still be picked in segregated trials. To most Negro athletes this sounds like mere tokenism, a sort of *togetherness* in place of *apartheid*. But most of them add that if South Africa were again barred, they would probably go to the 1968 Games. The I.O.C. may have got the message. As African nations boycotted the games and the USSR threatened to withdraw, the I.O.C. agreed—in an uncharacteristic reversal—to reconvene, presumably to reconsider.



Three UCLA basketball players, Mike Warren, Lew Alcindor, Lucius Allen (above), have passed up the Olympic trials. At right,

broad jumper Ralph Boston sits in the infield at a track meet. His look, puzzled and troubled, seems at this moment to symbolize the

dilemma of Negro race—and also of achievements. "I v says, "because it's

Racial pride versus the lure of a medal

