

JIM HILL

Inducted 2007

Jim Hill was a pioneer and the first of several national backstroke champions to come from Minnesota. He won both national high school and collegiate championships in the dorsal event and was also a member of an American record-setting Gopher medley relay.

Jim grew up in Minneapolis and came from a family of swimmers. His older brother, Hilbert, swam at the University of Minnesota in 1922 and 1923, and his younger brother, Sam, was the one who got Jim started.

Sam had been swimming on the Minneapolis YMCA team when he talked sixteen-year-old Jim into joining the squad. They both excelled at the Y and on their Minneapolis Central High School team. The Y had a coach named Batchler, but Central only had an advisor.

With the Hill brothers at the front, Central dominated the City Conference in the early 1920's. They made up two-thirds of the Central medley relay that took first for three consecutive years at the city meet. In addition Jim was the city 100-yard backstroke champion for those same three seasons. In his senior year he went to Evanston, Illinois, for the 1923 National High School Meet. He came through with first place in the 100-yard backstroke.

Jim was one year too early for the Minnesota State High School State Meet which was first held in 1924 and was won by Central. By then Jim was a freshman at the University of Minnesota. Freshmen were not eligible to compete for the varsity in those years, so he swam on the freshman team. That summer Jim and Sam went to the Olympic Trials, but did not place.

When asked what stood out as extra special during his swimming career Jim said, "my whole college experience." And no wonder, for these were the golden days of Gopher swimming. In the 1920's, Niels Thorpe's Minnesota teams were the equal of any in the conference and also placed well nationally. The Gophers finished fourth, first, and second at the Big Ten Meet during Jim's years on the varsity. They also placed third at the 1925 nationals and second in 1927.

Jim won two out of three Big Ten 150-yard backstroke titles. In his sophomore year he set a national record of 1:49 and 2/5 for the backstroke and later finished second at the nationals. As a junior he was the national collegiate champion with a 1:48.1. His senior year he captained the Gophers to their second place finish at the nationals and came home with a gold medal in the medley relay. The medley championship was a fitting climax for this illustrious relay. Starting in his junior year Jim, his brother Sam, and breastroker Chuck Purdy, made up an outstanding medley that dominated for two years. In a meet against Iowa on February 19, 1926, they broke

the American Record by eleven seconds with a time of 3:17 and 4/5. They also won the medley at the conference meet which helped Minnesota bring home the Big Ten Championship.

The 1927 nationals ended Jim's competitive swimming career. His undergraduate work was in the school of agriculture, and his adult life was spent working in rural Minnesota in the field of artificial breeding.