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California Polytechnic State University

Feb. 5, 2002

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **1968 Olympic Sprinter To Speak at Cal Poly During Black History Month in February**

In celebration of Black History Month, Tommie Smith, best known for his Black Power protest after he won the 200-meter race at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City, will speak at 7 p.m. on Feb. 7 in Cal Poly's Chumash Auditorium.

It was Smith -- along with third-place finisher John Carlos -- who raised a black-gloved fist, bowed his head and closed his eyes during the "Star-Spangled Banner" as he stood on the medal podium.

His symbolic gesture was intended to bring public attention to the injustices black Americans were facing and serve as a call for unity among blacks. The act cost him his gold medal and termination from the national team.

The gesture signified Smith's commitment to the sociological, educational and spiritual cause of blacks in America, said Tiffani Hamilton of Cal Poly's Multicultural Center, which is organizing the February event. Smith, an advocate of the Olympic Project for Human Rights, will talk about how sports and racism have changed since the 1968 Olympic Games and about the importance of community activism. His talk is free and open to the public.

Smith's protest overshadowed his athletic achievement. His 200-meter world record of 19.83 seconds was not broken until 1979, and not in the Olympics until 1984.

Smith earned a bachelor's and a master's degree in sociology from San Jose State University. He taught and coached track and field at the elementary-school, junior-high, high-school and collegiate levels.

He has been featured in such publications as Sports Illustrated, Newsweek,

Score, Ebony and Track & Field and was highlighted in the HBO-TV movie "The Fist of Freedom," which aired in August 1999. Smith has been inducted into the California Black Sports Hall of Fame, Bay Area Hall of Fame, Lemoore Union High School Hall of Fame, and San Jose State University Sports Hall of Fame. He continues to teach and coach track and field at Santa Monica College.

His appearance at Cal Poly is sponsored by the university's College of Liberal Arts as part of its Lyceum speaker series and by the Multicultural Center. Those offices are looking for additional sponsorship for the event.

"It's important that we have the support and financial means necessary to bring to Cal Poly speakers such as Tommie Smith, whose life experiences and studies enrich and challenge the campus community," said Mark Fabionar, coordinator of the Cal Poly Multicultural Center.

For more information about the event or sponsorship, contact Tiffani Hamilton at the Multicultural Center at 756-1405  
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