

Bill Smith
Hawaii's Greatest Swimmer

Bill Smith was born William Melvin Smith, Jr., on May 16, 1924 in Honolulu.

Bill started swimming competitively in 1939 at the Waikiki Natatorium at the age of 15. A year later Bill went to the Nationals in California and placed 2nd in the mile behind Bunny Nakama, younger brother of Keo Nakama. There he met Coach Soichi Sakamoto, and when he returned to Hawaii he moved to Maui to train with him. He joined the Three Year Swim Club of Coach Sakamoto which had been founded in 1937 with the lofty goal of the Olympics in 1940. Coach Sakamoto trained his team in the irrigation ditches of Puunene, Maui where they practiced swimming against the current.

Bill graduated from Baldwin High in 1942 and got a scholarship to Ohio State University to swim under Coach Mike Peppe. He swam there for one year, and with WWII breaking out he joined the Navy. After the war he went back to OSU.

In the 1942 Nationals he won three Freestyle events, one a world record and the other two, American records. He won a total of 36 individual and relay titles in the AAU, Big Ten, and NCAA championships. He held American records at 18 different distances and was generally considered the world's outstanding swimmer from 1941 to 1949 during which time he was an eight-time All American.

As a college swimmer Bill was undefeated in three years of dual meets and was a four-time All American. He set seven world records and won fourteen U.S. national championships, seven NCAA and seven AAU.

The Olympics of 1944 were also canceled, but when the Olympics resumed in 1948 in London, Bill, as captain of the swim team, won gold medals in the 400 Free and the 800 Free relay. At one time Bill held all the world records in Freestyle between the 200 and 1,000 meter distances. After the Olympics, Bill came home and became the director of the City and County of Honolulu's lifeguard program. He was later the coach of Kamehameha Swim Club for about 20 years.

Bill Smith, who was the greatest freestyler of two current Hall of Fame coaches, Sakamoto and Peppe, was one of the most successful competitive swimmers in the first half of the 20th century. He is considered to be Hawaii's greatest swimmer.

Sources:

- International Swimming Hall of Fame
- Hawaii Swimming Legacy by Clyde Matsusaka
- Hawaii Swim Forum
- wikipedia