

Roosevelt “Rosie” Collins

An Unequal Playing Field



Navigating de facto (by practice) vs. de jure (by law) segregation in Colorado Springs was an exhausting burden. Rules about where Black residents could eat, live, work, and play were unwritten, shared by word of mouth or experienced firsthand. Black swimmers were not allowed on the west side of Prospect Lake where the Bathhouse was located, could swim at the Monument Valley Park Pool only on Wednesdays before workers drained and cleaned the pool; and had to order hamburgers to go at the back door of George's on South Tejon.

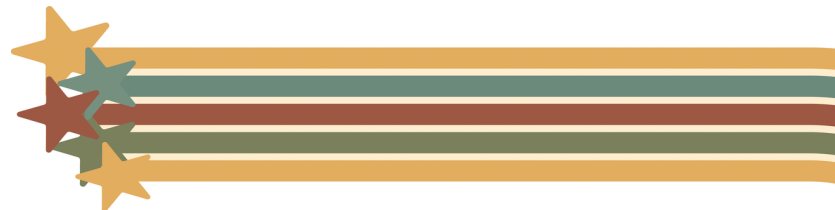
Depending on the whims of school officials, Black students could either play on local sports teams or not, and their annual school photos were either included with their grade or segregated in a separate section. Parents and pastors responded by creating new scouting troops, extracurricular clubs, and the Dunbar Y.M.C.A. at 402 South Weber to provide Black children with recreational opportunities.

The renowned “Brown Bombers” City League baseball team limited travel to “day trips” after being refused accommodations in communities across Colorado. There were exceptions to “de facto” segregation of course: local classrooms were integrated as were buses, trolleys, and trains, and some local businesses welcomed all. However, anyone imposing segregation in Colorado Springs was in violation of a succession of Colorado civil rights laws first enacted in 1885.

In 1935, Roosevelt “Rosie” Collins was hired by Colorado College as an athletic trainer, the first Black employee in a professional role. Collins routinely faced discrimination while travelling with CC teams. He recalled, “I was taking the track team to Denver...we...ordered a meal at Castle Rock...There were 23 of us. They set down 22 of the meals and the [team] captain said, ‘You sit here Mr. Collins.’ The waiter came running over and said [to me], ‘You can’t eat in here.’ The captain replied, ‘let’s get the hell out of here gang, nobody is going to eat in here.’ The waiter asked, ‘what about all this food?’ [The captain] said, ‘You eat it!’” Later, a CC administrator congratulated track team captain Harold Hayes for doing the right thing, stating, “We need more [young men] like you.”



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Vice President Richard Nixon with Colorado College athletic trainer Roosevelt Collins at the Broadmoor. In a previous visit to Colorado Springs, Collins treated Nixon for neck discomfort and the two became friends.



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